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The evidence for racism as trauma in Aboriginal Australians: formulation and treatment focus

Abstract

Research has long shown evidence of the higher degree of exposure Aboriginal Australians experience to traumatic and negative life events. This includes suicides at double the non-Aboriginal rate; incarceration at nineteen times the rate; child removals at eleven times higher; death by external causes at double the rate; life expectancy between ten to fifteen years less and rates of preventable death close to three times higher. Despite this, there exists limited studies into the prevalence of post trauma stress disorder (PTSD) in Aboriginal people which compromises the ability to define the extent of need for trauma-based services and interventions. Whilst cumulative trauma exposure alone would hypothetically increase the vulnerability of Aboriginal people to PTSD this paper further explores the evidence for racism existing as addition peri, pre- and post-trauma variables. These factors are clearly critical to culturally informed assessment and treatment focus but are yet to be the focus of empirical and clinical research in Australia. A clinical formulation that incorporates these racially mediated trauma variables is proposed to ensure practitioners can incorporate these factors into more culturally informed trauma assessments, treatments, and interventions.