

**School of Public Health**

**Attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence held by  
professional Aboriginal women in Perth, Western Australia**

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To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

## **Abstract**

This research used a constructivist grounded theory approach in order to explore Aboriginal women's attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence.

Data were derived from semi-structured interviews with seven professional Aboriginal women who resided in Perth, Western Australia. As the research was conducted by a non-Aboriginal person, it was overseen by a Critical Reference Group of Aboriginal women, who provided cultural guidance regarding all aspects of this study.

From the participant interviews a number of themes emerged, including the historical context that contributes to current attitudes and beliefs to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, including the breakdown of traditional governance and family systems; and the impacts of historical/transgenerational trauma. Participants' responses also described the contemporary factors that they identified as contributing to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, including ongoing community disadvantage, internalised oppression and racism. Additionally, the importance of family to Aboriginal people was described by participants, along with the power of 'shame' in an Aboriginal context. These historical and contemporary contributing factors were seen by participants as shaping attitudes and beliefs in Aboriginal communities, along with responses to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

From these data a model was developed which showed the interrelationship between contributing factors as described by participants.

Additionally, the basic social process of 'weighing up' was identified from participant responses which involved the weighing up of competing contexts, thus determining the actions and interactions described by participants in relation to sexual violence.

Recommendations based on the findings are discussed.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The attitudes and beliefs that people hold about sexual violence are seen to be critical in their acceptance of sexual violence, the perpetration and prevention of sexual violence along with the support of victims/survivors (Flood & Pease, 2009). In 2012, *The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* (Council of Australian Governments, 2012) argued that "...social norms, attitudes and beliefs contribute to all forms of violence against women, whether it is emotional, psychological, economic, physical or sexual violence" (p.14).

Attitudes to sexual violence have been subject to numerous studies (Frese, Moya, & Megias, 2004; Postmus, McMahon, Warrener, & Macri, 2011; Schuller, McKimmie, Masser, & Klippenstine, 2010; Vivolo-Kantor, DeGue, DiLillo, & Cuadra, 2013). Many authors attribute the perpetration of sexual violence and negative attitudes against victims/survivors to a number of factors including the acceptance of 'rape myths' (Briere & Malamuth, 1983; Flood & Pease, 2006; Malamuth & Check, 1985; Ward, 1995; York, 2011).

Other factors are also thought to contribute to attitudes towards sexual violence, such as hostility towards women (Cowan, 2000; Forbes, Adam-Curtis, & White, 2004), adherence to gender stereotypes (V. N. Anderson, Simpson-Taylor, & Herrmann, 2004) and the unequal distribution of resources and power between men and women (Heise, 1998; Wall, 2014). While a number of studies have examined the attitudes and beliefs that different cultures may have regarding sexual violence (D. C. Carmody & Washington, 2001; Costin & Schwartz, 1987; Golge, Yavuz, Muderrisoglu, & Yavuz, 2003; Kalra & Bhugra, 2013; Koo, Stephens, Lindgren, & George, 2012; Lee, Lee, & Lee, 2012; Muir, Lonsway, & Payne, 1996; Tavrow, Withers, Obbuyi, Omollo, & Wu, 2013; Yamawaki & Tschanz, 2005), only a relatively small number of such studies have occurred in Australia (Bournell, Lee, & Chung, 2008; Daws et al., 1995; Eastel, 1993; McGregor, 2009; VicHealth, 2006; Xenos & Smith, 2001).

Understanding the factors that contribute to the development of attitudes which are supportive of sexual violence, or which minimise the impact of sexual violence, have been seen as a necessary step to create change in these attitudes, which in turn is a key ingredient of the prevention of sexual violence (Flood & Pease, 2009). In their review of the factors which contribute to the development of attitudes to gendered violence, Flood and Pease (2009) stated that "[a]ttitudes have a fundamental and causal relationship to the perpetration of violence against women.

There is consistent evidence of an association between violence-supportive beliefs and values and the perpetration of violent behaviour, at both individual and community levels” (p. 126).

Gordon, Hallahan, and Henry (2002) made 197 recommendations to the Government of Western Australia including the need to develop education programs for Aboriginal people that have a preventative focus against sexual violence. M. Carmody et al. (2009) stated that “[p]rogram developers need to be aware of the culturally-based elements of programs and strive to make programs inclusive, relevant and sensitive for all participating population groups” (p. 25). Additionally, M. Carmody et al., (2009) argued that a program developed for one cultural group, may not be suitable for a different cultural group. In order to ensure that any sexual violence prevention efforts related to Aboriginal people are culturally relevant, there is a need to understand their underlying beliefs and attitudes about sexual violence (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013; Nayak, Byrne, Martin, & Abraham, 2003).

### **Terminology**

The following are definitions of key terminology used in this research.

**Aboriginal.** The term Aboriginal was used in this research to broadly describe Aboriginal people in Western Australia (Fryer-Smith, 2008). Where specific terminology was used by a participant or in the literature, that terminology was used verbatim. Where an issue was referred to that is a national issue, the researcher used the term Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Attitudes and beliefs.** An “attitude” is a term used in social psychology to denote differing preferences that people have for objects, behaviours, people and ideas (B. T. Johnson & Boynton, 2011). Attitudes may be explicit or implicit and cannot be directly observed, instead they must be inferred from the individual’s response to the object of the attitude (Schwartz, 2011). Attitudes are thought to consist of three components: affective (how a person feels about something), cognitive (the thoughts, ideas or beliefs a person has about something) and behavioural (what a person does in relation to the object of their attitude/s) (Crano, Cooper, & Forgas, 2011).

While attitudes have traditionally been seen as relatively stable across situations, contemporary social psychology tends to understand attitudes as being influenced by the social environment in which they occur (B. T. Johnson & Boynton, 2011). There is debate regarding whether or not attitudes are predictive of behaviour, however they are seen as an important contributing factor to human

behaviours both directly and indirectly (B. T. Johnson & Boynton, 2011). Research by Glasman and Albarracín (2006) suggested that attitudes are more likely to correlate with future behaviour when the attitude is easy to recall, and when the attitude is stable over time.

In the debate regarding the definition of “belief” Spezio and Adolphs (2011) stated that there is a considerable body of evidence which indicates that both emotion and cognition are important in the formation of beliefs, and that emotions serve to reinforce cognitions or dispute them, and vice versa. While beliefs are thought to be changeable and modified in the face of new factual information, attitudes are said to be harder to change (Pease & Flood, 2008).

**Child sexual abuse/sexual assault.** For the purpose of this study, the concept of child sexual abuse (CSA) was defined as: “The involvement of dependent, developmentally immature children and adolescents in sexual activities which they do not fully comprehend, are unable to give informed consent to and that violate social taboos of family roles” (Kempe & Kempe, 1978, p. 60). Specifically, sexually abusive behaviour refers to any sexual activity between a child under the age of 16 years, as delineated by the Criminal Code (WA) 1913, and an adult, or older child. The definition of sexual activity included fondling genitals, masturbation, oral sex, vaginal or anal penetration by a penis, finger or any other object, fondling of breasts, voyeurism, exhibitionism and exposing or involving the child in pornography (Holzer & Bromfield, 2010). This definition of CSA presupposes that a child under the age of 16 years is not emotionally capable of providing informed consent to sexual activity (Lamont, 2012).

G. Ryan (2010) argued that when adults sexually abuse children, it is sufficient for the differential age and the behaviour to define it as CSA, however when juveniles engage in sexual activity, behaviour is insufficient to define CSA on its own. Ryan (2010) argued that the issues of consent, equality and coercion must be taken into consideration and that the dynamics, relationships and impact of the sexual behaviour must also be considered, in order to determine if behaviour is sexually abusive. For the purposes of this research, the term sexual assault (SA) was used to refer to non-consensual sexual activity involving a person over the age of 16 years.

**Consent.** “Consent” is a concept which is central to the understanding of sexual violence in contemporary Australia (Lamont, 2012; Rush, 2011). While some historical understandings of sexual violence were based in property law—that is, the woman as the property of her father or husband, and the child as the property of the

father—the lack of consent of the victim and/ or the inability of the victim to give consent to sexual activity forms the basis of our modern understanding of sexual violence (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). Consent to sexual activity is a concept within criminal law (Lamont, 2012). In Western Australia, according to the *Criminal Code 1913 (WA)* s 319 (2) (a), the statutory definition of consent means “a consent freely and voluntarily given” ...”a consent is not freely and voluntarily given if it is obtained by force, threat, intimidation, deceit, or any fraudulent means”.

However, consent to sexual activity can be viewed as broader than a legal indicator of appropriate sexual activity, consent to sexual activity is also a form of communication in sexual relations (Humphreys & Brousseau, 2010; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013), which has been described as ambiguous at times, with indications of consent often being non-verbal or indirect verbal statements (Humphreys & Brousseau, 2010). The National Task Force on Juvenile Sexual Offending (1993) and Ryan (2010) suggested that consent should incorporate the following components: those involved should understand what is being proposed; they should be aware of the society’s standards of what is proposed; understand the potential alternatives and consequences; be able to assume that the choice to participate or not will be fully and equally accepted; have a choice, and that those involved have mental capacity.

**Family violence.** Blagg (2000a) reported that many Aboriginal people prefer to use the term ‘family violence’ over the term ‘domestic violence’, as it is broader than domestic violence or intimate partner violence, and family violence in Aboriginal communities is “linked to the violence of colonialism and its legacy” (p. 2), rather than a discrete social issue. Keel (2004) argued that incorporating sexual violence within the concept of family violence increases Aboriginal workers’ willingness to talk about sexual violence because family violence is less of a taboo topic. Family violence has been defined as incorporating a range of violent behaviours including physical, cultural, psychological and spiritual violence, of which sexual violence is one aspect (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2006).

However, Keel (2004) argued that by incorporating sexual assault into the broader umbrella of family violence, instead of treating it as a separate issue may obscure the incidence of sexual violence with the result that the extent of sexual violence would remain unknown. Memmott, Stacy, Chambers, and Keys (2001) suggested that although a number of forms of violence may be subsumed under the broader category of family violence, differentiating forms of violence is necessary for targeting violence prevention.

Family violence incorporated a range of violent behaviours including physical, cultural, psychological and spiritual violence, of which sexual violence is one aspect (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2006). The literature recognises that there is an overlap between sexual violence and family violence,

**Prevalence and incidence.** Prevalence refers to the proportion of a given population who experience sexual violence. This can be related to occurrences of sexual violence in a period of time such as the percentage of women who experienced sexual assault in the last 12 months, or across their lifespan (Tarczon & Quadara, 2012).

Incidence refers to the number of occasions sexual violence has occurred in a period of time, therefore incidence rates may be higher than prevalence rates for a given period of time as they may include more than one incidence for an individual (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). Tarczon and Quadara (2012) stated that “[p]revalence rates can inform understandings of the likelihood of victimisation” (p. 2).

**Rape myths.** In the mid-1970s, the concept of “rape myths” was introduced by both feminist scholars such as Brownmiller (1975) and sociologists such as Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1974) to explain the commonly held cultural beliefs, which were often erroneous, that were thought to underpin sexual violence (Edwards, Turchik, Dardis, Reynolds, & Gidyez, 2011). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) defined rape myths as “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (p.134). Rape myths, sometimes called ‘rape supportive attitudes’ (VicHealth, 2006, 2010); have been posited to distort the reality of sexual violence in a number of ways. Firstly by attributing the blame to the victim/survivor, for example, women who dress in a certain way provoke sexual violence, secondly by denying the occurrence of sexual violence or that certain acts are ‘real’ sexual violence. An example of this is that women cannot be sexually assaulted within marriage, or that prostitutes cannot be sexually assaulted. Finally, rape myths justify or excuse sexual violence, for example, the idea that men cannot control their sexual urges.

**Sexual violence.** “Sexual violence” can be defined in a number of different ways, varying with the context of its usage (for example, criminal law versus research) and the standpoint and knowledge of the authors (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a). The way in which sexual violence is defined can affect how it is

measured; whether or not an act is considered a crime, and an individual's perceptions of its seriousness (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a).

For the purposes of this research the following definition of sexual violence provided by the World Health Organization (2002) was used:

Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (p. 17)

Sexual violence is an umbrella term and as such may incorporate a range of sexual acts involving physical contact such as sexual penetration without consent; and acts of a sexual nature which do not involve contact, such as performing sexual acts in front of a person or forcing someone to watch pornography (Basile, Saltzman, & Atlanta, 2002). Although not all sexual violence involves acts of physical violence, the term sexual violence recognises that these acts are a form of violence which aim to dominate and control the targeted individual or individuals (World Health Organization, 2003).

**Victim/survivor.** People who experience sexual violence are often referred to as "victims"; however, the term victim can be interpreted as a passive, powerless state, which can be perceived as another form of objectification (Jordan, 2013). While the term victim can be viewed as a means to emphasise the suffering of people who experience sexual violence (S. V. Hunter, 2010), Dunn (2005) argued that "constructing battered women as survivors, however, may also remediate some of the stigma that can attach to victimization more generally as survivors" (p. 1).

The term "survivor" can be viewed as empowering and acknowledging the resilience of those who survived their experience of violence or it can be perceived as meaning that the experience of sexual violence no longer has any impact, which may not be the case (S. V. Hunter, 2010). Both terms have unintended negative consequences and not all people who have experienced sexual violence identify with either the victim or survivor identity (S. V. Hunter, 2010). Additionally, people who have experienced sexual violence may identify with being a victim and a survivor at the same time, or may vacillate between the two identities (Jordan, 2013). Therefore the purposes of this research the term "victim/survivor" was used to describe people who have experienced sexual violence.

## **Organisation of Thesis**

The first chapter provides an introduction to this research, and definitions of key terminology used in this thesis. Chapter Two consists of a literature review which provides an overview of the prevalence data for sexual violence and a discussion of the limitations of the data, along with an overview of feminist theories of sexual violence, with a focus on the intersectionalist approach. In addition, the ecological model for understanding violence is described, followed by a discussion of key literature relating to attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence. An overview of the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities and a review of the literature related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities is discussed before the research question, purpose, and significance of the study concluding the chapter.

Chapter Three focuses on the methodology employed in this research, commencing with a review of ethical issues relating to Aboriginal health research, cultural safety and cultural security. The choice of a grounded theory methodological framework and the selection of a constructivist approach is discussed. Selection of participants, including inclusion and exclusion criteria are described, followed by the procedures undertaken, including data gathering and data analysis. Consideration of ethical issues in this study and strategies to address them are presented, including the formation of a Critical Reference Group, confidentiality, informed consent to participate and the researcher as an outsider. Finally, Chapter Three concludes with an overview of the criteria used to assess the rigour of this study and a discussion of reflexivity.

Chapter Four begins by discussing participants' views relating to the historical context for understanding current attitudes and beliefs to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities today, including the breakdown of traditional governance and family systems; loss of Aboriginal men's roles; and historical/transgenerational trauma. This is followed by participant data regarding the contemporary context for sexual violence in Aboriginal communities as described by participants, including community disadvantage; racism; the importance of family; shame and internalised oppression. The chapter then describes attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence as described by participants including; the overlap between sexual violence and family violence; gender role stereotypes and denial and disbelief as responses to disclosures of sexual violence. Following this the complexity of issues raised by participants is illustrated by presenting a model derived from participant responses which shows the key themes found during the analysis of the data, and the



interrelationship of these themes. The chapter concludes describing the basic social process identified from the data. This is followed by a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this study.

Chapter Five presents the conclusions drawn from this research along with recommendations for future actions.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the prevalence and incidence of sexual violence in Australia and a discussion of the limitations of these data. An overview of theoretical perspectives of sexual violence that informed the research follows, including feminist theories, intersectionality, and the ecological model for understanding violence. A discussion of key research literature relating to attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, with reference to relevant cross-cultural research, develops the literature review which then focuses on prevalence data in relation to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, followed by a review of the literature regarding sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The chapter concludes with the research question, the purpose of the study and significance of the study.

### Prevalence of Sexual Violence

Accurately determining the extent of sexual violence is difficult across the world (Basile et al., 2002; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). In Australia, it is difficult to obtain statistics which accurately depict the prevalence of sexual violence in contemporary society for a range of reasons (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a; N. Taylor & Mouzos, 2006). Firstly, the majority of victims/survivors do not report their experience of sexual violence to authorities for a number of reasons such as: fear of the justice system, being unsure that it was a crime, wanting to resolve the issue themselves, shame and self-blame, and fear of the consequences of disclosure and fear of not being believed or being blamed (Lievore, 2003; McElvaney, Greene, & Hogan, 2014). According to the Personal Safety Survey 2012 only 16.9% of women who experienced sexual assault (as defined by the survey) contacted the police about their experience (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b) which supports the idea that many victims/survivors do not report their exposure to sexual violence. Secondly, there are limitations as a result of the way that data are collected and recorded, as discussed in the following section.

**Types of sexual violence data.** Tarczon and Quadara (2012) described two types of data that are commonly used to identify the prevalence and incidence of sexual violence. The first type is administrative data such as recorded crime statistics. They reflect the number of offences reported to police and statutory agencies. The second type is victimisation and/or offender surveys which reflect

information provided by individuals regardless of whether or not the incident was reported to authorities.

Both data sources have a number of limitations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a). In relation to administrative data, the definitions applied to sexual violence are generally based on legal or statutory definitions, which are narrower than 'behaviour-based' definitions. Behaviour-based definitions of sexual violence tend to be less prescriptive than legal definitions, and may encompass a range of sexual behaviours, which the victim/ survivor did not consent to or was unable to consent to (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004, 2013a). For example, the World Health Organization (2002) definition of sexual violence provided previously, is a behaviour-based definition of sexual violence.

Legal definitions, sometimes called 'mechanical' definitions (Rush, 2011), are used in the context of the criminal prosecution of sexual violence, and are bound by specific parameters which dictate whether the action is a crime, and if so, the particular category of crime it fits into (Rush, 2011). Legal and statutory definitions of sexual violence vary between jurisdictions, resulting in inconsistencies in data collection (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a; Bromfield & Horsfall, 2010; Irenyi, 2007; Lievore, 2003; Neame & Heenan, 2003). Additionally, it is well documented that the vast majority of victims/survivors of sexual violence do not disclose their experience of sexual violence to authorities. For example in the 2012 Personal Safety Survey, over 40% of females who experienced sexual violence reported they did not seek support or advice in relation to their most recent incident of sexual violence by a male perpetrator (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). In addition the 2012 Personal Safety Survey utilised a definition whereby sexual violence constituted a criminal offence (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). Therefore administrative data is likely to under-represent the extent of sexual violence.

An example of administrative data related to sexual violence is child protection data. Traditionally, data relating to CSA only included cases that were reported and substantiated (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013). Research suggested that a substantial number of incidents of child abuse and neglect are never reported to authorities (Tucci, Mitchell, & Goddard, 2010). Once reported, allegations must be substantiated. The Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (2013) stated that "[a] substantiation indicates there is sufficient reason (after an investigation) to believe the child has been, is being, or is likely to be, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed"(p.3). However, substantiated cases of child abuse are considered to be an underestimate of the actual prevalence (Bromfield & Horsfall, 2010). The substantiation of child protection cases has been found to be

related not only to the likelihood or actual level of abuse, neglect or harm, but also the gender, ethnicity and age of the child who is allegedly in need protection (Cross & Casanueva, 2009). Additionally, Bromfield and Horsfall (2010) noted that the method of recording substantiation data excluded extra-familial abuse where the child's parents were acting to prevent the abuse from recurring. It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that administrative data relating to sexual violence involving both children and adults is likely to be an underestimate of the actual prevalence.

In relation to victimisation survey data, large scale surveys are seldom conducted due to several factors. They include the expense of such an endeavour; vulnerable and hard to reach populations, such as remote Aboriginal communities or homeless people that may not be included in such studies; not all incidents may be reported by respondents and definitions vary between surveys which can make comparisons of data across different sources difficult (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a, 2014b; Lievore, 2003).

Tarczon and Quadara (2012) remarked that "there is no single data source that is able to provide all the information required to paint a detailed picture of the full extent of sexual assault and abuse in the Australian community" (p 6). However, it is generally accepted by researchers in the field that the available data constitute an underestimate due to the unknown figure of cases that never come to the attention of the authorities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004, 2013a).

