

KEY MESSAGES

Perspectives on childhood resilience among the Aboriginal community: an interview study

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Policy context

Australian Aboriginal children are exposed to a number of adversities that have been attributed to the downstream effects of European colonisation. Childhood adversities increase the risk of negative health and social outcomes that can contribute to longstanding mental and physical health 'gaps' between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and the high rates of youth suicide observed. Despite these challenges, most Aboriginal children are resilient and show remarkable adaptation during difficult circumstances. Resilience is often mentioned in conjunction with Aboriginal people, yet there is comparatively little research investigating Aboriginal resilience in Australia, including the aetiology of resilience and strategies for promoting resilience in children. A better understanding of the factors that can enhance children's resilience will aid in the development of targeted programs to promote better health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal children who face long-standing adversity. This research was based on face-to-face interviews with Aboriginal health service professionals, youth workers and adult community members and aimed to describe the perspectives of members of urban and regional Aboriginal communities on childhood resilience, including how resilience can be enhanced.

Key messages

Aboriginal children continue to face high levels of adversity within their families and communities, including the impacts of poverty, domestic violence, drug and alcohol problems, discrimination and bullying.

- > Aboriginal families need greater support in order to raise resilient children, including:
 - appropriate services, including holistic, sustainable and accessible services that target parent's mental health and teach effective parenting practices
- > Children's positive decision-making during periods of adversity is aided by:
 - an awareness of positive pathways, provided by role models and social support
 - the self-belief and self-esteem that empower children to follow these pathways in order to achieve valued, positive goals
- > Children's cultural identification promotes resilience and buffers against discrimination and negative stereotyping
- > There is a need for more sustainable, Aboriginal-led programs to identify at-risk children and provide safeguards during periods of familial adversity

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