



‘That’s just the way he is’: Some implications of Aboriginal mental health beliefs

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Abstract

Recent qualitative research conducted in metropolitan Perth and the Kimberley region of Western Australia has highlighted major gaps in service delivery to Aboriginal clientele suffering depression and suicidal ideation (Vicary, 2002). Seventy Aboriginal people were interviewed about their beliefs and attitudes towards mental health, western psychology and western practitioners, and strategies for improving mental health care delivery. The study highlights that participants consistently perceived the course and treatment of depression as following a different aetiology to that of mainstream Australia. The authors’ references to depression do not conform with Eurocentric perceptions, but rather to the Aboriginal Australians’ conceptualisation, as explained within the paper. Almost three in four respondents indicated that they believed that Aboriginal people did not perceive depression as a state that could be addressed via treatment. Instead they perceived it as a characteristic of the individual concerned stating ‘that’s just the way he is’. Subsequently they reported that individuals might not get the assistance they require in overcoming their illness.

Keywords

Aboriginal mental health, cultural variants, cultural consultants, depression, culture-bound syndromes, service delivery

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