Despite the limitations of victimisation surveys (as described above) the Personal Safety Survey (PSS) conducted in 2012 was considered to be the best estimate of the prevalence of sexual violence in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). The PSS 2012 differentiated between SA and CSA, with sexual assault being defined as an act of a sexual nature committed against the will of a person over the age of 15 years, which would have been considered a crime, such as completed or attempted rape. The definition excluded unwanted sexual touching, which was defined by the PSS as sexual harassment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). The PSS 2012 definition of sexual violence included sexual assault and sexual threat.

**Australian prevalence of sexual violence over 15 years of age.** In 2012, the PSS estimates that approximately 19% of women and 4% of men (over the age of 18 years) reported a lifetime prevalence of sexual violence since the age of 15 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). Of those women who stated they had experienced sexual violence in the 12 months prior to the PSS 2012, over 87% of perpetrators were known to the victim/survivor. Women in the 18 to 24 year old age

group were more likely to report having experienced sexual violence in the previous 12 months than women in other age groups, indicating that younger women were at higher risk of experiencing sexual violence.

These statistics are similar to those reported in the United Kingdom, where the Crime Survey for England and Wales found that one in five women reported being a victim/survivor of sexual violence since the age of 16 years (Ministry of Justice, Home Office, & Office for National Statistics, 2013), and the United States where, according to the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, one in five women (18.3%) reported experiencing attempted or completed sexual penetration without their consent in their lifetime (Black et al., 2011).

**Australian prevalence of sexual violence under 15 years of age.** Data relating to the prevalence of sexual violence experienced by people under the age of 15 years were not available from the 2012 PSS, as data for this age group were presented as an aggregate of physical and sexual abuse (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013b). Therefore, the most recent data related to sexual violence victimisation under the age of 15 years were drawn from the PSS conducted in 2005 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The PSS 2005 defined CSA as any act by an adult, involving a child under the age of 15 years in sexual activity (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The 2005 PSS reported that 12% of women experienced sexual violence prior to the age of 15 years, with 67.6% of these respondents reporting sexual abuse before the age of 11 years. Of the female respondents, the largest proportion of sexual violence was perpetrated by someone known to them (90%), the majority of these being family members.

A 10-year cohort study of students aged 14 to 15 years conducted in Victoria between 1992 to 2003 (E. E. Moore et al., 2010), retrospectively examined the prevalence of sexual violence victimisation before the age of 16 years. The researchers found that amongst females the prevalence of sexual violence was 17% and amongst males the prevalence was almost 7%. The difference in prevalence from the PSS 2012 may be related to differences in the definitions of childhood sexual violence victimisation used for each study.

It was difficult to locate comparable international data on the prevalence of sexual violence experienced by people under the age of 15 years, due to different definitions of sexual violence against a child and age differences in the age at which someone was considered a child. Radford et al. (2011), however, estimated that 16.5% of 11- to 17-year-olds in the United Kingdom experienced sexual violence. A meta-analysis of 65 studies across 22 countries, by Pereda, Guilera, Forns, and

Gómez-Benito (2009) estimated that 19.7% of women experienced sexual violence as a child.

As discussed previously, it is likely that the available statistics from the PSS 2012 and 2005 are underestimates of the prevalence of sexual violence in Australia, however, the available evidence suggested that sexual violence is a problem in the Australian community.

## **Theories of sexual violence**

There are a range of theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain the underlying reasons for the prevalence of sexual violence, including social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), gender role socialisation theories (Heise, 1998) and feminist theories (H. Johnson, Ollus, & Nevala, 2008). It is important to recognise that feminist perspectives, social learning theory and gender-role socialisation theories are not mutually exclusive (Hetzl-Riggin, 2014). For the purposes of this thesis, the researcher adopted an intersectionalist perspective. Intersectionality derived from feminist theories in recognition that women's experiences of violence are shaped by the intersection of different social identities, such as race, class and socio-economic status (Berger & Guidroz, 2009). Feminist theories and intersectionality are discussed in the following section.

**Feminist theories of sexual violence.** Feminist scholarship has been important in the development of the social sciences' understanding of sexual violence (DeKeseredy, 2011). In the early 1970s feminist theory posited the theory that sexual violence was the product of "the patriarchal system of gender inequalities which empowers men and oppresses women underpins the sexual violence and that stratification and social control are fundamental elements in the sexual domination of women" (Ward, 1995, p. 4).

In the past some feminist theories, such as radical feminism, focussed on patriarchy as single-factor explanation for gender inequality and violence (Brownmiller, 1975; DeKeseredy, 2011), presently, there are a range of divergent feminist theories underpinned by the theory that many societies around the world are structured along the lines of patriarchy (DeKeseredy, 2011; H. Johnson et al., 2008). Feminist theories posit that there are social structures which serve to maintain the dominant position of men such as laws, educational and political institutions. Additionally, the patriarchal structure is reinforced by ideology, whereby the acceptance of male dominance is viewed as normal and positive by the majority of the population (H. Johnson et al., 2008). Feminist theories argued that reducing the gender-based violence such as sexual violence necessitates increased gender-

equality. While there has been a tendency in the last decade for some authors to represent the problem of sexual violence as gender neutral (DeKeseredy, 2011) prevalence data provides a timely reminder that while men can be and are victims/survivors, and women can and do perpetrate, the majority of sexual violence is perpetrated by men against girls and women (VicHealth, 2006).

There have been a number of criticisms of the feminist perspectives. For example, there are claims that feminism ignores violence committed by women in intimate relationships (Dutton, 1994, 2006). It is worth noting that much of this criticism has been argued using data obtained by the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Dutton, 1994) as a measure of intimate partner violence, which has produced gender symmetric results; however, the use of the Conflict Tactics Scale has been criticised because it fails to examine context or motives for acts of violence, instead providing only raw counts (DeKeseredy & Schwartz, 2010). Other criticisms of feminism are the over-reliance on criminal sanctions against perpetrators of violence, and the presence of factions within feminism that are apt to critique each other (Ali & Naylor, 2013).

Despite the criticisms of feminism, feminist theories are still viewed as an important contribution to understanding sexual violence (M. Carmody et al., 2009). The gendered analysis of feminism has been expanded to consider a range of intersecting oppressions such as race, gender and class.

**Intersectionality.** Crenshaw (1989) used the term 'intersectionality' to describe the intersectional identity of African American women, as both women and African American, arguing that feminist and anti-racist discourses marginalise African American women as they only consider either race or gender. Crenshaw (1991) argued that African American women in the United States experienced simultaneous gender and racial discrimination, and therefore theorising about violence against women should occur at the points where the sources of discrimination intersect (Cabrera, 2010). Crenshaw's work has been expanded to consider a range of intersectional identities in addition to gender and race, such as sexuality, class and disability (Cabrera, 2010).

Brownridge (2009) cautioned against essentialising women, following his research which showed that different vulnerable populations of women have different levels of risk, some of which remained relatively stable over time (such as the elevated risk of Canadian First Nation women) and others declined (such as co-habiting women). Brownridge (2009) argued that his analysis of violence against

gendered populations of women demonstrated that a one-size-fits-all theoretical approach “does not fit the complex reality of violence against women” (p.262).

The combination of racial and gender violence was commonplace throughout the colonial era (A. Smith, 2003, 2014) and can be seen as a tool to control the sexual and reproductive lives of colonised women (M. L. Hunter, 2013). Smith (2014) argues that it “is inadequate to conceptualize sexual violence simply as a tool of patriarchy, because sexual violence has served as a primary tool of racism and genocide against Native peoples” (p. 31).

In recognition of the complex interactions between a range of risk and protective factors, and a growing acceptance of sexual violence as a public health issue, the ecological model for understanding violence was developed (Krug et al., 2002). Feminist perspectives, including intersectionality can be applied to the ecological model for understanding violence (Hetzl-Riggin, 2014) by examining gender inequality across the individual, relationship, community and societal domains (Flood & Pease, 2009).

### **Ecological Model for Understanding Violence**

Krug and colleagues (2002) expanded on the ecological model of violence against women initially proposed by Heise (1998). Krug et al. postulated that there were four interrelated spheres of influence that contribute to violence perpetration, including sexual violence as described in Figure 1. This model recognises that violence is a complex issue which no single factor can explain.

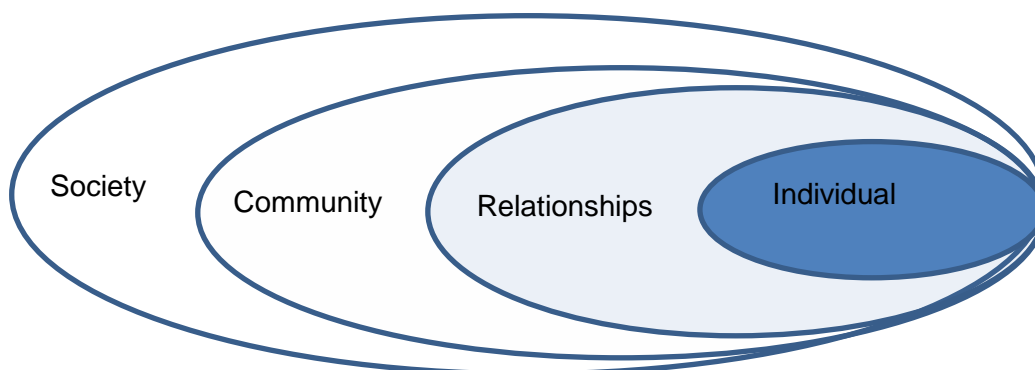


Figure 1. Ecological model for understanding violence (Krug et al, 2002, p. 12).

**Individual factors.** How the individual behaves which is influenced by personal and biological factors that increase the risk of a person becoming a perpetrator of or a victim/survivor of violence.

**Relationships.** Close relationships including family, intimate partners, peers, friends and how these relationships increase the risk of the person becoming a



perpetrator or victim/survivor, of violence. For example, having peers who endorse violence and engage in violent acts, may increase the risks of the individual becoming a perpetrator or victim/survivor (Krug et al., 2002).

**Community.** This level represents the contexts in which social relationships occur including workplaces, educational institutions, local neighbourhoods and community groups. Within the ecological model this level seeks to identify characteristics in these settings that increase the risks of violence and can include issues such as population density and local levels of poverty (Krug et al., 2002).

**Society.** This refers to the broader societal factors which contribute to the encouragement or discouragement of violence. For example, social and cultural norms which endorse male domination over women and children, the ready availability of weapons and violence by structures such as the police force. Krug also described broader social issues such as economic, educational and health policies that are supported or maintained within a society and lead to inequality between groups within the society (Krug et al., 2002).

The interrelationship between these factors, that is, where a factor was strengthened or modified by another factor, is indicated by the overlapping rings in the model (Figure 1). For example, “a person with an aggressive personality is more likely to act violently in a family or community that habitually resolves conflict through violence than if he or she were in a more peaceable environment” (p. 10).

The ecological model of violence not only explained the causes of violence as being complex and interrelated; it also identified spheres where violence may be prevented by acting across a number of levels at the same time. For example, attempting to address risk factors in schools through violence prevention programs (community), addressing gender inequality through legislation (society), providing services to support families where violence is occurring (relationships), and addressing individual risk factors for both victimisation and perpetration (individual). The ecological model for understanding violence, acknowledges that the attitudes and beliefs that people hold about sexual violence may be an important risk or protective factor at the individual level, and that these attitudes and beliefs are reinforced through a range of social structures.

### **Attitudes and Beliefs about Sexual Violence**

The attitudes and beliefs that people hold about sexual violence is seen to be an important influence on a range of factors, including the low level of reporting of sexual violence (Burt, 1980; Egan & Wilson, 2011; Pease & Flood, 2008; Ward, 1995). VicHealth (2010) surmised that while attitudes and beliefs are not the only

influence on violence against women, they are “central to the contexts in which violence against women occurs” (VicHealth, 2010, p. 15) in that they inform the violence that occurs, they shape the responses of victims/survivors of violence (for example self-blame because they were out alone at night) and they influence the response of the community and therefore service providers and policy makers toward both the perpetrator and the victim/survivor.

Furthermore, understanding and challenging the unhelpful attitudes and beliefs people hold about sexual violence is seen to be a key element of sexual violence prevention (Office of the Status of Women, 2004). Lievore (2003) argued that this broader view or societal norm has contributed to the continued difficulties victim/survivors of sexual violence experienced in the disclosure, reporting and recovery from acts of sexual violence. Additionally, Flood and Pease (2006) stated that research has demonstrated that males who hold violence supportive attitudes were more likely to commit violence, and that in communities where violence supportive attitudes were more prevalent, violence was more likely to occur. Attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence have been described as stemming from social and cultural factors which included the following: gender, age, socio-economic status, educational level, employment, ethnic background (N. Taylor & Mouzos, 2006). Gender has been found to be a factor in the acceptance of attitudes that blame the victim/survivor of sexual violence; that is, males have been found to be less sympathetic towards sexual violence victims/survivors than females (Nagel, Matsuo, McIntyre, & Morrison, 2005). Additionally, higher levels of education and socio-economic status have been found to be correlated with more supportive attitudes towards victims/survivors of sexual violence (V. N. Anderson et al., 2004; N. Taylor & Mouzos, 2006). Lower levels of gender equality have also been associated with increased levels of sexual violence (Wall, 2014).

Another factor which has been found to correlate with unhelpful attitudes towards sexual violence is sexist attitudes (D. Abrams, Viki, Masser, & Bohner, 2003). Sexist attitudes, which Glick and Fiske (1996) described as comprising of two forms, *hostile sexism*, or attitudes that are outwardly negative towards women (for example, all women are bad drivers), and *benevolent sexism*, or attitudes towards women which are based on stereotypes, but are outwardly pro-social and positive in tone and feeling (for example, a male worker calling a female colleague ‘cute’. While the male worker may feel this is a compliment, the female worker may feel that her status as a professional is undermined). Glick and Fiske argued that when these two forms of attitudes exist together they create *ambivalent sexism*, which is reconciled

by categorising women who conform to traditional sex roles as 'good' and women who do not conform as 'bad'.

Attitudes towards sexual violence have been examined in numerous studies (Aosved & Long, 2006; Basow & Minieri, 2011; Bournsnel et al., 2008; Burt, 1980; Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Cowan, 2000; T. Davis & Lee, 1996; Frese et al., 2004; Struckman-Johnson & Struckman-Johnson, 1992), many of which have examined the acceptance of "rape myths" (Devdas & Rubin, 2007; Forbes et al., 2004; Ward, 1995).

**Rape myth research.** A large amount of research into attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence has been quantitative in nature, with the use of survey instruments such as the Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Burt, 1980) and the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (Payne, Lonsway, & Fitzgerald, 1999). Some of this research utilises vignettes describing various scenarios involving sexual violence, with differing variables which are then rated by participants using survey tools (for example, Brown & Testa, 2008; Maurer & Robinson, 2008).

In a meta-analysis of rape myth acceptance research, Suarez and Gadalla (2010) found a range of sociocultural factors which predicted a positive association with rape myth acceptance including: sexual aggression, hostility towards women, the willingness to engage in sexual activity outside a committed sexual relationship, along with forms of oppressive beliefs such as racism, sexism, classism and religious intolerance. Suarez and Gadalla (2010) stated that the congruence of rape myth acceptance with other forms of oppressive beliefs may indicate that rape myths are a potential indicator of structural violence.

An example of research into attitudes related to sexual violence is that undertaken by Angelone, Mitchell, and Lucente (2012) who conducted research with 348 college students in the United States in order to examine the influence of multiple perpetrator motivations on participants' attribution of victim blame. Participants were shown a vignette which provided varying degrees of information regarding perpetrator motivation, and were then asked to complete a survey regarding attribution of victim culpability, credibility, trauma and pleasure, perpetrator culpability, guilt, and sentencing recommendations. Results of this research indicated that providing participants with information regarding perpetrator motivation was associated with reduced levels of victims blame. Additionally, participant gender role, rather than gender had a greater effect on attributions, with egalitarian gender roles associated with lower levels of victim blame (Angelone et al., 2012).

Gerger and colleagues (2007) developed the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression scale (AMMSA), which incorporated a broader range of sexually aggressive behaviours than previous attitudinal measures, which tended to focus solely on rape. Süssenbach and Bohner (2011) developed a nine-item version of the AMMSA, which demonstrated that while the means of respondents' scores indicated that the majority of respondents disagreed with seven of the nine items, two items were endorsed by respondents: "It is a biological necessity for men to release sexual pressure from time to time"; "Women like to play coy. This does not mean that they do not want sex" (Süssenbach & Bohner, 2011, p. 378), suggesting greater acceptance of the belief in men's biological need for sex, and in women's token resistance to sexual violence respectively. Süssenbach and Bohner (2011) found that higher levels of rape myth acceptance existed in respondents who had lower levels of income and lower levels of education, however no direct gender effect was found in this study. The researchers found that gender did interact with gender identification, which impacted on rape myth acceptance. For example, males with higher gender identification were more likely to be supportive of rape myths, as well as other intolerant beliefs such as homophobia, and benevolent sexism, whereas the opposite was true of female respondents, in that higher gender identification in women was related to decreased acceptance of rape myths, and reduced support of intolerant beliefs (Süssenbach & Bohner, 2011).

The concept of rape myths is not without criticism. Recently, Reece (2013) argued that "we are in the process of creating myths about myths, or 'myth myths' " (p. 446). Reece stated that the idea that rape myths are widespread can be challenged on the basis that some of the attitudes are not myths, but rather are valid beliefs, that not all the myths are about rape but are in fact 'sex myths', and that there is little evidence that rape myths are widespread, suggesting that two decades worth of rape myth research is overstated due to problems with rape myth measures, including the AMMSAS. Reece further argued that 'rape researchers' utilise semantic exercises to avoid acknowledging the truth of some rape myths, stating "here is more than a whiff of elitism in the notion that there are some truths that rape researchers can, but the public cannot, be trusted with" (p. 470).

Conaghan and Russell (2014) rebuked Reece's (2013) position, arguing that her analysis was "methodologically flawed, crudely reductionist and rhetorically unyielding" (p. 25). Conaghan and Russell (2014) stated that Reece utilised research out of context, failed to acknowledge the scientific rigour of the development of measures such as the AMMSA, and that she demonstrated a superficial understanding of feminist analysis.

The majority of rape myth research has focused on females as the victim/survivor and males as the perpetrator and while a small amount of rape myth research related to male victims/survivors, McGee, O'Higgins, Garavan, and Conroy (2011) argued that this area of research still requires further development. The following section provides an overview of research related to attitudes about child sexual abuse.

**Attitudes and beliefs about child sexual abuse.** Attitudes and beliefs about child sexual abuse have been less extensively documented in the research literature (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010). One of the few validated measures developed was the *Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale* (Collings, 1997), which Cromer and Goldsmith (2010) reported had good convergent validity with Burt's (1980) Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. The Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale contains three sub-scales that relate to the specific types of myths that people may hold. These included:

- Blame diffusion: which shifts the blame from the perpetrator to the victim/survivor or others such as the non-offending parent
- Denial of abusiveness: which minimises the harm of CSA and portrays the child as consenting
- Restrictive stereotypes: which features mistaken beliefs about the nature of victim/survivor and perpetrator relationship; for example the belief that most CSA is perpetrated by strangers, and perceptions about the social and demographic conditions under which CSA occurs; for example that CSA is only a problem in Aboriginal communities (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010).

A measure of incest victim/survivor blame developed by Jackson and Ferguson (1983), the Jackson Incest Blame Scale, described incest blame being associated with four constructs which attribute blame in one or more of the following ways:

- Situational factors, which are similar to the social and demographic characteristics of Collings' Child Sexual Abuse Myth Scale (Collings, 1997), that is incest occurs due to socioeconomic factors, family conditions or drug and alcohol use
- Victim/survivor blame, which includes the belief that victims/survivors encourage or provoke incest

- Societal values such as representations of sex and violence in the media, objectification of women and the morality of society
- Fourthly, offender characteristics, such as perpetrators offending because they are mentally ill or because they can't control themselves.

