ASSESSMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

WHO COLLABORATING CENTRE FOR RESEARCH AND TRAINING, PERTH, AUSTRALIA

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"Social and emotional wellbeing is a broad and holistic concept that reflects the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander holistic understanding of life and health. It includes mental health, but also considers other factors such as cultural, spiritual and social wellbeing. It encompasses not just the wellbeing of the individual, but also the wellbeing of their family and community" (1)

OBJECTIVE

- To develop and evaluate a culturally appropriate instrument for the screening of social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) among Aboriginal people.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE HANAA

- The Centre developed the Here and Now Aboriginal Assessment (HANAA) as a culturally appropriate, brief screening instrument for SEWB issues among Aboriginal people.
- The HANAA utilises a semi-structured, narrative ‘yarning’ interview style. In Aboriginal culture ‘yarning’ is the process of informal conversation and storytelling which serves as a means for people to introduce and get to know each other.
- In a clinical setting, utilising a yarning approach acknowledges the importance of developing rapport and establishing trust, and is a culturally appropriate style of communicating with Aboriginal clients.
- The HANAA interview focuses on how the respondent feels currently, rather than reporting feelings retrospectively over a specified time period.
- The HANAA is comprised of 10 assessment domains (physical health, sleep, mood, suicide risk and self-harm, substance use, memory, unusual experiences, functioning, life stresses, and resilience).
- Each domain is explored using prompt words that are provided to assist the assessor to conduct the interview in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way.
- As each domain is explored and assessed, the respondents narrative is recorded by the assessor.
- Each domain is rated using a simple, dichotomous scale of ‘Problem’ or ‘No Problem’.
- The assessment ends with selection of an appropriate Recommendation.
- The HANAA is accompanied by guidelines which assist assessors to develop cultural competence when working with Aboriginal clients.
- The HANAA is designed to be implemented by both health and non-health professionals. It can also be used for clinical, research, teaching, and training purposes.
- Over the last few years, there have been more than 150 requests from across Australia for the HANAA package from professionals working in the mental health sector and community services, alcohol and drug services, academics, researchers and people working in judicial services.

EVALUATION OF THE HANAA

- Evaluation found the HANAA to have good reliability. Inter-rater agreement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal assessors on each domain measured by Kappa ranged from 0.5 to 1.0. (2)
- There was also good agreement between HANAA assessors and the treating clinician in identification of the main presenting problem. (2)
- HANAA users reported a high level of utility and cultural applicability of the 10 assessment domains. The overall mean rating across all domains was 8.3 out of 10. (3)
- Overall, the prompt words that accompany and enable each domain to be explored were rated 7.9 out of 10 for usefulness. (3)
- The dichotomous rating scale was very useful, mean score of 8.4 out of 10. (3)
- The HANAA guidelines were also considered very useful, scoring 8.8 out of 10. (3)
- The Recommendation section was rated as 7.2 out of 10. (3)

CONCLUSION

- The HANAA is making a significant and practical contribution to the assessment of Aboriginal SEWB at a community level in Australia
- Recommendations for future work on the HANAA include consideration of the addition of a personality domain and development of a child and adolescent version

REFERENCES

3. Janca, A., Lyons, Z., Gaspar J. (In press), Here and Now Aboriginal Assessment (HANAA): a follow up survey of users, Australasian Psychiatry