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The Westerman Aboriginal Symptom Checklist – Youth (WASC-Y):

National data from a clinical sample of Aboriginal youth

Objectives: To produce national clinical norms for the WASC-Y and explore the associations among scales.

Method: We analysed WASC-Y data from 1226 Aboriginal youth who had presented to mental health services and compared their scores to the original community norms.

Results: Our sample shows a higher level of mental health risk than did the normative sample, with some interesting gender effects. We found high levels of suicidal behaviour: 41.5% admitted to thoughts of suicide and 25.0% reported one or more suicide attempts. As expected, Depression, Impulsivity, and Anxiety scales correlate positively with Suicide Risk. There is emerging evidence that Cultural Resilience provides some mitigation of Suicide Risk.

Conclusions: Our data provide the first culturally and psychometrically valid national mental health profile of Aboriginal youth accessing mental health services; including separate clinical norms for males and females. Aboriginal youth present with serious levels of suicide and mental health risk that urgently require improved access to clinically and culturally competent services. Our data address an unacceptable gap in understanding the mental health needs of Aboriginal youth.