The research undertaken by Collings (1997) and Jackson and Ferguson (1983) demonstrated that individual variables of participants, such as sexism, gender, personal trauma history and culture influenced the acceptance of or adherence to these myths. This research also indicated an overlap between CSA myths and sexual assault myths, such as blaming the victim/ survivor.

More recently, as part of a larger grounded theory study of videotaped forensic interviews of 100 young people (aged between three and 17 years) where allegations of sexual violence were investigated, Hlavka (2014) explored the way adolescent girls accounted for their experience of sexual violence utilising a subsample of 23 interviews of racially diverse girls aged between 11 and 16 years. The study found that heterogendered and heteronormative scripts featured strongly in the girls' explanations of their experience of sexual violence. For instance, males were depicted as sexual aggressors and girls were responsible for setting sexual boundaries and policing themselves and each other. According to Hlavka (2014), this resulted in the girls accepting responsibility for accepting gifts, miscommunication and failures to protect their virtue. These findings confirm some of the gendered norms that have previously been documented in rape myth research (Burt, 1980; Deming, Krassen Covan, Swan, & Billings, 2013; Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013; Ward, 1995). In this regard, Hlavka stated "[i]n the process of appraising and explaining violence, girls drew upon particular macro-understandings of gender and sex to interpret and justify actions that legitimated men's dominance" (p. 354). This suggested that girls are exposed to and adopt heteronormative scripts regarding sexual violence from a young age.

Both rape myth research and research into attitudes and beliefs about CSA have common themes which serve to a) blame the victim/survivor, b) diminish the responsibility of the perpetrator, c) minimise the impact or seriousness of sexual violence and d) stereotype the victim/survivor and/or the perpetrator.

While the majority of research has been conducted in this area in the Western world, increasingly, research regarding attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence are being conducted in non-Western countries and with different ethnic groups. This is an important development as criticisms of the Attitudes Towards Rape, Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale (IRMAS) and other measures argue that

the use of surveys “fails to capture rape myths as they may occur in social contexts and when several rape myths occur simultaneously” (Deming et al., 2013, p. 4).

Understanding the social context in which the attitudes to sexual violence occur is particularly important when examining the occurrence of sexual violence in different cultures as meanings ascribed to gender; attitudes and the consequences of sexual violence can differ across cultures (Kalra & Bhugra, 2013). The following is a brief overview of cross-cultural research regarding attitudes towards sexual violence.

#### **Cross-cultural research about attitudes towards sexual violence.**

Sanday (1981) examined the prevalence of sexual violence in different cultures, and found that some cultures were ‘rape free’ and some were ‘rape prone’. Sanday (1981) posited that sexual violence is shaped by sociocultural values and that cultures where sexual violence occurs less frequently have higher levels of gender equality.

In the mid to late 1990s, recognition grew that attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence affecting African American women were based on a combination of the historical and contemporary effects of both racism and sexism (A. M. White, Strube, & Fisher, 1998). For example, Tillman, Bryant-Davis, Smith, and Marks (2010) argued that culture-specific barriers to sexual violence disclosure exist among African American victims/survivors including: a sense of allegiance to protect African American males, from perceived or actual mistreatment by the criminal justice system, inadequate or appropriate sexuality socialisation, and stereotypes of African American female sexuality.

There has been an increased recognition of the complexity of factors contributing to attitudes to sexual violence, and of the need to incorporate cross-cultural factors into sexual violence prevention education programs (M. Carmody et al., 2009). Furthermore, Flood and Pease (2006) stated that “there is powerful cross-cultural evidence that attitudes toward violence against women are constructed by, and only meaningful within, particular cultural contexts” (p.30). Flood and Pease warned that it is important, however, to be aware that cultural differences can be utilised in racist ways.

An example of research regarding specific cultural values regarding sexual violence is that by Oh and Neville (2004) in South Korea. The researchers utilised 26 items from the IRMAS and developed 28 items based on the literature to capture rape myths specific to Korean culture. A series of three experiments were conducted, with the first two experiments testing the preliminary scale’s construct

validity, with both a university student sample and a community sample. The third experiment examined test-retest reliability. The resulting scale, the Korean Rape Myth Acceptance Scale, incorporated culturally specific ideas around the Confucian values that emphasise feminine modesty and chastity, and views women as 'spoiled' if they engage in sexual activity outside of the marital relationship, even if it is non-consensual (Oh & Neville, 2004).

Nayak et al. (2003) conducted research into attitudes about gender-based violence across Kuwait, India, Japan and the United States. Participants were university students aged between 17 and 24 years; 189 students were from India, 236 from Kuwait, 235 from Japan and 407 students from the United States. Participants completed a questionnaire which was developed from existing survey instruments related to attitudes towards sexual violence and physical intimate partner violence. The researchers found a significant amount of variance in responses between countries and within countries related to gender, except for Kuwait which had no significant difference in responses from male and female participants. Kuwait, which the researchers argued had more restrictive gender roles, was found to have the least favourable attitudes towards victims/survivors, for both male and female participants. The researchers concluded that cultural groups that have more restrictive gender roles are more likely to hold negative views towards victims/survivors of sexual and physical violence.

While studies have examined cultural differences in the acceptance of rape myths (D. C. Carmody & Washington, 2001; Costin & Schwartz, 1987; Golge et al., 2003; Lee et al., 2012; Muir et al., 1996), there has been a limited amount of research which examines culture-specific beliefs and attitudes about sexual violence across countries or other sociocultural groups. Nayak et al. (2003) argued that studies of different sociocultural groups have either been conducted within one nation including the grouping together of heterogeneous sociocultural groups, and have not explored the differing structural factors which may have impacted factors such as gender which, in turn, impact on attitudes towards sexual violence.

Additionally, as demonstrated in the previous examples of cross-cultural research into attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, much of the existing research is based on adaptations of existing survey instruments which suggests a gap in the available research regarding in-depth explorations of attitudes towards sexual violence in different sociocultural groups. In order to provide a context for research regarding Aboriginal people's attitudes to sexual violence in Australia, a review of research regarding attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Australia follows.



**Australian research on attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence.** In the Australian context a number of studies have examined attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence (Boursohn et al., 2008; Daws et al., 1995; Eastel, 1993; VicHealth, 2006, 2010; Xenos & Smith, 2001) some of which have included Aboriginal people as respondents to a broader survey (Indermaur, 2001; N. Taylor & Mouzos, 2006; VicHealth, 2010).

Eastel (1993) conducted research into the Australian general public's beliefs and attitudes about sexual violence through a survey consisting of items from several validated and reliable overseas rape myth measures. The survey sought to measure the level of acceptance of rape myths and to also examine the level of satisfaction with the response of the legal system to sexual violence. Participants were recruited following the airing of the television documentary, *Without consent*. The documentary addressed adult sexual violence and was aired on two consecutive weeks on a national television network. At the end of the documentary contact details were provided for those who wished to participate in the research. Those who phoned to indicate their willingness to participate were sent a copy of the survey through the mail. Additionally, participants were recruited through the printing of the survey in a national chain of newspapers. The majority of the 6,588 self-selected respondents were female (n=5,303), 40.8% of respondents were aged 25-39 years and over half were married. While the majority of respondents did not adhere to rape myths, men were more likely than women to endorse rape myths as were the respondents over the age of 50 years. This was consistent with international research previously outlined. Almost three in ten male respondents agreed or were undecided with the statement that 'most charges of rape are unfounded'. Nearly one third of the sample either disagreed with, or were undecided, about the statement that there is no behaviour on the part of a woman that should be considered justification for rape. Over one third of male respondents agreed with, or were undecided about the statement that women who have fantasies about being raped actually wish to be raped in reality. However, the majority of respondents believed that sentences for sexual offenders should be longer, and that laws concerning sexual violence were too lenient. Male respondents were less likely to agree with the notion that legal sanctions regarding sexual violence were too lenient or that sentences should be more severe.

In 2006 a telephone survey was conducted of a randomly selected sample of 2,000 Victorians (VicHealth, 2006). Additionally, a culturally and linguistically diverse sample of 800 people was surveyed. The purpose of the survey, which was based on a national survey conducted in 1995 (Office for the Status of Women (OSW),

1995), was to examine factors which contributed to violence against women and to assess changes in attitudes towards violence against women, by comparing results of the 2006 survey with the survey conducted in 1995. Similar to international research previously discussed, the strongest and most consistent predictors of violence supportive attitudes were being male and having low support for gender equality. Additionally, being born overseas was a predictor of being significantly more likely to hold attitudes that are supportive of violence against women. The researchers found that men from the culturally and linguistically diverse sample were significantly less likely to agree that behaviours such as forcing a partner to have sex was very serious. Overall, approximately one in six respondents agreed with the statement “women often say no [to sex] when they mean yes” and one in four respondents disagreed with the statement “women rarely make up false claims about being raped”. Nearly two out of five respondents agreed with the statement “rape results from men not being able to control their need for sex”.

In 2009, the largest national survey of attitudes towards violence against women in Australia to date, the National Community Attitudes to Violence against Women Survey 2009 (McGregor, 2009), conducted telephone interviews with a general community sample of more than 10,000 people over the age of 16 years. Additional telephone interviews were conducted with 2,500 first and second generation members of the Italian, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities. For the culturally and linguistically diverse aspect of the survey some qualitative research was undertaken in addition to the survey. Stakeholder interviews were conducted with 13 relevant stakeholders, focus groups were conducted with specific cultural groups in Sydney (Iranian and Assyrian) and Melbourne (Sudanese and Iraqi) consisting of eight to ten participants with mini-group discussions conducted with four to six community agents from each of the four community groups.

The survey also conducted interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants; this is discussed in the section relating to research on Aboriginal people’s attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence. Similar to other research, the researchers found that factors associated with violence supportive attitudes were being male, and having lower gender equity supportive attitudes for both the general community and culturally and linguistically diverse samples. Additionally, there were some attitudinal differences based on the age, socio-economic background, location and migration and settlement factors. For example, differences amongst age-groups were found in responses to items which suggested excuses for sexual violence, such as “if a woman is raped while she is drunk or

affected by drugs she is at least partly responsible” was more likely to be endorsed by the youngest age group surveyed than the 31-40 year old age group (19% compared with 7%), and 37% of the oldest age group endorsed this item.

The results of the 2009 survey were compared with a national survey conducted in 1995 (Office for the Status of Women (OSW), 1995), and the Victorian survey conducted in 2006 (VicHealth, 2006) using a survey instrument based on the 2006 survey with modifications. Four of the 16 survey questions relating to sexual violence were asked in both 1995 and 2009. Responses to three out of four of these items showed a significant decrease in the following statements:

- Women often say ‘yes’ when they mean ‘no’
- Women who are sexually harassed should sort it out themselves
- Women are more likely to be raped by someone they know

The responses to the first two items were reported to reflect a shift towards less tolerance for sexual violence; however, responses to the statement “women are more likely to be raped by someone they know” indicated a decrease in agreement with this item by 4% between 1995 and 2006.

Related research into Australian attitudes towards gender roles, specifically women and men’s work and family roles, was conducted by van Egmond, Baxter, Buchler, and Western (2010) utilising five cross sectional surveys conducted between 1986 and 2005. Van Egmond and colleagues (2010) found that men and older people were more conservative than women and younger people, however those born between 1960 and 1980 were more egalitarian on some issues than those born after 1980. Additionally, while the trend towards increasingly egalitarian gender attitudes was most marked until the mid-1990s, the trend flattened and in some cases reversed following the mid-1990s, suggesting that the move towards more liberal gender attitudes in Australia has plateaued.

Klettke and Simonis (2011) conducted research using an electronic survey, to examine the differences and similarities in perceptions of culpability of 15-year-old and 20-year-old violence victims/survivors. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling via email, with 173 participants aged 18 to 60 years completing the survey. Of those who completed the 28 item survey, 31% were male and 69% were female. The results of the research indicated that misconceptions about victims/survivors of sexual violence are still prevalent, and that adolescents were perceived in a similar manner to adult victims/survivors. For example, 45% of respondents attributed some form of blame to victims/survivors of both age groups if they behaved ‘promiscuously’ and 28% of participants attributed blame for sexual

violence to a 15 year old and 19% to a 20 year old, if they acted 'affectionately'. While this research indicated that there were similarities between 15- and 20-year-olds for the attribution of responsibility for sexual violence, a relatively small sample size was utilised, and the researchers suggested that further research into this issue using a random representative sample would be beneficial.

There was a dearth of research related to attitudes and beliefs about childhood sexual violence in Australia. Two pieces of research were identified, both of which were designed to investigate attitudes to child abuse, with some questions relating to CSA. One study was conducted to investigate community attitudes to child abuse, including sexual abuse (Donovan, Wood, Jalleh, & Ivery, 2010). Over 20,000 people completed a web-based survey in 2009. Respondents indicated that if they thought a child was being sexually abused 42% of them would discuss this with the child's parents. The researchers argued that this suggested that respondents were making an assumption that the perpetrator was not a parent. Sexual abuse was perceived as occurring less often than other forms of child abuse, with 16% of female respondents indicating that they believed sexual abuse was very common, compared with 6% of male respondents. Respondents under 35 years of age were more likely than older respondents to state that they would definitely call the police in relation to the sexual abuse scenario presented in the survey (39% compared with 28% of respondents over the age of 45 years).

In 2009 research was undertaken by the Australian Childhood Foundation to examine community attitudes to child abuse (Tucci et al., 2010). Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 722 adults aged 18 years and over. The researchers found that almost one in four respondents either would not believe, or could not make up their mind as to whether to believe children if they disclosed abuse to them. Additionally, although more than one in four respondents identified a child whom they believed was being abused in the previous five years, 21% of which was identified as sexual abuse, one in six respondents stated that they did nothing, despite their concerns. Interestingly, 98% of respondents stated that they believed that adults who sexually abuse children should be charged by the police.

A small body of research related to attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Australia exists, much of it investigating adult sexual victimisation, while available research into attitudes and beliefs about childhood sexual victimisation was limited to research examining broader attitudes to child abuse. While there is recognition of the need to consider the culturally specific contexts of sexual violence in the international literature related to sexual violence, to date there has been only

a small amount of research relating to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities (McCalman et al., 2014). The following discusses the sexual violence in Aboriginal communities including the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities followed by a review of the existing literature.

### **Sexual Violence and Aboriginal Communities**

Sexual violence in Aboriginal communities has been an issue that has seen inquiries, policies and interventions taking place in the last 12 years (P. Anderson & Wild, 2007; Brough, 2007, June 21; Gordon et al., 2002; Mullighan, 2008; Robertson, 2000). The following provides an overview of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities based on the available literature.

In November 2001 the Western Australian Government announced an inquiry into the response by Government agencies to complaints of family violence and CSA in Aboriginal communities (Gordon et al., 2002). This was prompted by the coronial inquest into the tragic death of Susan Taylor, a 15 year old Noongar<sup>1</sup> girl who had suicided in the Swan Valley Noongar Community in 1999, having previously made allegations that she had been sexually abused to a range of Government agencies (Weber, 2001). The Inquiry, commonly referred to as the *Gordon Inquiry*, was tasked with investigating the apparently epidemic levels of sexual, physical and family violence in Aboriginal communities in Western Australia. While the Gordon Inquiry attracted criticism for being too government-oriented and not giving Susan Taylor's parents a voice (McGlade, 2007), it is nonetheless a seminal report into sexual violence in Western Australian Aboriginal communities .

The Gordon Inquiry (Gordon et al., 2002) made 197 recommendations to the Government of Western Australia including the need to develop education programs for Aboriginal people that have a preventative focus against sexual violence (pages 111, 118 and 121). A number of enquiries and anecdotal reports have identified sexual violence as a serious problem in some Aboriginal communities (Aboriginal

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<sup>1</sup> The Noongar People are the Aboriginal people of the south-west corner of Western Australia. The word Noongar translates as 'man'. Noongar country extends from Jurien in the North to the west of Esperance and the coastal areas in-between. Several alternative spellings have commonly been used including: Noongar, Nyoongar, Nyoongah, Nyungah, Njonga, Nyungar, Nyunga and Yunga since colonisation as, with all Aboriginal languages, Noongar was traditionally an oral language (Southwest Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, n.d). The spelling of Noongar was agreed upon by a group of Aboriginal people from the region as part of the construction of a Noongar dictionary (Whitehurst, 1997).

Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Coorey, 2001; Gordon et al., 2002; Mullighan, 2008).

Research (Bishop, Vicary, Andrews, & Pearson, 2006; Memmott, 2001; Richardson, 2005) and anecdotal evidence (Gordon et al., 2002; N. Taylor & Putt, 2007) suggested that the rates of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities are higher than those of the non-Aboriginal population. While there are probably multiple reasons for the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reporting rates, it has been argued that only a small percentage of all cases of sexual violence against Aboriginal people are ever reported to authorities (Robertson, 2000).

The reasons for this are complex, including fear of racism, shame, lack of trust in the legal system, fear of payback, difficulties with confidentiality in small and closed communities, difficulties communicating with legal staff, perceived need to protect the perpetrator due to the high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody and the absence of someone to report to in rural and remote communities (Fitzgerald, 2001; Lievore, 2003; Stanley, 2003; Willis, 2011).

**Prevalence of Sexual Violence in Aboriginal Communities.** Determining the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities is fraught with the same difficulties as determining the prevalence of sexual violence in the broader Australian community, such as under-reporting and limitations in administrative and victimisation data (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a). In addition there are a number of other difficulties that apply specifically to determining prevalence in Aboriginal communities.

It is thought that sexual violence in Aboriginal communities is significantly under-reported compared with the non-Aboriginal community (C. Bryant & Willis, 2008; Richardson, 2005; Robertson, 2000). While many of the reasons for not reporting sexual violence were the same in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, there have been additional reasons for non-reporting identified that were specific to Aboriginal people (Willis, 2011). Lievore (2003) noted that the reasons that affected Aboriginal people's decision to report were complex and included fear of racism, shame, lack of trust in the "White system", fear of payback, difficulties with confidentiality in small and closed communities, difficulties communicating with legal staff, perceived need to protect the perpetrator due to the high number of Aboriginal deaths in custody and the absence of someone to report to in rural and remote communities.

Although Aboriginal people were under-represented in surveys such as the Personal Safety Survey (C. Bryant & Willis, 2008), and there is a lack of quality

comparable data across jurisdictions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014b), the prevalence of sexual violence for Aboriginal people drawn from crime victimisation data suggested that Aboriginal people are two to four times more likely to have experienced sexual assault than non-Aboriginal people, with Aboriginal women four to five times more likely to experience sexual violence than Aboriginal men (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014b). According to the 2012 recorded crime victimisation data, the majority of victims/survivors of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities were children under 14 years of age (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014b). Data regarding the substantiation of reports of sexual abuse of Aboriginal children suggested that the rate of substantiation of sexual abuse was around 9% of all substantiations, compared with nearly 14% for non-Aboriginal children, however the data was subject to limitations as a high proportion of children's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status was unknown (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013). Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities to any degree of certainty.

However, a number of Governmental inquiries (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; P. Anderson & Wild, 2007; Gordon et al., 2002; Mullighan, 2008), anecdotal (Cashman, 2005; Coorey, 2001; McGlade, 2012; Stanley, 2003; Stanley, Kovacs, Tominson, & Cripps, 2002) and research reports (Bolger, 1991; N. Taylor & Putt, 2007; Willis, 2011) in the last two decades have suggested that the rates of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities have been considerably high in comparison with non-Aboriginal rates. Despite the lack of definitive statistics on the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, there exists a body of literature related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The following is an overview of the literature in this area.

**Literature related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.** There was a limited amount of empirical research regarding sexual violence in Aboriginal communities; however a significant body of non-peer reviewed literature existed (McCalman et al., 2014). While some of the non-peer reviewed literature discussed issues relating to sexual violence perpetrated against adults or sexual violence perpetrated against children, rarely did the literature encompass sexual violence across different age groups. Additionally, a large proportion of non-peer reviewed literature discussed sexual violence within the context of family violence, specifically in relation to intimate-partner sexual violence, and sexual violence perpetrated against children, omitting discussions of non-intimate partner sexual violence. There was also an absence of literature regarding inter-racial sexual violence between

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia, with the majority of literature focusing on intra-racial sexual violence.

