

Indigenous community safety

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Title

How are Indigenous communities managing risk and protective factors to improve community safety? Towards a strength-based approach.

Research Theme

Systems

Keywords

Research informing practice; interagency collaboration; service delivery.

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Biography

Ms Simone Georg is undertaking a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) at the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University. Simone has worked in various policy roles across the Australian Public Service. Prior to commencing her PhD, she worked in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, in the Office for Women, advising on the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.

Abstract

This multi-disciplinary research project uses applied anthropology to understand Indigenous community safety from a ground-up perspective. By drawing upon a case study, the research investigates how inter agency partnerships manage risk and protective factors to reduce interpersonal violence in one remote Northern Territory community. In this context, risk factors are social and economic indicators which increase the likelihood of a violence incident. Protective factors are social and cultural attributes that strengthen relationships and prevent harm from occurring. The study uses a strengths-based, solutions-orientated approach to improving community safety services in remote areas, and it is argued that further research investment is needed that adopts such an approach.

Building on criminology literature, the research uses developmental prevention theory to better understand how risk and protective factors are understood in a practical context. Developmental prevention theory is a primary prevention tool that focuses manipulating risk and protective factors to reduce violence and crime throughout the life span (Homel 2005). There is a substantial body of literature that identifies and quantifies risk to Indigenous related violence (Wundersitz 2010), however considerably less is known about the strengths that protect Indigenous family and communities from harm. Empirical research suggests that interpersonal relationships and close kinship connections, strong leadership and governance, and shared cultural identity are some factors that contribute to community strengths and resilience (Willis 2010). This research aims to contribute to the literature by exploring how community strengths contribute to psychological, social and physical safety, and how these strengths could translate into a culturally relevant way of looking at protective factors.

A variety of qualitative methods will be used to address the research aims. Ethnographic methods – involving focus groups, participant observation and unstructured interviews– will allow the researcher to develop a conceptually rich description of how risk and protective factors contribute to service delivery outcomes. Focus group discussions with community residents and elders will help build a conceptual basis for understanding a culturally and situationally relevant set of risk and protective factors. The conceptual foundations, developed through the focus group discussions, will then be used to understand how risk and protective factors can be leveraged through inter-agency partnerships. Partnerships include formal relationships between service providers, the police, government staff, and community elders in the remote community. Overt participant observation and unstructured interviews will explore a solutions-orientated approach to safety in a complex, inter cultural service environment.

This research will contribute to understanding safety in a way that recognises the relational and inter-connected nature of social networks in many remote Indigenous communities. Understanding the relationships between risk factors and improving information about protective factors will promote a view of community safety that is grounded in local knowledge. It also aims to help improve partnerships and service delivery in the local area, which ultimately promotes a safer and happier environment for community residents.

References

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