

## **Westerman, T.G (2020) SUBMITTED**

“An initial study into the determination and validation of culture-bound syndromes in Aboriginal Australian populations”

### **Abstract**

This paper describes the validation of culture-bound syndromes with a population of Aboriginal participants with lived experience of these syndromes (N=65) across Urban (N=34) and Rural (N=31) participants. Thematic analysis of focus group results is presented resulting in a number of important outcomes. First, the validation of seven culture bound syndromes. Second, the determination of predominant symptom consistencies across locations and finally, a deeper understanding of the cultural triggers implicated in the development of culture bound syndromes.

While culture bound syndromes have been discussed in the international literature for some time (see Cuellar & Paniagua, 2000), published empirical research for Aboriginal Australian populations remains absent. Critically, the secret nature of Aboriginal cultural practices presents an additional research challenge which arguably does not impact to the same extent in other Indigenous cultures. The impacts on ensuring culturally and clinically competent assessment are significant.

Practitioners are left without guidance in distinguishing between clinical and culture-bound disorders from an assessment and diagnostic perspective. Given the escalating rates of suicide and mental ill health and concerns regarding bias in mainstream assessments with Aboriginal people, guidelines, which enable clinicians to undertake clinically and culturally valid assessment are essential. An adaptation of the DSM-IV Outline for Cultural Formulation (“OCF”) for Aboriginal Australians is therefore proposed.