***Factors contributing to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.***

There are a range of different perspectives relating to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Some authors have contended that Aboriginal men were inherently violent towards women due to existing ideologies in traditional Aboriginal society that sanctioned violence against Aboriginal women (Nowra, 2007). However, others have argued that colonisers brought the prevailing attitudes towards women and sexuality with them to Australia and viewed Aboriginal people through this lens, often with little regard to the role of Aboriginal women (Konishi, 2008; Scutt, 1990; N. White, 2010). Aboriginal women were seen as particularly lewd and lascivious during this period (P. L. Dodson, 1991) and were blamed for spreading venereal diseases amongst the non-Aboriginal workers (Kociumbas, 2004). Funston (2013) argued “[t]he failure to understand the historical, socio-political context of sexual violence has fuelled racist attitudes and policies and has falsely ascribed blame to Aboriginal culture” (p. 3819).

Additionally, some authors have contended that Aboriginal people were exposed to high levels of violence, including sexual violence during colonisation (Atkinson, 1991; Breckenridge & Carmody, 1992; Goodall, 1990; Haskins, 2004). According to Goodall (1990) Aboriginal women (and girls) were at risk of sexual victimisation from the beginning of colonisation due in part to the shortage of European women in the colony. Additionally, Aboriginal people were not viewed as being ‘human’ due to the lack of recognisable (to the British) forms of agriculture, lack of buildings, absence of recognisable social order and due to the prevailing interpretation of Darwinism which became popular in the early nineteenth century (Kociumbas, 2004; Reynolds, 2008).

Ford (2000) described the complexity of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities as follows:

The issues surrounding child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities can be more complex than in other communities. An important compounding factor is the status of Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people. Because Aboriginals are an oppressed people, the power relationships around sexual abuse may have added elements. (p. 451)

Multiple reports into family violence and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities in Australia have cited the breakdown of traditional Aboriginal governance structures as a contributing factor to sexual violence in Aboriginal



communities (Blagg, 2000a; Gordon et al., 2002; Memmott et al., 2001; E. Moore, 2002; Stanley, Tomison, & Pocock, 2003).

Blagg (2000b) described a number of contributing factors to family violence (including sexual violence) in Aboriginal communities including marginalisation and dispossession, loss of land and traditional culture, breakdown of community kinship systems and Aboriginal law, entrenched poverty, racism, alcohol and drug abuse, the effects of institutionalisation and removal policies, and the "redundancy" of the traditional Aboriginal male role and status, compensated for by an aggressive assertion of male rights over women and children.

Memmott and colleagues (2001) proposed a model to explain violence in Aboriginal communities which reflected the increasing acknowledgement of the interrelated factors that contribute to violence. Memmott and colleagues' model incorporated (i) precipitating factors which are said to trigger an episode of violence, (ii) situational factors that predispose violence to occur or increase the likelihood of violence and (iii) underlying issues such as the historical disruption of Aboriginal systems of law and governance, along with the onset of social and psychological problems which are passed from generation to generation. Memmott's model proposed that responses to violence in Aboriginal communities need to incorporate multi-faceted and systemic strategies and avoid responses that target only one issue.

Reports related to sexual violence perpetrated against children in Aboriginal communities have stated that the normalisation of sexual violence in some Aboriginal communities has led to the perception that perpetration of sexual violence is a rite of passage (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; P. Anderson & Wild, 2007). Wundersitz (2010) explained that "[u]nder this scenario, because of its pervasive nature, violence may become internalised by each successive generation as an inherent part of the culture or lifestyle" (p.112).

Within Aboriginal communities, violence and abuse, it has been argued by some authors, is the result of internalised oppression or lateral violence, which in turn has occurred as a result of historical violence in the form of colonialism (N. White, 2010). There has also been concern expressed in relation to the stereotyping of Aboriginal men as violent and sexual offenders, while there is limited discussion in inter-racial sexual violence (Watson, 2009).

There has been criticism of the absence of race in feminist analyses of violence against Aboriginal women (Behrendt, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Saunders, 1991; Scutt, 1990). At the same time, the absence of a gendered analysis can be considered equally problematic, in that it does not acknowledge the

unique position of Aboriginal women and the issues that they face (M. Davis, 2007). In terms of Aboriginal women's experiences of sexual violence, this must be understood in terms of oppression and the intersectionality of race, gender and class as Aboriginal women's experiences are diverse (Behrendt, 2013; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

***Research into Aboriginal people's attitudes towards sexual violence.*** A small amount of research has been conducted with Aboriginal people regarding their attitudes towards sexual violence. For example, Taylor and Mouzos (2006) collected qualitative data through eight in-depth interviews with Aboriginal stakeholders and community leaders, and eight focus group discussions with Aboriginal community members, four in a regional town and four in Melbourne. The researchers found that despite high levels of awareness regarding sexual violence, it was considered to be a sensitive subject which the majority of community members were uncomfortable discussing, and was associated with stigma and the potential to be ostracised by community. Indigenous participants stressed that sexual violence is endemic in many Indigenous communities. Some women also saw sexual violence as inextricably linked to domestic violence, and alcohol/ other drug use issues. Some older female participants stated that young women often wondered whether the sexual violence was their fault, because of their flirtatious behaviour, teasing or the perpetrator's jealousy. Family and community constraints were identified as reasons for not reporting sexual violence, including the fear of retaliatory violence, and fear of bringing shame upon the family. Additionally, structural constraints were identified within the justice system, such as fear of not being believed by the police, or fear of child removal by welfare agencies.

Other research regarding Aboriginal people's attitudes towards sexual violence has been undertaken through the Indigenous component of the Community Attitudes Towards Violence Against Women survey (VicHealth, 2010). This research involved face-to-face interviews conducted with 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the age of 16 years in both metropolitan and regional locations throughout Australia. The sample was not a representative sample as respondents were selected from only nine locations. Like the general community component of this survey, low gender equity scores corresponded with violence supportive attitudes. The researchers found that the levels of attribution of blame to the victim/survivor were similar to, and at times lower than, than in the general community sample. For example, 7% in the Indigenous sample endorsed the statement that a woman is "partially responsible for rape if she is drunk at the time" (VicHealth, 2010, p. 41), compared with 34% of the culturally and linguistically

diverse sample, and 16% of the general community sample. However, a slightly higher proportion of the Indigenous sample believed that “women often say ‘no’ when they mean ‘yes’ ”(VicHealth, 2010, p. 43).

Research literature regarding Aboriginal peoples’ views regarding CSA was very limited. However a study by Donovan, Wood, Jalleh and Ivery (2010) indicated that Aboriginal respondents believed that there are a range of reasons for the occurrence of CSA including: parents not knowing how to care for or discipline children, not enough government funding for parenting programs, society not caring enough about children, not enough affordable child care or local activities for families, parents not spending enough time with children, parents’ financial problems and knowing that others will not report them (Donovan et al., 2010). Additionally, the researchers found that Aboriginal respondents were more likely than non-Aboriginal respondents to be prevented from intervening in suspected child abuse (including sexual abuse) by concerns about what would happen to them if they did, and not wanting to upset the parents.

A body of literature exists exploring the contributing factors to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, however there is little quantitative or qualitative research specifically related to Aboriginal people’s attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, suggesting a gap in the research literature.

### **Research Question**

In keeping with grounded theory and the qualitative research tradition the research question for this present study is broad and general (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The question this research sought to answer was: What are professional Aboriginal women’s attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Perth, Western Australia?

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to undertake a qualitative examination of professional Aboriginal women’s attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence using grounded theory method in Perth, Western Australia.

### **Significance of Study**

This research was significant for three reasons. Firstly, it provided new information regarding the beliefs and attitudes about sexual violence held by professional Aboriginal women in Perth, WA. Secondly, it is anticipated that the data generated from the research will assist in developing a greater understanding of the complexities of the dynamics surrounding sexual violence in Aboriginal

communities. Finally, the research contributes to the body of existing knowledge in the area of sexual violence and cultural diversity.

### **Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of feminist theories of sexual violence including intersectionality, along with a description of the ecological model for understanding violence. This was followed by a review of international and Australian research into attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence. Additionally, chapter two reviewed the existing literature in relation to the prevalence of sexual violence in the broader Australian community, and in Aboriginal communities, which was followed by an overview of the literature related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, including research related to attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence. The chapter concluded with the research question, purpose of the study and significance of the study. The following chapter provides an explanation of methodology and procedures utilised for this research.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter commences with a discussion of the rationale for the methodological perspective chosen for this research which is followed by an overview of the chosen methodology for this research — constructivist grounded theory. The applicability of grounded theory to cross-cultural research is discussed, followed by an outline of the data gathering procedure undertaken in this research, including the recruitment of participants and an overview of data analysis procedures, including transcription, and coding. A discussion of ethical considerations addressed in this research includes cultural safety and cultural security, informed consent to participate, confidentiality, the sensitivity of the research topic and the researcher as an outsider to the group being researched. Finally a range of strategies incorporated in the research methodology to ensure the rigour of this research, including reflexivity, credibility, and triangulation concludes this chapter.

### **Rationale for the Methodology**

According to Bainbridge, Whiteside, and McCalman (2013), “decolonizing methodologies draw from existing knowledge, working the cultural interface between Western and Aboriginal knowledges. The concerns of Aboriginal people, including their cultural protocols, values, and behaviors, are central to the process” (p. 277). Therefore, in selecting a research methodology, it was imperative to choose a methodology that was respectful of Aboriginal people and which did not replicate the harm that research has previously visited on Aboriginal people in relation to research methodologies (Gower, 2003; L. T. Smith, 2005). Johnstone (1991) stated that meaningful engagement in consultation is an essential step towards ensuring that Aboriginal people identify their concerns and issues regarding research priorities and processes. In order to ensure that Aboriginal people’s concerns were central to this research, and to ensure that ethical and cultural issues were addressed appropriately, a Critical Reference Group (CRG) of Aboriginal women was established to provide cultural guidance to the researcher in all aspects of the research (discussed further in the section on ethics considerations below).

While quantitative research in the form of validated scales such as the Attitudes to Rape Scale (Burt, 1980) has largely been employed in the research of attitudes to sexual violence, the choice of a qualitative research methodology was based on the desire for this research to develop a deep understanding of Aboriginal

women's attitudes and beliefs towards sexual violence. Larkin (2005, p. 3) states that "when decision-makers develop policy from statistical evidence alone, the importance of rationalities and epistemological racism can also enter the equation". Supporting the idea that research conducted with Aboriginal people is best conducted using qualitative methodology, Barnes (1996, p. 430) maintained that "health care researchers interested in developing culturally relevant knowledge, increasingly ask questions best answered by qualitative methods." Qualitative research methodologies seek to understand the participants' world view (Barnes, 1996; Pope & Mays, 1995; Streubert Speziale & Rinaldi Carpenter, 2003). Qualitative research methodology allows for the capture of data that has a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6) facilitating a more complete understanding of the issue being researched (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined grounded theory as a research methodology that culminates in the following:

...theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another. A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind ... Rather the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. (p. 12)

Prior to confirming grounded theory methodology, several qualitative methodologies were discussed with the Critical Reference Group (CRG) as possible research methodologies to ensure that the CRG felt that the most culturally safe methodology was selected. The CRG was given short written descriptions of several qualitative methodologies including grounded theory, action research, empirical phenomenological research and ethnography.

Following discussions with the CRG grounded theory was selected as most appropriate research methodology. Grounded theory was selected as the researcher does not enter into the research as an 'expert' with a presupposed hypothesis to test; rather the theory, which explains the social process in a way that is meaningful to the people it concerns, is generated from the data (Cresswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Bainbridge et al. (2013) maintained that theory development grounded in data can provide "useful insights into the processes for raising the health, well-being, and prosperity of Aboriginal Australians" (p. 275).

## **Grounded Theory**

Glaser (1992, p. 16) defined grounded theory as “a general methodology of analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area”. Grounded theory is “used to explore social processes that present within human interactions” (Streubert Speziale & Rinaldi Carpenter, 2003, p. 107). Grounded theory was developed from sociology’s symbolic interactionism theoretical framework, which purports that humans ascribe meaning to things on the basis of their interaction with them; that the meaning humans make is created by social interactions and that meaning is created and modified by how humans interpret it and that human actions are influenced by these interpretations (Skeat, 2013).

Ontologically, grounded theory was originally described as post-positivist (Annells, 1996), however, grounded theory has been further developed since inception, and now accommodates a range of ontological and epistemological stances (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). Fernandez (2012) described four main grounded theory models: Classic grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) also known as Glaserian grounded theory, the Strauss and Corbin (1990) model or Straussian grounded theory, feminist grounded theory (Wuest, 1995) and constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000).

As the research was undertaken by a non-Aboriginal researcher with Aboriginal participants, it was important to ensure that the voice of participants was central to the emerging theory. In addition, critical reflection on the researcher’s influence over the research process was essential to ensure the resultant substantive theory was relevant and meaningful to the participants. Additionally, the researcher held a relativist ontological perspective, whereby there is no absolute truth or ‘real’ reality; rather, individuals’ realities are constructed and are dependent upon the contexts in which they occur (Annells, 1996) therefore constructivist grounded theory was the methodology used for this research. The following discusses the constructivist approach to grounded theory.

**Constructivist grounded theory.** Constructivist grounded theory described by Charmaz (2000, 2006), was developed in response to the criticism that both Glaserian and Straussian grounded theory were too systematic in their procedures (Cresswell, 2005). The use of a research method that was too systematic was felt to decrease the ability of the researcher to be reflexive.

Constructivist grounded theory was chosen for this research as the methodology as it has been described as being particularly suited for cross-cultural

research, due to the focus it places on participants' own meaning (A. Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Charmaz (2004) remarked "to appreciate what is happening in a setting, we need to know what things mean to participants. Meaning renders action and intention comprehensible" (p. 981).

Constructivist grounded theory is said to be ontologically positioned between the positivist paradigm and the postmodernist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The constructivist approach to grounded theory emphasises the importance of expressing the meaning that participants ascribe to situations, the use of flexible strategies of data analysis and the importance of acknowledging the roles of both the researcher and those being researched (Charmaz, 2011).

As stated by Bryant and Charmaz (2007, p. 52) "[i]t brings the social scientist into analysis as an interpreter of the scene, not as the ultimate authority defining it". Such an approach encourages the researcher to employ reflexivity in all aspects of the research, which is particularly important in cross-cultural research (A. Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Constructivist grounded theory adopts the methodological strategies of Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory, but adopts a relativist epistemology by which the researcher aims to create interpretive understandings that pertain to the situation, and take into account how the researcher and participants' worldviews interact with the data (Charmaz, 2011). The importance of adopting a relativist epistemology for this research is that it "rejects the idea that claims can be assessed from a universally applicable, objective standpoint" (Luper, 2004, p. 271).

The applicability of grounded theory as a method for conducting cross cultural research is dependent upon a range of strategies that apply to each and every stage of the research (A. Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). The following discusses issues for consideration in cross cultural research using grounded theory.

**Grounded theory and cross-cultural research.** Martin (2003) stated that "a researcher's worldview both informs and shapes the assumptions and parameters for undertaking research activity" (p. 13). Grounded theory not only reports on the viewpoints of participants, the researcher assumes responsibility for interpreting the data and ascribes categories of meaning (Barnes, 1996).

Barnes (1996) warned that grounded theory, when used to study cross-cultural issues, must include the researcher's own awareness of their cultural attitudes, biases and filters to ensure that the researcher interprets the data in way that is meaningful to the participants. Barnes argued that this can be achieved



through consultation regarding cultural information including written material and with members of the cultural group participating in the research.

During the course of this research part of the role of the CRG was to provide a cultural interpretation of what the researcher saw and heard, including non-verbal data, the underlying meaning of Aboriginal English word usage such as 'shame', the structure and meanings of relationships such the extended kinship networks and the historical context for Aboriginal people in Western Australia as it pertained to the participants' experiences. Having the CRG provide cultural interpretation was an effort to mitigate against the researcher's cultural biases.

## **Procedure**

**Recruitment of participants.** Participants were initially recruited using purposive sampling through the researcher's existing networks of Aboriginal women in Perth. The initial sample of five women was selected on the basis of the researcher's judgement that it was likely that these women would provide a broad and knowledgeable perspective on the research topic, based on their professional knowledge (L. S. Abrams, 2010). A. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) suggested that "an excellent participant for grounded theory is one who has been through, or observed, the experience under investigation" (p. 231). That is, they are 'experts' in the subject being researched. Although the researcher was not aware of whether all participants had experienced sexual violence first-hand or observed it, the researcher knew that four of the initial participants came from working in a human services field and had some professional knowledge regarding sexual violence and one participant had been met by the researcher at a workshop on sexual violence.

Snowball sampling was used in order to attract additional participants, one of whom was previously not known to the researcher and the other had met the researcher professionally. Sedgwick(2013) described snowball sampling as a method of participant recruitment which can be used when participants are from a vulnerable or hard to reach populations.

Information about the study was sent to 12 potential participants who had expressed interest in the study, or people the researcher thought may be interested in the research. The researcher also invited people who received the invitation to forward the information on to Aboriginal women whom they thought may be interested in the study.

**Inclusion criteria.** Inclusion criteria for this study were that potential participants identified as Aboriginal, female, over the age of 18 years and resided in

Perth. Participants did not need to have experienced sexual violence themselves to participate in this research.

**Exclusion criteria.** If it was known to the research that a participant had experienced sexual violence the researcher attempted to ensure that the participant was emotionally stable in order to participate in the research. In order to achieve this, the researcher planned to exclude those undergoing current counselling for sexual violence-related issues, acute mental health problems or alcohol and/or other drug problems by advising potential participants of the exclusion criteria. Excluding participants who were experiencing these issues was intended to avoid further traumatisation and/ or increased symptoms of mental illness, and alcohol and other drug related harms. No potential participants were excluded on the basis of this criterion.

Participants who resided outside the metropolitan area were also excluded due to the researcher being unable to conduct face-to-face interviews with those participants. Face-to-face interviews were thought to be important as they were considered more culturally appropriate by the CRG, and would also allow the researcher to attend to non-verbal cues. Opdenakker (2006) suggested that face-to-face interviews assist in building rapport between the interviewer and the participants through the ability of each to view social cues. Excluding participants who resided outside the metropolitan area resulted in one potential participant being excluded.

**Participants.** Seven Aboriginal women over the age of 18 years were recruited. All participants resided in Perth at the time of recruitment. Participants were aged between 29 and 57 years. Six participants had Aboriginal mothers, one had a non-Aboriginal mother. Four participants had Aboriginal fathers, three had non-Aboriginal fathers. Three participants had two Aboriginal parents.

The participants all worked, or had previously worked, in the human services sector, for example health, welfare or a related field and had undertaken some tertiary studies. The participants could be described as being ‘professionals<sup>2</sup>’ that is a person engaged or qualified in a profession. The researcher did not set out to solely recruit women who had worked in a professional role, however, the benefit of

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<sup>2</sup>*Professional (noun)*. “A person engaged in a profession, esp. one requiring special skill or training; a professional person, or a member of the professional classes.” (Oxford English Dictionary [online], December 2014). Retrieved from <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/152053?redirectedFrom=professional>

having participants with a professional background was that they all had a broad range of experience working within Aboriginal communities.

As the Aboriginal community was relatively small, providing further identifying details of the participants, such as their work roles, or specific location of birth had the potential to identify participants, therefore the Critical Reference Group advised against the inclusion of further demographic details. Although participants were born in a range of places in Western Australia, all had spent more than five years living in Perth prior to participating in the research.

**Data gathering.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the means to collect data as traditionally Aboriginal people passed on their songs and stories using an oral tradition (Ross, 1986). In contemporary times this tradition has been continued in the form of 'yarning', which Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) defined as informally talking to someone to share information, or find out about something we are interested in knowing. Furthermore, Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) stated that yarning can be conducted with a purpose, such as conducting a research interview, and that yarning is a culturally friendly form of conversation that builds on the oral tradition of handing down knowledge.

Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) described the meaning of yarning in an Aboriginal context:

...when an Aboriginal person says 'let's have a yarn', what they are saying is, let's have a talk or a conversation. This talk/ conversation/ yarn can entail the sharing and exchange of information between two or more people socially or more formally. (p. 38)

In addition, semi-structured interviews were selected as a means of data collection as Aboriginal people may not be as responsive to fixed-response questionnaires (Davison, 2003) as they may be to open ended, semi-structured questioning which is framed in the context of "yarning". Conducting semi-structured interviews using a 'yarning' style allowed for greater reciprocity by the researcher, which in turn assisted in building rapport and trust.

The guiding interview questions were developed in consultation with the literature on beliefs and attitudes towards sexual violence and the CRG. The interview questions were reviewed by the CRG to ensure that the wording was culturally appropriate and to guide the researcher in using words that acknowledged the importance of Aboriginal women's world-views and knowledge, while

acknowledging that Aboriginal people are not a heterogeneous group, even among people from the same cultural group (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, & Walker, 2014). The guiding questions used neutral language, which is important to grounded theory methodology as it ensures an inductive approach to the research and allows participants to describe their own thoughts, beliefs and concerns (Elliot & Higgins, 2012).

At least three days prior to each interview the participants were provided with an information sheet about the research. During the interview, initial introductory information was provided to the participants about the research (in both written and verbal form) and the researcher's cultural background and relevant experience was described to the participant (see Appendix A: Participant information and consent form).

Participants were advised that they did not have to talk about anything they felt uncomfortable with and that the research was about their beliefs and attitudes to sexual violence, rather than details of any personal experience of sexual violence they or someone they know may have experienced. The researcher also advised participants that if they wished to talk about personal experiences that the researcher was able to hear these experiences and would not be shocked or adversely affected by listening to them due to their professional background. This statement by the researcher was designed to reassure participants that there was no expectation for them to disclose their own personal experiences of sexual violence during the interview in order to avoid any re-traumatisation by the retelling of these experiences. However, if participants felt that they wished to share their personal experiences it was important that they understood that the researcher could 'hear' these stories.

As Liamputtong (2007) explained, self-disclosure by participants during a research interview, including unintended self-disclosure, may occur due to the informal appearance of the interview. Additionally, Liamputtong (2007) argued that the inherent power imbalance between the researcher and the researched may lead to the disclosure of confidential information relating to others. For these reasons it was extremely important for the researcher to explain confidentiality and the limits to confidentiality to the research participants.

Confidentiality was explained to participants at the beginning of the interview as well as on the participants' research information sheet. Participants were advised by the researcher that their information would be de-identified and that they would have opportunity to double-check their transcripts and advise the researcher if there was any detail they wanted removed from the transcript. Participants were also

advised that although the interviews were confidential, any disclosure by them of a child at risk of current imminent harm or risk of imminent harm to the participant or others (such as risk of suicide or homicide) would require the researcher to notify relevant agencies to prevent that harm.

Once any questions relating to the research and confidentiality were answered from a research perspective, and the limits to confidentiality, were explained, participants were invited to sign a consent form. Liamputtong (2007) stated that by making the rules of confidentiality explicit to research participants, the confidential nature of the research may allow participants to feel safe enough to reveal their concerns.

Participant demographic data including their age, cultural identity of their parents and their own cultural identity was collected at this point. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions or raise concerns at any point during the interview. Although some of the participants were known to the researcher through the researcher's work, the initial part of the interview established the role of the interviewer as opposed to the researcher's professional role and assisted to put participants at ease and build rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes, with participants taking a break as needed. The interviews took place at a location negotiated with each participant, with the majority of interviews taking place at the researcher's place of work. One interview occurred in the researcher's home and another at the participant's work place. An audio recording was made of each of the participant interviews using a Livescribe™ pen. Additionally, the researcher made brief notes during the interviews.

## **Data Analysis**

**Transcription.** The audio content for each interview was transcribed verbatim and information that possibly would have identified the participants was highlighted, as were sections of the text where the audio was inaudible. The highlighting of the text served two purposes, one was to allow participants the opportunity to state what the inaudible section of the audio recording was, the other was to ensure that participants examined the potentially identifying information in the transcripts and then indicated whether they were in agreement (or not) with these sections of text being edited. Following the transcription and highlighting sections of text as described above the researcher checked each transcript with individual participants, asking them to indicate whether the content was a true reproduction of the interview data and whether they agreed with the researcher's selection of

identifying text to edit out (where participants could be identified), and to ask participants whether there was any further information that they would like removed to ensure no identification concerns would be raised by using quotes.

**Coding.** As each transcript was completed and approval of the transcript content was given by each participant, the researcher began the process of coding the data. Coding entailed closely examining transcripts and categorising sections of text that seemed to be of theoretical significance to the researcher by assigning labels to the text that resonated with the researcher's understanding of the social processes that were being studied (Bryman, 2012). Coding is more than a means to manage data, it is the beginning of the process of developing theory (G. W. Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Charmaz (2011, p. 165) stated that codes serve as conceptual tools to the grounded theorist, that are used to take apart the data, define the social process in the data and to allow for comparisons to be made between the data. G. W. Ryan and Bernard (2000) noted that in relation to the analysis of qualitative data, "the sociological tradition treats text as a window into the human experience" (p. 769).

With this in mind, each participant's interview transcript was coded initially using NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012), computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software (CAQDAS). Bringer, Johnstone, and Brackenridge (2006) stated that CAQDAS can assist with the organisational aspects of managing qualitative data, as well as serving as an audit trail and assisting in the process of developing theory "while meeting the evaluative criteria of grounded theory" (p. 246).

Rambaree (2007, p. 3) stated that "CAQDAS has allowed for more rapid, rigorous and scientific qualitative data analysis". However CAQDAS does not in fact analyse the data, the analysis relies on the researcher's interpretations of the data (Rademaker, Grace, & Curda, 2012).

The researcher used NVivo 10 to systematically review each transcript line by line, create memos and annotate sections of text, then assign key themes to the data as they emerged. As additional transcripts were completed they were coded using the constant comparison method as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This process included comparing sections of text that had been assigned to a node of data to other sections of text within the same node to enable the identification of key themes within the text.

Within each of the nodes, further comparisons were made between the researcher's notes, annotations made within the sections of text assigned to nodes, and memos that were created during the coding process. This was undertaken to

ensure that information was consistent with the identified themes and new themes were identified as they were identified within the data.

Figure 2 illustrates the nodes and sub-nodes that the researcher identified following the initial analysis of participant transcripts using NVivo 10. Following the initial analysis eight nodes and 18 sub-nodes were identified.

As additional analysis took place, the researcher continued to code the transcripts using NVivo 10, making adjustments to the coding as the researcher compared the data to existing nodes using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Where there was a duplication of ideas or a lack of clarity in the themes, the researcher re-examined the data by re-tracing the coding process back to the original transcript, comparing the coding with other data and coding, and reviewing the coding decision based on this information.

- Services
- Prevention
  - Sex Education
  - Traditional culture
- Perpetrators
  - Grooming
  - Power
- Nature of sexual violence
  - Impact of sexual violence
  - Child sexual abuse
  - Definition sexual assault
  - Community attitudes
    - Jealousy
  - Consent
- Family
- Disclosure
  - Shame
  - Silence
- Court
- Causes of sexual violence
  - Normalising sexual violence
  - Missions
  - Colonisation
  - Dysfunctional
  - Attitudes to women
    - Alcohol and drugs

Figure 2. Nodes and Sub-nodes from Themes in Participant Transcripts in NVivo 10 Following Initial Coding.

Following this process the researcher subsumed the sub-nodes '*child sexual abuse*' and '*definition of sexual assault*' into the broader node '*sexual violence*', as the data in both sub-nodes overlapped significantly and the latter category was a better fit. The node '*nature of sexual violence*' was subsumed into the broader nodes '*sexual violence*' and '*causes of SV*' (sexual violence) as while the theme of

'nature of sexual violence' fitted the researcher's understanding of the data from the first interview transcript, it did not fit with data from subsequent transcripts.

Following additional analysis, data were reduced into 12 nodes and 12 sub-nodes as indicated in *Figure 3* below.

Name	Sources	References
Perpetrators	8	51
Grooming	4	6
Prevention	8	88
Traditional Culture	6	30
Sex Education	6	26
Causes of SV	8	160
Normalising Sexual Behaviour	4	7
Understanding of consent	4	8
Attitudes to women	6	24
Community attitudes	8	87
Legal system	3	10
Services	6	61
Colonisation	10	33
Impact of Sexual Violence	6	29
Family Importance	3	23
Disclosure	9	86
Silence	2	9
Shame	7	39
Sexual violence	8	73
Dysfunction	6	49
Alcohol and Drugs	3	7
Family and Domestic Violence	4	21
Jealousy	4	13
Missions	5	16

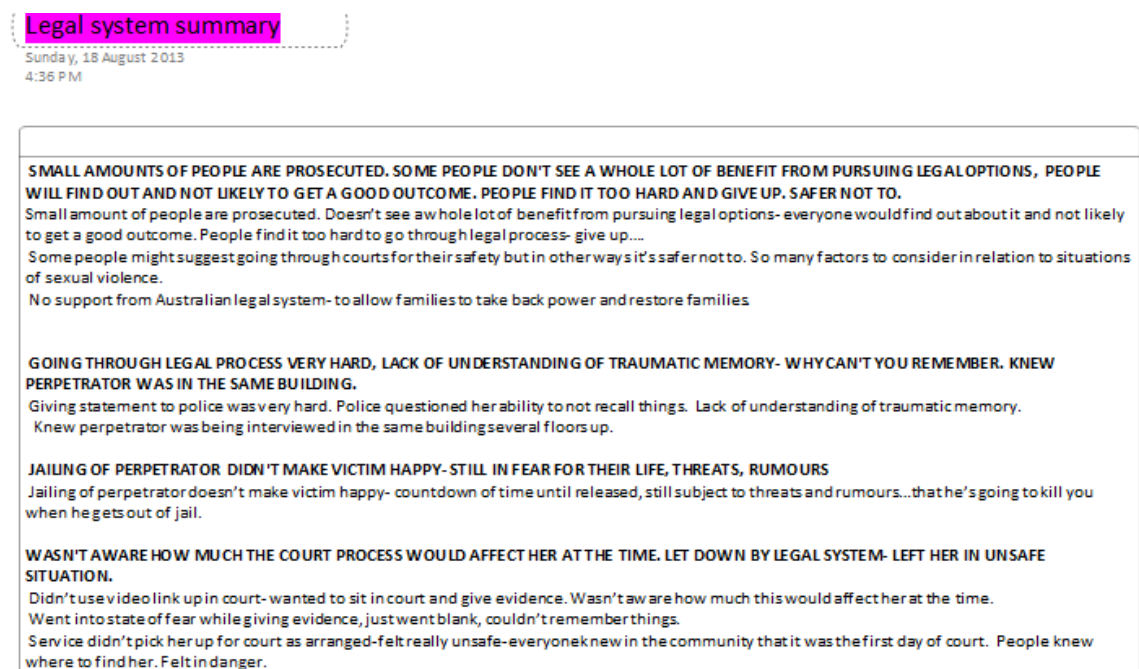
*Figure 3.* Final Data Nodes as shown in N-Vivo 10.

*Figure 3* shows the nodes and sub-nodes that the researcher created using NVivo 10. The left hand column shows the names of each node and sub-node, the middle column shows the number of sources the nodes were drawn from, and the right hand column, entitled references, lists the number of times text is coded under the heading of each node. The green icon with a yellow arrow next to the number of sources indicates that a memo was made relating to the node.

Given the considerable amount of information in each node, it was deemed necessary to further investigate each node's data entry by creating a further level of analysis. The researcher created an analysis sheet where transcript text from each



node, along with memos created in NVivo 10, was inserted into one column of a table, for further analysis of each section of text in the column directly opposite each piece of data (see Appendix B: Data analysis sheets for 'missions' node). This resulted in a much more refined data set and the resultant data were collated into a Microsoft OneNote document (see *Figure 4*) to be summarised further until no possible new themes emerged.



*Figure 4.* Summary of the Node 'legal system' in Microsoft OneNote Format.

*Figure 4* shows the summary of data in the 'legal system' node in Microsoft OneNote format. The capitalised and bolded text is the final summary of the node. The lowercase text is the content of the node which has been summarised.

The final theme from each node was then compared to the summaries for each of the other nodes to check for any overlap or duplication of ideas. This was achieved by transferring the information from each node summary onto an index card and comparing the index cards side-by-side. Additionally *Post-it* labels were attached to sections of text on the index cards where the researcher realised that there was a duplication of ideas or a link between themes.

A further summary of all nodes was created in a Microsoft Word document which was circulated to participants as additional summaries of nodes were included (see Appendix C: Final summary of all nodes November 2013). At each stage of data analysis the researcher's ideas, diagrams, summaries and other information were checked with the CRG and where possible, participants (see Appendix D: Details of interviewee and CRG communication regarding interviews and data

analysis). One participant left her job and was unable to be contacted a few months after analysis began, another participant took extended leave from her job, however this was after the final summary of nodes was circulated.

Data were also represented in a series of mind maps which assisted the researcher to view the links between the data and allowed the researcher to see if the themes from each node fitted with the other nodes. Drafts of mind maps were circulated to the CRG for review and feedback. The researcher felt that it was important to represent the data in both a text and pictorial manner to accommodate for different styles of information processing among reviewers. For instance, the researcher was able to review data in text form to examine individual themes, but found that in order to examine the interrelationships between data, a diagram seemed to be more easily understood by the researcher. CRG members also preferred a diagrammatic representation of the interrelationships between nodes.

Once the CRG's feedback was incorporated, the final mind map provided an overview of the relationships between data nodes and showed how these impact on the attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The diagram was then used to form a model to explain the factors that impact on the formation of attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

As the results and discussion sections were written by the researcher, themes and categories continued to be refined. As the researcher identified further overlaps between the categories and links between the data, these were attended to as outlined above.

### **Ethical Considerations**

A number of ethical issues needed to be considered in this research, not least of all, the researcher's ethnicity. As a non-Aboriginal woman of Irish-Anglo heritage who was conducting research with Aboriginal people, it was essential that a Critical Reference Group of Aboriginal women was convened to provide cultural guidance to all aspects of the research.

**Ethics in Aboriginal health research.** Research has been perceived negatively in many Aboriginal communities (Brands & Gooda, 2006; Putt, 2013). Martin (2003) stated "we are over-researched and this has generated mistrust, animosity and resistance from many Aboriginal people" (p. 203). Gower (2003) noted that previous research conducted by non-Aboriginal researchers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have utilised inappropriate methodologies and practices which have been "culturally insensitive and in many instances, harmful to Indigenous individuals and communities" (p. 1), a sentiment

echoed by Wyatt (1991) who argued that research practice with Aboriginal people has been unethical in the past.

A range of problems regarding research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been documented, including insubstantial benefit being derived from the outcomes of health research (Henry, Dunbar, Arnott, Scrimgeour, & Murakami-Gold, 2004). Henry and colleagues (2004) argued that research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been motivated by the “academic, political or professional needs of researchers” (p. 5), rather than the needs or wants of Aboriginal people, and that research findings have not been disseminated in a timely or accessible manner, thus reducing their usefulness.

Additionally for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, research is linked intrinsically to the disempowering experience of colonisation (Humphery, 2001; Rigney, 1999). Rigney (1999) stated that “the historical process of oppression with the construction of ‘race’ as its core ingredient saw Australian social systems, culture, institutions, attitudes, and behaviors racialized” (p. 114).

Given the previous negative experiences of Aboriginal people with non-Aboriginal researchers conducting research, a range of strategies were put into place to ensure that the present research was conducted in a culturally safe and respectful way. The researcher utilised the National Health and Medical Research Council (2003) *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*, as an adjunct to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007* (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, 2007). *Values and Ethics* is underpinned by six principles: spirit and integrity, reciprocity, respect, survival and protection, and responsibility. Bainbridge et al. (2013, p. 277) stated that the six principles “address context and power relationships, acknowledging the position of the researcher and working from a values base in research partnerships”.

In addition, the research was designed and implemented with the principles outlined in *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012). These principles (see Appendix E) complemented *Values and Ethics* and clearly articulated how to address the concerns previously raised about research and Aboriginal people and facilitated cultural safety and cultural security during the research.

**Cultural safety.** The concept of cultural safety developed in New Zealand, from Maori nursing practice. It requires that the person providing the service, or in

this case the researcher, reflects on their own cultural identity and recognises the impact that their personal culture has on their professional practice (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2011). Cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness or cultural sensitivity and is based on the perception of the person receiving the service, or in this case, the research participant. Cultural safety includes “having insight into the epistemological foundations that guide their research practice, consequently informing interpretations of data collected” (Wilson & Neville, 2009, p. 72). Culturally safe research means participants will feel included, respected, valued, and that they can trust the researcher and what they will do with the findings of the research (Wilson & Neville, 2009).

**Cultural security.** *Cultural security* moves beyond theoretical awareness of culture, to actively seeking to meet the cultural needs of people (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2012). Coffin (2007) argued that while cultural awareness (being aware of aspects of another’s culture) and cultural safety are foundations for cultural security, they are insufficient to meet the needs of Aboriginal people. For cultural security to occur there must be brokerage which allows for the two way exchange of information and the development of trust; and there must be appropriate protocols which outline the actions to be taken to operationalise cultural safety into cultural security (Coffin, 2007).

To ensure the cultural security of this research a Critical Reference Group (CRG) of Aboriginal women was established. The overarching role of the CRG was to provide cultural guidance to the researcher in all aspects of the research (see section on ethics for further discussion of the role of the CRG).

**Critical Reference Group.** Initially nine Aboriginal women agreed to be on the Critical Reference Group. They included eight human services professionals from a variety of professions and one private consultant. Three of the CRG members had previously worked in the sexual violence field, other members had professional experience in cultural education, health, tertiary education, alcohol and other drugs, mental health and child protection. The CRG’s role was to:

- guide construction of interview questions
- provide advice relating to written material associated with the research
- provide information and advice about verbal and non-verbal communication with participants.

- provide advice to develop guidelines for maintaining the confidentiality of participants (i.e., suggest what sort of details from participants may be potentially identifiable)
- provide feedback on the development of coding categories and themes
- provide clarification of cultural issues
- guide the researcher in any other way that the CRG considered necessary to ensure “culturally safe” research

Several face-to-face meetings were held with the CRG however not all members were able to attend all meetings. As two members lived in regional WA and all members had busy work and home lives, email was used to communicate with the CRG to seek their feedback on the development of documents related to the research such as participants information, to share minutes and agendas from meetings and to provide additional information as requested such as information on research methodologies.

During the course of the research a number of CRG members’ work roles changed and one member of the member of the CRG left the CRG to continue her studies. Another CRG member had personal issues and was unable to continue her participation in the CRG. One other member of the CRG changed roles and was not able to be contacted.

Six Aboriginal women participated in the CRG throughout the entirety of the research and provided input into the development of interview questions, feedback about data analysis and coding, the findings and discussion and the conclusion and recommendations. The CRG members came from a range of professional backgrounds, including alcohol and other drugs, child protection, mental health and cultural consultancy. The majority of CRG members were Noongar, with one CRG member identifying as a Bunuba<sup>3</sup> woman.

Prior to commencing data collection the CRG and researcher drafted terms of reference which outlined the researcher’s and CRG’s roles based on *Aboriginal Terms of Reference* (Oxenham, 1997) (see Appendix F).

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<sup>3</sup> Bunuba (also Bunaba, Punamba, Kunamba, Bunapa, Booneba ) is the language of the Traditional Custodians of a large region in the southern Kimberley bounded (very roughly) by the Fitzroy River to the south-east, the Leopold Range to the north-east, the Oscar Range to the south-west, and the Napier Range to the north-west. Retrieved from Australian Indigenous Languages Database <http://austlang.aiatsis.gov.au/main.php?code=K5>

**Informed consent to participate.** Cross-cultural research can present issues which impact on research conceptualisation, implementation and the subsequent interpretation of findings (Liamputtong, 2007) such as language and cultural factors which may impact on participants' ability to understand what participating in research means.

Informed consent requires that the participant understands the costs and benefits of participating in the research, and agree to participate freely and willingly. Informed consent is grounded in the ethical principal of autonomy (Streubert Speziale & Rinaldi Carpenter, 2003).

The idea of informed consent is central to the issue of sexual violence in that acts of sexual violence do not have the victim's informed consent. Therefore ensuring that all participants were provided with information about the purpose of the study, potential risks and benefits, the research process—including the right to withdraw from the study—was essential, as was their free agreement to participate (Liamputtong, 2007). All participants in this research were provided with written and verbal information about the purpose of the study. Written information for participants was developed in consultation with the CRG to ensure that appropriate language was used (Appendix A). Participants were advised they were able to withdraw their consent to participate in the research at any time up to the point of coding. The researcher was well practiced in working with vulnerable people and ensuring that they have sufficient information to make an informed decision about whether or not to consent to something.

**Confidentiality.** Confidentiality required special attention due the ease with which people in small cultural groups can be identified by the smallest of details (Liamputtong, 2007).

Prior to the commencement of the research, the researcher developed guidelines to protect the confidentiality of participants in consultation with the CRG. While it was not intended for the CRG to be able to identify any participant through their interview content, codes or themes, the members of the CRG agreed to the CRG terms of reference which stated that the CRG would maintain confidentiality and that they would not discuss the details of anyone participating in the research outside the context of the research, should they become aware of them.

Participants were allocated a code at their initial interview and were advised they would have opportunities to advise the researcher of any information that they felt needed to be de-identified, and to discuss how they would like the information to be treated, for example suppression of detail such as a town name or date, both

during the interview and when reviewing the transcript. Participants were identified only by their codes throughout the remainder of the research and the researcher maintained a copy of the data matching the codes to the participants.

Data collected were treated with strict confidentiality and stored securely in accordance with NMHRC/ AVCC Guidelines (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council, & Universities Australia, 2007) in a locked cupboard. All data stored on computer was stored on a personal computer that had no other users and data was password protected.

Participants were advised of limits to confidentiality prior to the commencement of the interview. Participants were advised that there were two things that the researcher could not maintain confidentiality about. One was if the participant became at risk of harm during the interview, for example strong suicidal ideation, and the second was if the participant disclosed details of a child who was at immediate risk of harm.

**Sensitive subject matter.** Liamputtong (2007) stated that "sensitive researchers must carefully manage the emotions of participants and ensure that by participating in the studies, the vulnerable research participants are not left with painful experiences" (p. 32). Sexual violence is a sensitive subject to research (Liamputtong, 2007). For this reason extremely sensitive interviewing was required. The researcher had 9 years prior experience working in the area of sexual violence and 12 years experience as a mental health clinician. These roles enabled the researcher to identify and manage participants' emotions, and also gave the researcher some credibility in researching in this area. Several participants commented in a positive way on the researcher's understanding of the area of sexual violence during their interviews.

To address the sensitive nature of the subject matter, at the beginning of the interview participants were advised that it was not expected that they should talk about any personal experience they had with sexual violence in detail and that they were welcome to decline answering any questions they were uncomfortable with and stop for a break from the interview. Each participant was provided with a list of appropriate agencies which could assist them if the interview raised issues which caused them undue distress (see Appendix H).

**Researcher as outsider.** The researcher as a non-Aboriginal woman of Anglo-Irish descent was an outsider to the research participants. This meant that the researcher was unable to fully understand the worldviews of the participants. The literature identified both positive and negative aspects of the researcher being an

“outsider”, that is, someone who does not belong to the group they are researching (Breen, 2007; Bridges, 2001; Minkler, 2004; Narayan, 1993).

One negative aspect of outsider research is a power imbalance between the researcher and researched. For example in this research the researcher is a member of the dominant colonising cultural group, therefore it may take time to develop sufficient trust with potential participants for them to be comfortable for the researcher to interview them. Minkler (2004) stated that historical trauma (such as trauma experienced post-colonisation), internalised oppression, and institutional and individual racism may contribute to tensions that exist between the outsider researcher and participant in cross-cultural research.

Another potential negative aspect of outsider research is that outsider researchers may be viewed as ‘parachuting’ into the lives of participants and then disappearing again once the research is completed (Drew, 2006). Drew refers to this as ‘the seagull imperative’.

While insider researchers can be described as having a better understanding of the culture of the group being researched which in turn can facilitate naturalistic interaction and better relational intimacy, due to the pre-existing relationship, the other side of this relationship is that it can be difficult for insider researchers to maintain their objectivity (Breen, 2007).

Other authors have postulated that the boundaries between insider and outsider researchers are not as clear cut (Breen, 2007; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Hodkinson (2005) argued that identities are generally not one-dimensional, static or mutually exclusive (Breen, 2007). Meadows and Legendyk et al (2003), noted that when they conducted their research with Canadian Aboriginal women the general trustworthiness and approach of the interviewer was more important to participants than the cultural identity of the interviewer. Narayan (1993) suggested that “what we must focus on is the quality of relations with the people we seek to represent in our texts” (p. 671). That is, the relationship between the researcher and the participants is more important than insider or outsider status.

As Aronson Fontes (1998) stated “the identities of the people involved in all aspects of research cannot be divorced from their personal and professional identities with all their many facets including gender, religion, race and social class” (p. 54). As the researcher was a non-Aboriginal women, awareness of the potential biases, assumptions, and impacts of White privilege were considered throughout the research process and mechanisms were put in place for reducing the impact.

Henderson and colleagues (2002) and Bishop et al (2006) discussed a number of steps that should be taken when non-Aboriginal people research issues



affecting Aboriginal people. The following measures undertaken in conducting this research were based on these recommendations:

- The tapes, transcripts and data generated from the research remain the property of the research participants
- Proper acknowledgement was made of the contributions of the CRG, participants and other members of the Aboriginal community who assisted with this research
- Prior to any publication of research data or reports, the draft texts were or will be approved by the CRG and research participants must be consulted
- A plain language report will be developed from the research and copies of this report will be freely available to Aboriginal agencies, communities and individuals.

## **Rigour**

As previously stated, data obtained from participant interviews were subjected to interpretative analysis by the researcher, which means that it is subjected to influence of the researcher's viewpoint (Charmaz, 2006). Rigour is a term that is applied to the assessment of quality of a piece of qualitative research (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). There are numerous strategies suggested for ensuring rigour in qualitative research (Beck, 1993; Chiovitti & Piran, 2003), however systematic processes should be incorporated into the research to explain how the data was obtained and analysed (Hall & Callery, 2001; Leininger, 1994; Mays & Pope, 2000). Strategies for ensuring rigour should be based upon the epistemology and methodology employed by the researcher (Annells, 1996). In the case of this research, a subjectivist epistemology was implicit in the selection of the constructivist grounded theory method selected. Charmaz (2006) suggested the following criteria for rigour in grounded theory research: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness.

**Credibility.** Credibility relates to the links between the data and the theory, and whether the data are sufficient to warrant the researcher's claims (Flick, 2008). As previously noted, during this research open and focussed codes were carefully developed during the coding of the interview transcripts and the analysis of the data. The categories were represented in a series of mind maps which articulated their relationships and assisted identification of the basic social process.

**Originality.** Originality refers to whether the categories developed in the study offer new insights into the area of research (Flick, 2008). Given the limited amount of research on Aboriginal women's attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, this research extends the available knowledge on this topic. Additionally, the identification of the social process (discussed in Chapter 4) and the relationship between the categories adds a deeper dimension to the understanding of Aboriginal women's attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence.

**Resonance.** Refers to whether the categories developed from the data relate to the experience of participants who are being studied and whether the categories make sense to them. The researcher checked the key themes with both participants and the CRG to increase rigour by using this triangulation method (Flick, 2008) at all stages of the coding. Participants and the CRG were presented with interpretative data on a regular basis (see Appendix G) requesting their feedback. In some cases the researcher was able to speak face-to-face with CRG members and participants following an email requesting feedback.

The researcher incorporated participants' and CRG feedback before reviewing the coding within and between nodes. Some of the nodes drawn from the data in the initial stages of coding were later redeveloped as the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts and other data sources suggested that the initial themes were not relevant and could be subsumed under other themes. For example, during the initial coding the researcher created the themes '*sexual assault*' and '*child sexual abuse*', these were later subsumed under the category '*sexual violence*', as further analysis convinced the researcher that these initial categories were imposed by the researcher's own point of view which initially leaned towards attempting to structure the data based on the questions used for the semi-structured interviews and thus make a comparison between previous research on attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence, however the themes did not fit with the data from all of the transcripts.

**Usefulness.** This criterion evaluates whether the analysis offers interpretations that can be used by people in their everyday world, and whether it can be transferred to other areas of research (Flick, 2008). Additionally, usefulness includes whether analytic categories suggest any generic process. Given the research was specifically undertaken to examine the attitudes and beliefs of professional Aboriginal women towards sexual violence, it is unlikely that the end result could be generalised to other areas of study, or applied more broadly without further research. Usefulness also includes whether the research contributes to

knowledge. A discussion of how the research contributes to the body of knowledge can be found in Chapter 5.

**Reflexivity.** In addition to criteria for rigour, Charmaz (2006) also stressed the importance of reflexivity, while other authors have indicated the importance of triangulation as a means for ensuring rigour. Reflexivity was a significant area of concern for the researcher due to the researcher's role as an outsider from the cultural group of the participants, and the history of ethical and cultural concerns that have occurred around research conducted by non-Aboriginal researchers and Aboriginal people, as previously discussed.

Reflexivity "is seen as an important way of ensuring that research approaches designed with the aim of 'empowering' communities and individuals do not ignore the powerful and potentially marginalising influence of 'researcher interests' " (Rigney, 1999, p. 19). Charmaz (2004) suggested that in order to learn the meaning participants ascribe to situations, researchers must be reflexive about their own meanings. Reflexivity challenges researchers to claim their shortcomings, misunderstandings, oversights and mistakes (Martin, 2003).

Undertaking research as a non-Aboriginal researcher with Aboriginal women required that the researcher recognised any cultural biases and filters and identified how they impacted upon the research process and outcome. As this research was undertaken by a non-Aboriginal woman of Irish-Anglo heritage and therefore a member of the dominant, colonising culture, articulating *White privilege* was important to the understanding of how this may have shaped the researcher's perspective. Articulating White privilege recognised that the researcher was outside the experience of being colonised (Bainbridge et al., 2013), while at the same time, the researcher sought to be an 'allied other' through the desire to represent the experiences of Aboriginal participants in a way that is empowering and respectful (Denzin, 2010).

Hovane (2007, p. 8) defined *White privilege* as the "advantages and benefits that White people generally, including White feminists, derive socially and economically, as a result of being White". The social norms derived from Whiteness are based on the perceptions, experiences, culture and values of the dominant White culture which becomes the standard to which all other groups are compared (Walter & Butler, 2013). It is assumed that the filter of White privilege does not require any premeditated actions to be taken to check its validity, that is, if it is even acknowledged as being in existence (Donnelly, et al, 2005). As Moreton-Robinson stated, "[t]hey have produced knowledge about Indigenous people but their way of

knowing is never thought of by white people as being racialised despite whiteness being exercised epistemologically” (Moreton-Robinson, 2004, p. 75).

The significance of White privilege was underpinned by the emergence of critical race feminism in the United States in the 1990s, and a conflict between White feminist perspectives and Aboriginal scholars in Australia. In 1990 Jackie Huggins, a well-respected Aboriginal feminist, along with a number of others (Huggins et al., 1991) publically questioned the right of White researchers such as Diane Bell, who along with Topsy Napurrula Nelson (Bell & Nelson, 1989), had published an article entitled “Speaking about rape is everyone’s business” to speak about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Huggins and colleagues disputed the sentiment of the title and argued the article reflected the appropriation of cultures by White imperialism. Huggins and colleagues stated:

One may well see rape as being everyone’s business from a privileged white, middle-class perspective, however, when you are black and powerless it is a different story. Blacks have to face the individual, communal and societal consequences that whites don’t have to endure. (p. 506)

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided a description of the methodology chosen for this research, including the rationale for choosing a constructivist grounded theory approach, and its appropriateness for cross-cultural research. This was followed by an overview of the data collection procedures, including the recruitment of participants, and then the data analysis procedures were described. A review of ethical considerations in conducting this research, and steps taken to address these ethical considerations was discussed. Finally, the chapter concluded with an overview of the criteria for establishing the rigour of this research and a discussion of reflexivity.

Chapter Four entails a detailed discussion of the findings of this research and a discussion of these findings, with reference to the relevant literature. This chapter includes the interrelationship between categories derived from participant interviews, and a description of the basic social process identified in the data. Chapter Four concludes with a model which describes the grounded theory developed from the data.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

The previous chapter examined the methodology which underpinned this research. The current chapter discusses the findings of this research commencing with a detailed exploration of participants' views on the historical context for understanding current attitudes and beliefs relating to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities as represented by the data. This is followed by an examination of the contemporary context for sexual violence in Aboriginal communities derived from the data. A range of issues identified by participants are discussed including community disadvantage, racism, the importance of family, shame and internalised oppression.

The third part of this chapter describes attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence as described by participants. This includes the overlap between sexual violence and family violence; gender role stereotypes and denial and disbelief as responses to disclosures of sexual violence.

This is followed by a discussion of the participants' views on the prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, which includes the need to utilise a holistic approach and ensure that men, young people and Elders are involved in prevention activities. It also includes addressing related issues such as sexuality and relationship education as described by participants.

The final part of this chapter presents a model derived from participant data which shows the final data nodes developed through the process of data analysis outlined in chapter three. The data nodes, or factors, are presented in a model which illustrates how these factors are interrelated in the context of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The basic social process identified from the data is described, namely, *weighing up*, that is, the domains participants described that Aboriginal people may consider when responding to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, concludes the chapter.

### Historical Factors

The impact of colonisation was an issue that all participants felt contributed significantly to the context in which sexual violence in Aboriginal communities should be viewed.

*So I just think these are, so many great issues here that can have such an effect on our lives and change our lives, and good luck to them mob that are getting their land, but the Noongar mob will never get their land, never be compensated for what's been lost. And it's infuriating. You see rich people*

*beside the river and you go 'but this was our country' ...So the injustices every single day in your face tend to make you a bit upset.*

[Participant UV]

Participant UV's statement above shows the depth of the effects of historical trauma from colonisation felt by Aboriginal people today. Although the loss of land for Noongar peoples occurred through the process of colonisation (Collard & Harben, 2010), the loss of land is an issue which affects Aboriginal people today due to the importance of *connection to country* in Aboriginal cultural identity and practice (Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart, & Kelly, 2014). Participant UV's comment illustrates that for her, the current disparities between the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the loss and sense of injustice are magnified.

Three key themes related to the impact of colonisation emerged in the analysis of the participants' data: the breakdown of traditional governance systems, the breakdown of Aboriginal family and kinship ties, and racism. These issues are described in detail in the following discussion of historical factors.

Paradies (2007) argued "that race is a social construct which encompasses the notion of essentialised innate differences based on phenotype, ancestry and/or culture" (p. 68). Racism is a form of oppression whereby race forms the basis of the uneven distribution or production of power (Paradies, 2007). Racism is discussed as a contemporary factor in the findings below however, cultural and institutional racism underpinned colonisation and subsequent acts and policies. For example, racist beliefs informed legislation such as the Western Australian *Aborigines Act 1905*, which resulted in the forced removal of *half-caste* Aboriginal children, the segregation of Aboriginal people into missions and reserves and control of Aboriginal peoples' lives (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Such acts and policies have been seen as resulting in the breakdown of traditional Aboriginal governance and family systems (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), which participants saw as historical factors which contributed to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities today.

The following discussion of findings presents the breakdown of traditional governance systems and the breakdown of family systems. This includes reference to how participants viewed the breakdown of these systems as impacting on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities in the contemporary context.

**Breakdown of traditional governance systems.** Participants indicated that the dismantling of Aboriginal communities through children being sent to missions,

the creation of reserves, implementation of various acts and policies (for example the Native Welfare Act 1905), resulted in the breakdown of traditional Aboriginal governance systems in the form of Aboriginal law. The Law Reform Commission of Western Australia (2006) stated that “[i]t is recognised that the effects of colonisation have largely undermined the traditional Aboriginal power structures and relationships that give customary law its vitality, legitimacy and authority” (p. 351).

**Systems of care and control.** Three participants in this study stated that the traditional governance system within Aboriginal communities would have normally responded to issues such as sexual violence, and as such were a system of care and control in traditional Aboriginal communities. This is illustrated by the following statement by participant ML.

*Because there is no I suppose governing within a family group, there's no...you've got people that are matriarchs in the family who will have their say and try to keep people in line, but when it comes to that sort of thing about you know what needs to be done and how to follow it up and how to support people, there's none of that happening and there's no process for that as there would have been traditionally for Aboriginal people.*

[Participant ML]

Prior to colonisation, Aboriginal governance systems delineated the roles and responsibilities of community members, were tied to spiritual beliefs and were responsible for the maintenance of relationships within the community (Stanley et al., 2002). Dodson (1991) stated “... it needs to be recorded that traditional Aboriginal society involved a lifestyle that was all encompassing, comprising of a complex set of interrelated systems and structures which nurtured in group members a strong sense of belongingness” (section 6.9, para. 1).

**White law.** Participant UV stated that there is a high degree of lawlessness in some remote Aboriginal communities as the traditional governance systems have broken down and some Aboriginal people have no respect for what they view as ‘White law’.

*I suppose maybe in the old days, there was always the elders or the people who kept law and standards, and now that that's gone, even though we have White law, most Aboriginal people I know don't give a shit about the law, they don't mind doing time so there is no consequences they can be a law unto themselves in remote areas, they've been doing it for a long time.*

[Participant UV]

The term 'White law' used by Participant UV, seemed to imply that some Aboriginal people continue to have strong concepts of Aboriginal cultural governance, and that the broader Australian legal system is viewed as having been imposed by the dominant culture. This observation is despite concerted efforts to assimilate Aboriginal people by successive governments (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). As indicated by Blagg and Morgan (2004), Aboriginal law has continued relevance across rural, remote and metropolitan locations in Western Australia in contemporary times, and in many parts of the state is of primary status.

Participant UV's statement also suggested that in some Aboriginal communities, legal sanctions imposed by 'White law' have not been viewed as effective. For example, despite Aboriginal people being approximately 3% of Western Australia's population, 40% of Western Australia's adult prison population are Aboriginal; that is, Aboriginal people are imprisoned at a rate 21 times that of non-Aboriginal people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013c).

Multiple reports into family violence and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities in Australia have cited the breakdown of traditional Aboriginal governance structures as a contributing factor to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities (Blagg, 2000a; Gordon et al., 2002; Memmott et al., 2001; E. Moore, 2002; Stanley et al., 2003). For example, Anderson and Wild (2007) reported that the prevalence of "incest and other intra-familial offending appeared to be high in communities where Aboriginal law had significantly broken down" (p. 61).

Participants described the breakdown of traditional governance systems, as coinciding with the breakdown of family systems as laws and policies implemented by the dominant culture contributed to the creation of reserves and missions, and the removal of children from their families and communities. In particular, participants discussed the impact of child removal and missions on Aboriginal people.

**Breakdown of family systems.** Participants described the breakdown of family systems as resulting in the loss of Aboriginal men's roles, and the loss of family and culture. The impact of the forced and coerced removal of Aboriginal children and their placement in missions was seen by participants as impacting significantly on the ability of these generations to parent their own children due to the lack of family and community structures which would normally serve as ways to pass on parenting and other interpersonal skills. This is illustrated by Participant UV's statement below.



*...like my mum...she was in mission. She was a real staunch woman, she never hugged us and she was never soft to us. She was really strict, just like we were on the mission. And as she got older we would hug her and she would just stand there 'cos she didn't know what to do. And she got really old and she'd give us a little tap. It was extremely hard for her, and I think though that is what we see, mum, they don't raise their children for love, and probably because they didn't know what right love was or, and, it just, every road points to colonisation for me.*

[Participant UV]

Participant UV described the impact of the missions on her mother's ability to show affection to her children. Participant UV voices the belief that colonisation via the mission affected her mother's parenting style.

Participants stated that Aboriginal people in missions were not exposed to healthy sexual relationships including experiencing sexual violence, were not educated about sex, relationships or sexual health, and were not able to discuss sexual relationships which were seen as a taboo topic. The result of this according to participants was that Aboriginal people in missions were not comfortable discussing sexual health and relationships with their children, which meant that their children also felt that discussing sexual relationships was 'shame'.

Participant ML described the impact of the missions on the ability of parents to discuss sexual and relationship issues with their children.

*And I think that the issue, that is that's definitely an impact of missions. And missions having, I suppose not being educated about things. It's a huge thing then for the parents not to educate their kids, not just sex education and general sexual health but then access to pornography and you know what I mean the appropriate use of that.*

[Participant ML]

Participant ML emphasises the lack of education about sexual and relationship issues that children experienced in the missions, which resulted in a loss of this important aspect of parenting for Aboriginal families. In addition to the lack of education about relationships, some participants discussed Aboriginal people's exposure to sexual violence in missions.

Below, Participant FL remarks that Aboriginal people who have grown up in missions have experienced unhealthy environments, including exposure to sexual violence.

*...they've had unhealthy sexual relations modelled. They've grown up in unhealthy environments...*

[Participant FL]

Participant FL's comment indicated that Aboriginal people in missions learned unhealthy sexual behaviours. Participant CT described the contrast she saw between her mother, who was taken to a mission from the age of two years, and her father who was raised by his family, in their attitudes to nudity and their ability to be openly nurturing.

*He was different 'cos he was never raised in a mission. His father hid him in the bush see. He had a different way of thinking, which I think was good for us because we sort of got to then have a balance. ...He had a different way, whereas mum, she'd say 'well where you think girls get pregnant?'*

[Participant CT]

Participants felt that the forced removal of Aboriginal children and their subsequent placement in missions exposed those children to poor care-giver role models, violence, contributed to parenting difficulties, 'shame' in relation to sexual issues, and the breakdown of Aboriginal family structures. This was also reflected in the relevant literature.

McGlade (2012) described the removal of Aboriginal children from their families and their placement in missions (along with foster homes and government institutions) as still impacting on Aboriginal people today. The negative effects of the breakdown of family structures through the forced removal of Aboriginal children, along with physical, sexual, spiritual and psychological abuse has been well documented (Bubar, 2013; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997; Zubrick et al., 2005). The Australian Human Rights Commission (1997) noted that there were intergenerational effects of the stolen generations, including parenting difficulties, anxiety and depression, male violence due to the loss of male role models and behavioural problems in successive generations.

Recently, research has demonstrated the impact of forced removals of Aboriginal and other indigenous children in colonised countries, for example Snowball and Weatherburn (2008) found that being a member of or related to a member of the *Stolen Generations* increased the risk of violent victimisation by 30%, while Cripps, Bennett, Gurrin and Studdert (2009) found that Indigenous women who had been removed from their families were more likely to experience violence.

Dodson and Hunter (2006) found that being either directly or indirectly involved in the *Stolen Generations* was a significant risk factor for involvement with

the criminal system. Dodson and Hunter (2006) examined data from the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS), to examine factors associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' contact with the criminal system. Their results indicated that being a member of the *Stolen Generations* had a strong correlation with being arrested, formally charged and incarceration within the five years prior to both surveys. Additionally, having a relative such as a child, sibling, grandparent, parent, cousin, aunty or uncle removed from the family was found to have similar correlations. Furthermore, the rate of being charged, arrested or incarcerated increased when the individual and their family member/s had been removed from their natural family. Dodson and Hunter (2006) argued that the data demonstrated the "transmission of social disruption within families" (p. 38), in that there was a three times greater likelihood that a child would be removed, if their parent had been removed.

The loss of attachment relationships at an early age, such as when one is removed from family and placed in a mission, has been identified as a risk factor for the intergenerational transmission of both physical and sexual violence in the broader research literature (Berzenski, Yates, & Egeland, 2014). Early repeated childhood trauma impacts on the development of the personality, sense of self, neurological development and the ability to form healthy relationships as an adult (Herman, 1997; Schore, 2002).

Research relating to the effects of forced removal of Aboriginal parents on their children has shown increased risk of clinically significant social and emotional problems (Silburn et al., 2006). Silburn and colleagues (2006) examined the data from the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, a large scale epidemiological survey conducted between the years 2000 and 2002. The survey sample consisted of a statewide representative sample of 5,289 Aboriginal children, which enabled the researchers to make systematic comparisons to be made of social and emotional outcomes for families affected by the forced removal of children with families who were not affected by the forced removal of children. Results indicated that, compared with primary or secondary carer who had not been subjected to forced removal, carers who had been subjected to forced removal were nearly twice as likely to have been arrested or charged, over one and half times more likely to report alcohol use-related problems in the household, more than twice as likely to report that gambling-related problems in the household, half as likely to have social supports that they can *yarn* to, and one and a half times more likely to have had contact with mental health services (Silburn et al., 2006). Furthermore, of the children whose primary carer had been removed from the family, were more

than 32% at risk of clinically significant emotional or behavioural difficulties. Silburn and colleagues' (2006) research indicated some support for the intergenerational effects of the forced removal of children. The research undertaken by Silburn and colleagues (2006) supports the participants' experiences which indicate that the forced removal of Aboriginal children impacted on their ability to parent in later life.

The loss of family and kinship connections was described by some participants as having a particular impact on Aboriginal men, in relation to the loss of their roles and hence self-esteem. Participants indicated that this was a contributing factor to sexual violence in contemporary Aboriginal communities.

**Loss of Aboriginal men's roles.** Three participants stated that colonisation has caused the loss of Aboriginal men's roles as providers and protectors of their families in Aboriginal society. Participant CT's statement below describes the loss of Aboriginal men's roles, which has occurred while Aboriginal women have maintained their role as carers despite colonisation. She asserted that Aboriginal men today are unable to obtain employment and have the sense that the 'White system' is against them, which has resulted in increased aggression from Aboriginal males.

*Also the, just from colonisation men have lost their place in society so the whole power struggle is more so for Aboriginal men than a White man. Finding his place in society umm can be umm a constant battle. You know like the women can still care for children and things like that, even if you're on a pension. A man's place is to protect his family and he can't even, the police you know are not on their side, or the law's not on your side, can't do a job, provide for your family you know, and you can't take your aggression out on society because you get punished for that again. So you do it at home where umm it's the only place left really.*

[Participant CT]

In consultations undertaken with Aboriginal communities in Western Australia by Blagg (2000b), the marginalisation of Aboriginal men has been identified as a contributing factor to the levels of sexual and other forms of violence. The loss of Aboriginal men's roles as provider and protector through the process of colonisation has been posited as a contributing factor to violence in Aboriginal communities (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Wundersitz, 2010). Participant ML expressed similar sentiments:

*... I think it's much more embedded in the way of culture and I think it's particularly men, Aboriginal men. I have to say that I think it's attached to their*

*losing of you know, position and their status within a Western type of framework and the way that operates, but I also think it's an opportunity for them to have power in some way and dominate somebody else and more dominance obviously.*

[Participant ML]

The combined issues of the loss of Aboriginal men's traditional roles and the current lack of status many Aboriginal men experience today are seen by Participant ML as contributing to low self-esteem in Aboriginal men. Sexual violence is viewed by participant ML as an attempt to exercise power and dominance in this context.

The loss of Aboriginal men's traditional roles is described by participants and several authors (Blagg, 2000; Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Wundersitz, 2010) as having an effect in contemporary times. Aboriginal men today face higher levels of unemployment and incarceration than their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013c, 2014a).

Atkinson (2002a) following her research into sexual violence in Aboriginal communities argued "for Aboriginal men, the struggle to affirm and assert black male masculinity was always present" (p. 229) and stated that as men may be less able to articulate their experiences of trauma, pain and grief, they may engage in violent acting out within their relationships and communities. This echoed Participant ML's beliefs that sexual violence by Aboriginal men is an attempt to assert power and dominance in the face of powerlessness and marginalisation in respect of the dominant culture.

However, as McGlade argued (2012), the loss of Aboriginal men's roles does not mean that Aboriginal men suffered more greatly than Aboriginal women as a result of colonisation. Both Aboriginal women and men experienced the legacies of colonisation, the loss of traditional governance systems and family and kinship breakdown, which participants reported has culminated in historical or transgenerational trauma. Although historical/transgenerational trauma is represented in Figure 5 as a contemporary issue, it is discussed here with reference to the historical events reported by participants which, in addition to the loss of traditional governance and family systems, they saw as contributing to the historical/transgenerational trauma Aboriginal people experience in contemporary times.

**Historical/Transgenerational trauma.** All participants described the impact of colonisation resulting in ongoing trauma for Aboriginal people as an important contributing factor to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities today. Participants

described their beliefs that colonisation had resulted in transgenerational or historical trauma.

Participant UV stated that she believed that the trauma from colonisation and the after effects of colonisation had not been addressed.

*... for me, it was a group of people that came here and took away so much, and it left the people with nothing and scrambling to find something in their lives. And so you know, from studies that so many people have done I do believe in, that trauma has never really been addressed but has just passed down from generation to generation.*

[Participant UV]

The statement above indicates Participant UV's belief that unresolved trauma from the process of colonisation has a transgenerational impact. This sentiment was echoed by Participant CT, who described the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal people as being similar to the effects of the Holocaust.

*We've had generations of it, and that's the difference with us. ... not to sort of think oh yeah you're just talking about Aboriginal people, you can use the Holocaust, and people who have had a real traumatic you know experience in their life, or their grandmother may have had it. That still impacts on the family today.*

[Participant CT]

Participant CT's comment also revealed she has experienced doubt and disbelief regarding the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people, and uses the Holocaust as a means to illustrate the effect of colonisation in a way that is accepted. Evans (2009) described colonisation in Australia as *settler colonialism* and argued that "settler colonialism is a structure whose characteristics persist in the present of settler nations, thereby limiting prospects for reform where matters of Indigenous sovereignty are concerned" (p. 6). According to Bastien, Kremer, Kuokkanen, and Vickers (2003) colonisation involves the continued economic, cultural and social domination of those who are colonised, meaning that colonisation continues over an extended period of time. This supports Participant CT's statement that "we've had generations of it", meaning that colonisation has been an extended process.

Two participants remarked that increased prevalence of sexual violence is often seen in groups of people who have experienced significant levels of trauma,

violence and dispossession as a result of colonisation, war, or acts of genocide. This is illustrated by Participant FL's statement.

*...quite often rape and sexual assault within those refugee camps is common and that's amongst the people, their own people so there's good evidence to show that groups that have been through that kind of trauma and violence or war, dispossession, colonisation, quite often results in seeing sexual violence in communities.*

[Participant FL]

The impacts of colonisation have been documented in a range of literature in Australia and internationally, and has been identified as impacting on the level of violence and dysfunction in indigenous populations in New Zealand, United States of America, Canada and Australia (AIHW, Al-Yaman, Van Doeland, & Wallis, 2006). Research related to historical trauma has documented impacts on the individual in the form of physical and mental health problems, and at the family level resulting in impaired communication and parenting stress (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Milroy, 2005; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Although empirical evidence was lacking relating to the effect of historical trauma on communities, Evans-Campbell (2008) argued that there are a range of reports that cite the breakdown of traditional culture and values, loss of traditional practices, alcohol and other drug abuse, high rates of physical health problems and internalised oppression as the result of historical trauma.

There is substantial evidence that the exposure to trauma can alter the body's endocrine and immune systems as well as altering the structure and function of regions of the brain involved in memory, stress response and emotional regulation (Provencal & Binder, 2015; Rothschild, 2000). The neurobiological effects of exposure to trauma can also impact upon the next generation (Matthews & Phillips, 2010).

Research examining the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and alcohol and other drug dependence amongst the children of Holocaust survivors found that there were substantial differences between the children of Holocaust survivors and the comparison group (Yehuda, Bell, Bierer, & Schmeidler, 2008). Yehuda et al, (2008) noted that while being the child of a Holocaust survivor did not increase the lifetime prevalence of PTSD per se, maternal PTSD was strongly associated with an increased risk of PTSD in the adult child. Additional research proposes that the intergenerational transmission of PTSD may be related to epigenetic factors such as the maternal programming of

mechanisms for regulation of glucocorticoids (Lehrner et al., 2014; Provencal & Binder, 2015). Changes to the epigenome can influence gene expression and neural activity, and ultimately determine the responsiveness of the genome to environmental factors (Zhang & Meaney, 2010). Zhang and Meaney (2010) argued that exposure in-utero alter the epigenome, maternal care giving in early life also impacts upon the epigenome. This research suggests that there may be a neurobiological basis for the intergenerational transmission of trauma, resulting in the children of the traumatised having an increased vulnerability to psychological problems when exposed to contemporary trauma (Walters et al., 2011), as a result of changes to the epigenome via in-utero exposure to maternal stress and exposure to early childhood stress (Zhnag & Meaney, 2010).

Atkinson (2002a) described the effects of colonisation as resulting in trans-generational trauma and internalised oppression. She described transgenerational trauma within Aboriginal communities as follows:

In colonised societies there have been multiple layers of both acute and overt acts of violence, and chronic and covert conditions of control have been established. These separately are traumatic and oppressive. Collectively, and compounding over generations the pain may become internalised into abusive and self-abusive behaviours, often within families and discreet communities.  
(p. 80)

Atkinson's (2002a) description of transgenerational trauma reflects the views of participants who reported trauma and oppression through Aboriginal people's exposure to violence, including sexual violence, at the hands of the colonisers. The analysis of the participant interviews revealed participants' beliefs about sexual violence as part of colonisation. This is discussed in the following.

**Sexual violence and colonisation.** Participants indicated that they felt that colonisation brought with it sexual violence and that this was something that was then learned by Aboriginal men, suggesting that sexual violence can be a learned behaviour. This is evidenced by Participant DB's comment regarding sexual violence perpetrated by station owners and station hands against Aboriginal women, below.

*Yeah, because of what the station owners and station hands used to do. So therefore, maybe Aboriginal men were watching as youngsters. Younger kids, and thought yep this is normal. That's what the Whitefella does, we can too.*



[Participant DB]

Participant DB's comment implied that Aboriginal men learned sexually violent behaviour by observing non-Aboriginal men's sexual violence towards Aboriginal women. The belief that sexual violence in Aboriginal communities is at least in part a learned behaviour was also expressed by Participant ML.

*I don't think that you could say that remote communities... would have been exposed to that had they not been part of a colonised process...that I think the rates of sexual violence are, there's part of that's learned behaviour.*

[Participant ML]

The wide-spread sexual violence perpetrated by colonisers against Aboriginal women has been documented by a number of authors, as discussed in the literature review (Atkinson, 1991; Breckenridge & Carmody, 1992; Goodall, 1990; Haskins, 2004). McGlade (2012) argued that “[c]olonisation included severe levels of sexual violence Aboriginal women and children, both girls and boys” (p. 40).

***Colonisations' link to sexual violence in contemporary Aboriginal communities.*** The significance of colonisation as a contributing factor to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities was articulated by Participant ML who described colonisation as impacting on the functioning of Aboriginal people in contemporary times. She also stressed that colonisation is an extended process, which Aboriginal people are still surviving today.

*...if you ignore the significance that [colonisation] that has had and still has, because people are surviving still, because it's not that long ago.*

[Participant ML]

Participant JP described the impact of colonisation as relating to not only exposure to sexual violence at the hands of the colonisers, but also a lack of support and protection for Aboriginal people who are affected by sexual violence. Participant JP indicated that as a result of this colonisation has impacted on the ability of Aboriginal families to function.

*I think that our umm history is different. So you know umm things like missions and cattle stations and all those kinds of things there's more sexual violence that our community has had to deal with..... And I don't think that as well as having all those incidences, support services or protection wasn't there as well... it's just been allowed to continue and get worse. And a*

*dysfunctional community from colonisation has impacted on how our families operate.*

[Participant JP]

Participants' beliefs about how colonisation has contributed to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities has a degree of support in the non-empirical literature (Gordon et al., 2002; Mullighan, 2008; Thorpe, Solomon, & Dimopoulos, 2004). A number of authors in Australia (Atkinson, 1990, 2002b; Lucashenko & Best, 1995; Thomas, 1993) and internationally (Archibald, 2006; Brave Heart et al., 2011; Deer, 2009; Weaver, 2009) have argued that sexual violence in Aboriginal and First Nation Canadian and American communities today can be at least partially attributed to the impacts of colonisation.

However, the theory that colonisation is related to the high levels of violence in Aboriginal communities today is difficult to prove given that it necessitates proof that there was no violence prior to colonisation (Brownridge, 2009). Despite this, there is some research evidence from research by Snowball and Weatherburn (2008), who undertook a multivariate analysis of data from the 2002 NATSIS, to examine the predictors of violence victimisation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Snowball and Weatherburn (2008) found moderate evidence to support the argument that the social disruption caused by colonisation increased the risk of violence victimisation in Aboriginal communities. This finding was supported by Brownridge (2008, 2009) who found indirect support for colonisation being a contributing factor to First Nation Canadian women's rates of violence victimisation after controlling for other risk factors.

In consultations regarding sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, Thorpe et al. (2004), reported that "the impact of personal, family and community disintegration in many Aboriginal societies...is still being realised today, and should not be underestimated if genuine and workable solutions to prevent sexual and family violence in Indigenous communities are to be developed" (p. 21), suggesting that the impacts of colonisation are viewed as being related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

While the participants were not suggesting that there was no sexual violence prior to colonisation, they were expressing a view that the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal society pre-colonisation was less than post-colonisation. However, participants were not suggesting that sexual violence in Aboriginal communities is only related to colonisation; rather colonisation was described as one of a number of contributing factors. Additionally, participants described a range

of contemporary factors which they felt impacted on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

### **Contemporary Factors**

A range of reports have been written documenting links between historical trauma and the levels of disadvantage in Aboriginal communities today (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2007; Blagg, 2000a; P. L. Dodson, 1991; Memmott et al., 2001). Magowan (2009) stated that not only is the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities related to the breakdown of traditional governance systems, it is also associated with a range of contemporary factors, such as alcohol use, which “differ in extent in relation to unstable social conditions — housing, poverty, policing, lack of protection and refuges, ability of community to intervene in family matters and location of courts within community” (p. 228). This suggests that there is interplay between historical and contemporary factors which contribute to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

Participants described several contemporary factors which they felt were related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities including: community disadvantage, racism, ongoing trauma and competing priorities. The following discusses the contemporary issues identified by participants beginning with community disadvantage.

**Community disadvantage.** The levels of community disadvantage, such as poverty, in some Aboriginal communities were seen as a significant factor impacting on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities by participants. Participant FL’s comment below reflected her belief that there is a need to address the level of community disadvantage in order to decrease sexual violence.

*...some of this stuff is not going to go away until we address structural determinants and poverty*

[Participant FL]

A large body of documentation indicated that Aboriginal people continue to be disadvantaged across a range of social determinants of health, such as inadequate housing and infrastructure, poorer educational outcome, high levels of unemployment, poor physical and mental health, and lower-life expectancy (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Carson, Dunbar, Chenhall, & Bailie, 2007; Gracey & King, 2009; Zubrick et al., 2005). Research by Snowball and Weatherburn (2008), previously described in relation to colonisation, also found moderate support for the relationship between social deprivation, such as poverty,

unemployment and financial stress, and increased risk of violence victimisation. Additionally, a lack of parental supervision and the adoption of adult responsibilities at an early age, along with familial disruption and an unstable home environment, which have been described as circumstances that face many Aboriginal children, are risk factors for problem sexual behaviour in children (O'Brien, 2008).

Participants also described ongoing trauma in many Aboriginal people's lives as contributing to sexual violence. This ongoing trauma was described by participants as being related in part to community disadvantage.

**Ongoing trauma.** Collectively, Aboriginal people continue to face higher levels of ongoing trauma in their contemporary lives than non-Aboriginal people including: shorter life spans, high rates of suicide, overcrowded housing, poverty, incarceration, high levels of violence in some Aboriginal communities and high levels of psychological stress (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014a, 2014b; Carson et al., 2007; Nadew, 2012; Ralph, Hamaguchi, & Cox, 2006).

Participant FL described very high levels of violence in some communities. She described her concerns about the potential normalising of violence, which she viewed as a contributing factor to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

*...there was this one incident...where there was just this terrible fight between this man and a woman, quite very public, very public, I can just remember [daughter] looking and umm and not flinching, or going 'Oh that's terrible'. It's just that kind of 'Oh my God! You are not going to normalise this shit. You are not'.*

[Participant FL]

Aboriginal people are exposed to a range of ongoing traumas. For example Aboriginal women are more likely to be the victims of physical violence than non-Aboriginal people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014b) and experience higher levels of injury as a result of assault. Being an Aboriginal woman has been found to be risk factor for intimate partner homicide (Guggisberg, 2012). Additionally, Milroy (2005) stated that Aboriginal people experience exposure to secondary traumatisation through witnessing the effects of the original trauma on a parent or family member, which has an impact on their social and emotional wellbeing.

Participant RL also described sexual violence as contributing to ongoing trauma through suicides, alcohol and other drug-related problems, which she saw as a contributing factor to community disadvantage.

*....and this is where you get the high incidence of suicide or self-harm or drug and alcohol abuse and stuff like that. They're not just a druggie because they can't handle their grog or their drugs, there's some contributing fucking factor to why this person feels the needs to consume and alcohol.*

[Participant RL]

The experience of interpersonal trauma, such as sexual violence, can impact on psychological development, which some authors attribute to mental health and substance use-related problems in later life (J. D. Ford & Courtois, 2013; Herman, 1997). Substance use-related problems, mental ill health, poverty and inequality increase the risks of violence victimisation (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009; McCausland & Vivian, 2010). At the individual level, having experienced childhood physical or sexual violence is a risk factor for the perpetration of sexual violence, and at the community or societal level risk factors include poverty and the tolerance of violence (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009; H. Johnson et al., 2008; Krug et al., 2002; Wundersitz, 2010).

The range of risk factors for sexual violence perpetration and victimisation described in the literature reflected the participants' descriptions of contemporary factors such as ongoing trauma and community disadvantage. Participants described the difficulties Aboriginal people may experience in relation to responding to sexual violence in the face of a combination of historical/transgenerational trauma, ongoing trauma and community disadvantage. This issue is discussed below.

**Competing priorities.** Coping with a range of life stressors, such as poverty, a high number of deaths of family, poor physical health and poor infrastructure in circumstances where sexual violence occurs can mean that sexual violence is one of a range of issues that affect Aboriginal people. Participants discussed the competing priorities that face Aboriginal participants, which may mean that sexual violence is not the highest priority in that person's life.

*Because its bottom of the priorities. Is the person damaged? Are they dying? You know if they're not then I've got all these other things to attend to. So it's*

*sort of like the Maslow's Hierarchy of needs<sup>4</sup> for people if you translate all of that into that way of thinking about it, sexual violence will never ever be a priority for communities unless, it's made to be by that individual. And, by that family group and community.*

[Participant ML]

Juggling a range of competing priorities may mean that reporting sexual violence to authorities is not considered a viable option. This issue was described by Participant JP as follows.

*Umm so yeah in safety terms some people might just say go through the courts for your safety, but in other ways it's safer not to. It's a very difficult area, not so much to define, but when you're talking about situations there's so many other factors.*

[Participant JP]

Participants JP and ML's comments suggested that it may be difficult for some Aboriginal people to prioritise sexual violence when they are attempting to respond to a range of other, sometimes much more urgent issues. This was also reflected in literature regarding sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

Competing priorities were described as a reason for non-disclosure of sexual violence in research conducted by Edie Carter in the mid-1980s, which examined Aboriginal women's experiences of sexual violence in Adelaide. "Aboriginal people have experienced problems of inadequate levels of health, housing, employment, welfare, education and no real involvement in decision making. That rape and child sexual abuse exist is another burden we are carrying" (Carter, 1987, p. 2).

Research related to other cultures also identified that children who have been sexually abused and whose families were struggling with other urgent problems such as unemployment, homelessness, poverty, illness may not disclose such matters to avoid adding to their parents' concerns (Lisa. Aronson. Fontes & Plummer, 2010).

Participants' descriptions concurred with the literature, and suggested that ongoing trauma and community disadvantage can create competing priorities, which

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<sup>4</sup> Maslow (1943) proposed that there is a hierarchy of five categories of needs that human beings have: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualisation. The physiological needs (which Maslow describes as the most pre-potent needs), such as food, shelter, warmth, will monopolise the consciousness in order to satisfy the need. The less pre-potent needs are forgotten, ignored or denied until this need is satisfied.

may influence how Aboriginal people respond to sexual violence. Sometimes these competing priorities may be considered more important than sexual violence.

The responses of services and service providers are important factors in determining whether a disclosure of sexual violence occurs in Aboriginal communities (Lievore, 2005). Participants described racism as a factor that shapes responses to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

**Racism.** Participants described racism an issue that continued to impact on Aboriginal people's responses to sexual violence by affecting their relationships with non-Aboriginal society. Participant CT's remarks below are an example of participants' experiences of racism.

*...I remember this lady and she said 'oh you get up in the morning and you just think' 'Oh well I'm Aboriginal or I'm black'... at the time I had a brand new [car] and this old man stood in front of it and wouldn't let me drive, he thought I was stealing the car. I'd just pulled in at the shops to get something for lunch for work and I physically had to get out of the car and say 'excuse me but can you please get out of my way because I need to go to work' ...THAT reminds me of the colour of my skin ...*

[Participant CT]

Participant CT's experience demonstrated that strong stereotypes of Aboriginal people are held by some non-Aboriginal people. Participant CT's statement also indicated that these stereotypes have an impact on Aboriginal people.

Participant UV described the presence of racism in everyday life for Aboriginal people as a constant. She relates her experiences of racism to the maintenance of power by the dominant culture.

*There seems to be this power shift thing. Constantly. Like racism you know, 'I'm not racist, why don't you people just walk in up and get a job'.*

[Participant UV]

Ziersch, Gallaher, Baum, and Bentley (2011) conducted interviews with 153 Aboriginal people in Adelaide during 2006 and 2007, to examine the relationship between racism and Aboriginal people's health and wellbeing. They found that racism was experienced regularly by 93% of participants, suggesting that racism is a regular experience for a large number of Aboriginal people, and that 2/3 of participants felt that racism impacted negatively on their health. Racism can be

viewed as contemporary stressor that contributes to Aboriginal peoples' burden of poor social and emotional wellbeing (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003).

Racism was also reported by participants as influencing Aboriginal peoples' willingness to interact with services. The cultural security of service providers is discussed in the following.

**Cultural security of service providers.** The impact of a lack of understanding by non-Aboriginal people of the needs, wants and experiences of Aboriginal people and how these may interact with sexual violence was described by participants as impacting on the willingness of Aboriginal people to engage with non-Aboriginal services. This is evidenced in Participant ML's comment below.

*Well if somebody has gone to [agency] and had counselling and the counsellor's told them we well you don't need to be connected to that family any more, they go away and say 'fuck them, what does that White counsellor know? That's my mob there, regardless of what happened to me. That's still my cousins, that's my aunty, that's my mob'. They go away and say 'don't be going anywhere [agency] and definitely don't be talking to that counsellor...she doesn't even know what blackfellas are like'.*

[Participant ML]

Participant ML's statement illustrates the issue of culturally inappropriate responses, whereby services and service providers make assumptions about Eurocentric solutions to violence in Aboriginal communities. While not necessarily an act of racism, it can be viewed as a form of Whiteness as epistemological *a priori* (Moreton-Robinson, 2004), which fails to recognise the lens of race or culture, because it is assumed to be the norm. Such assumptions can deter Aboriginal people from accessing services and supports.

*They don't trust services, they don't trust White people. I think there're probably more racist people, prejudiced against them, like coppers and stuff. So I think they get the double whammy, Aboriginal women.*

[Participant UV]

Racism has been found to be a common experience for Aboriginal people across a range of settings (Durey & Thompson, 2012; Paradies, 2007), including employment, in public places and by service providers (Paradies & Cunningham, 2009). Racism can be interpersonal, systemic or experienced at the hands of one's own cultural group (internalised) and racism commonly triggers a sense of anger in the person who is affected by it (Paradies & Cunningham, 2009). And while racism



may have become less overt in Australia, subtle, covert forms of racism are still harmful (Dudgeon et al., 2014).

**Micro-aggressions.** Aboriginal people experience not only overt and significant racism but also frequent, seemingly small and mostly covert racism (Dudgeon et al., 2014; Ziersch et al., 2011) sometimes referred to as *micro-aggressions* (Sue et al., 2007). Micro-aggressions “are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). This is reflected in Participant CT’s comment below.

*...I mean they wouldn't even be able to explain to you why they're angry half the time, and little incidents just trigger it off and it's got nothing to do with the underlying things that could be making that ...*

[Participant CT]

The experience of micro-aggressions can perpetuate historical trauma (Michaels, 2010). Craps (2012) argued that the traumatic nature of racism and other forms of ongoing oppression cannot be adequately understood in terms of the current psychological models of trauma which are largely Eurocentric and individually focussed, as racism is based in the historical yet continues in the everyday present.

Participant RL described the frequency of racial stereotypes she experiences in everyday life. She reflected that she has had to learn to laugh at racist comments in order to cope with their prevalence.

*And you know what I don't get angry at this stuff....shit if I got angry every time I heard a derogatory comment I'd explode. Umm so I learned to laugh at it...*

[Participant RL]

Racism as described by participants is an important factor to consider in relation to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, as experiencing racism can reignite people’s experience of historical trauma, which in turn may negatively impact on their mental and physical health. Additionally racism decreases the engagement of Aboriginal people in non-Aboriginal services, including services to support victims/survivors of sexual violence. Racism is also another form of oppression in which the context of Aboriginal victims/survivors experiences of sexual violence must be viewed. Racism which is internalised within the group is called internalised oppression.

**Internalised oppression.** All participants discussed the impact of colonisation, past acts and policies and how they believe this has contributed to how the level of disadvantage in some Aboriginal communities and how those communities respond to sexual violence today. Three participants discussed the issue of 'lateral violence' or 'internalised oppression'. Internalised oppression is defined by Lipsky (1987) as "this turning upon ourselves, upon our families, and upon our own people the distress patterns that result from the racism and oppression of the majority society" (p. 4).

Describing violence between Aboriginal women, Participant UV indicated her distress regarding Aboriginal women being sexually and physically violent towards each other, which she believed was a result of internalised oppression.

*And then once they have the partner they start bashing them like bashing them. And I just don't understand what's happening there. So while we have a group of women in prison that is growing, Aboriginal women, we also have the ones in the community. We've all in some way become offenders or perpetrators or whatever the right word is. I still think it's this dog eat dog, that whoever's on the bottom 'I don't want to be on the bottom so I'm putting you on the bottom', within our own. If that's lateral violence or whatever it is, then that's what it is.*

[Participant UV]

Participant UV described this as relating to status and people making sure that they are not 'at the bottom of the heap' within their community. Participant UV's comment was similar to a view expressed by Participant FL, who described jealousy as a manifestation of internalised oppression.

*...it's you know, it's that tall poppy, you give someone a hard enough time maybe they won't do so well at school because they'd rather be part of the mob and sort of like go around with the lowest common denominator all the time. And anyone who rises above that will get pulled back into line, umm so jealousy it's huge...*

[Participant FL]

Sexual violence in Aboriginal communities has been argued to be one of the outcomes of internalised oppression (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2012). In Native American communities, sexual violence has also been identified as a result of internalised oppression, which is as a result of historical trauma (Bubar, 2013; Poupart, 2003). Reports related to child sexual

abuse in Aboriginal communities have stated that the normalisation of sexual violence in some communities has led to the perception that perpetration of sexual violence is a rite of passage (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; P. Anderson & Wild, 2007). “Under this scenario, because of its pervasive nature, violence may become internalised by each successive generation as an inherent part of the culture or lifestyle” (Wundersitz, 2010, p. 112). In this sense internalised oppression can be viewed as contributing factor to sexual violence and its normalisation.

As with other contemporary and historical issues described by participants, internalised oppression was viewed as one of a number of contributing factors towards sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. These historical and contemporary issues were described by participants as influencing not only the prevalence of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, but also how Aboriginal people respond to sexual violence, along with the likelihood of disclosure of sexual violence.

The following discusses the participants’ views on the importance of family in Aboriginal communities. Participants viewed family as a moderating factor related to sexual violence and its disclosure.

### **The Importance of Family**

The importance of Aboriginal family and kinship connections became apparent from an analysis of participant interviews. The importance which Aboriginal people place on family connections is illustrated by Participant UV.

*When you don't have your mob you don't kind of feel like you can ever be yourself anywhere else. When you've got your mob you are truly who you can be with them, you're the most comfortable, you feel comfortable, you feel secure even with your family, you love them, they love you. So there's this sense of safety there.*

[Participant UV]

Participant UV’s description of the sense of belonging and security being with family underlines the importance of Aboriginal people’s family relationships. The importance of these relationships means that the decision to disclose sexual violence can have a profound impact on Aboriginal people. Supporting this notion, Gee et al. (2014) described the importance of family and kinship connections as central to the functioning of Aboriginal people.

Participants reported that disclosure of sexual violence has a range of consequences in Aboriginal communities such as the victim being ostracised by family and community, and intrafamilial conflict and conflict between families. Participant DB describes the decision to disclose sexual violence as requiring strength due to the possibility of being met with negative reactions and a negative impact on family relationships.

*Some do bring it up and I believe you need a lot of strength to do that after all that time because once it's out you can't change it, therefore you can't control reactions, which could compromise your own standing within the family, you know, we don't believe, that never happened,*

[Participant DB]

The significance of a negative family reaction may relate to the fact that many Aboriginal people do not have social circles beyond their extended family due to the extensive kinship networks that exist in Aboriginal communities (Pattel, 2007). Aboriginal people can face difficulties in obtaining validation from non-Aboriginal society, which can act to cement the importance of family connections (Pattel, 2007).

Participant RL described the breadth of family relationships in Aboriginal communities as follows:

*People, you know the Indigenous community as you know that whole community connection...it's not just the blood relation family I've got to worry about it's the kin relation family and they don't even make that separation a lot of them.*

[Participant RL]

According to Morphy (2006), Aboriginal familial structures are complex and have endured in an altered form post-colonisation, whereby who is considered family in Aboriginal communities is much broader than in non-Aboriginal communities. Participant RL's description of extensive family connections that incorporate relations by marriage is supported by Morphy (2006).

The difficulties in disclosing sexual violence have been described in the general literature to be increased when the perpetrator is a family member or someone in a close relationship (Ben-David & Schneider, 2005; Mouzos & Makkai, 2004) This has also been reported in Aboriginal communities (Keel, 2004; N. Taylor & Putt, 2007). The interconnectedness of Aboriginal families and the importance of family to Aboriginal people for social connection, may also deter Aboriginal people

from disclosing sexual violence victimisation (Pattel, 2007; Willis, 2011) and may result in negative reactions from family. The following describes participants' perspectives on what can occur within families when disclosures of sexual violence are made.

**Defending the perpetrator.** Participants stated that the families of the perpetrator may defend the perpetrator in response to an allegation of sexual violence. This may include violence and threats of violence from the perpetrators' family.

Participant JP described an Aboriginal woman who disclosed sexual violence and experienced violence from both the perpetrators' family and her own family and community. The extent of the violence reported by Participant JP was such that the woman apparently felt safer in prison than in the community.

*She felt safer in prison. Really it was the only place where she could be physically safer and still be involved in her kids' lives and things like that as well....Oh it was from both for her. Umm but usually the other ones are violent the family from the perpetrator's family. Umm but in that situation, very much her own family and community, she was completely umm excluded from that family.*

[Participant JP]

Several of the participants mentioned the legal case against the Noongar Elder Robert Bropho<sup>5</sup>, who participants stated was accused of perpetrating sexual violence. Participants stated that little action was taken by the community in response to these allegations due to his status in the Aboriginal community, until the death of a young Noongar woman Susan Taylor. Participant UV described what occurred following disclosures naming Robert Bropho and others in the community.

*...if we look at just the incidences with high profile ones in Perth, with Bropho, you know I think that pretty much says it all right there. His sons and kids stood on his side and the perpetrators and all their family who were terrified of speaking out against him... and to this day I've heard them go 'she sold her...she chucked herself at him'.*

[Participant UV]

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<sup>5</sup> Taylor, P. (2008). Robert Bropho, 78, jailed for sex assault on girl *The Australian*. Retrieved from <http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/bropho-jailed-for-pedophilia/story-e6frg12c-1111115669924>

Participant UV explained that family members were afraid, due to threats of violence, along with how they would be perceived in the Aboriginal community. McGlade (2012) reviewed legal cases against several high-profile Aboriginal men and described intimidation, denial and disbelief as common responses by Aboriginal community members. She remarked that “I know first-hand the repercussions that Aboriginal women who criticise Aboriginal men’s domination and abuse are likely to experience” (McGlade, 2012, p. 80).

The importance of family for Aboriginal people can be further illustrated by Aboriginal conceptions of ‘shame’. Participants described shame as being a significant issue in relation to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

**Shame.** Shame was described by participants as a significant issue which, they reported, impacts on Aboriginal people, families and communities’ beliefs and attitudes to sexual violence, as well as influencing if disclosures of sexual violence are made, services are accessed and Aboriginal individuals, families, and communities’ responses to sexual violence. Participants described shame as being connected to the fear of being judged by non-Aboriginal people, which related to Aboriginal people growing up feeling that they are different, and being looked down upon by non-Aboriginal people.

*I was ashamed to eat in front of other people and people look at you and your sort of like, oh they’re looking at me, because mum had that stigma you know with her, she put that on to us. Like ‘oh look you know Wadjela<sup>6</sup> mob looking at you’, and we’d be look ‘oh shame’. ...But that’s a major reason behind it, shame is such a big factor in our community and to do with sex woah, you know.*

[Participant CT]

Participant CT’s statement above related shame to the feeling of being judged by non-Aboriginal people. Additionally, shame was viewed by participant CT as impacting on discussions around sexual issues in Aboriginal communities.

The idea that non-Aboriginal people judge Aboriginal people, who are already considered to have a lower status than non-Aboriginal people, was

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<sup>6</sup> Wadjela is the Noongar term for non-Aboriginal person (Whitehurst, 1997).

described by other participants. Participant RL also connected feeling judged by non-Aboriginal people and shame to the non-disclosure of sexual violence.

*One of the yarns I was told was that Blackfellas look bad enough don't add something to the list... no, what is shame is that we allow this shit happen.*

[Participant RL]

Participant RL and the other participants were very clear that they felt that shame should not stop Aboriginal people from discussing sexual violence and addressing it within Aboriginal communities, however, they reported that it was a considerable barrier for Aboriginal people. Participant ML described how shame felt by the family of a person accused of perpetrating sexual violence may result in the discrediting of the victim and the defending of the perpetrator.

*I think that to the degree that it's caught up with your name, your family name and what shame that's going to bring onto your family. With Wadjelas they can sort of disappear, you can get married and change your name and stuff, but with Noongars and I think particularly Noongar families, because obviously that's my experience, is that a Noongar family it's a little bit more to the degree that we would absolutely you know, totally disregard anything that person said, and defend and protect perpetrators because of the shame that would bring on to the family. And you will hear people say that, 'how dare they make up stories like that to shame our family name'.*

[Participant ML]

Participant ML's comment also reflected the importance of family relationships in Aboriginal communities and a perceived difference between the importance non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people place on 'family name'. Participant ML's comment suggests that she views non-Aboriginal people as placing less importance on 'family name'. Additionally, Participant ML reflected that in the Noongar community, families are far more interconnected than non-Aboriginal families, therefore people who disclose are unable to 'disappear'.

Shame has been cited as a reason for the non-disclosure of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities (Coorey, 2001; McGlade, 2012; Willis, 2010). However, the literature regarding shame as a barrier to disclosure has not articulated the meaning of shame in Aboriginal English.

Literature regarding shame reported that the concept of 'shame' in Aboriginal English is much broader than that encapsulated in the meaning for non-Aboriginal people (Leitner & Malcolm, 2007). Harkins (1990) stated that shame in an Aboriginal context is more than embarrassment or shyness and can relate to being singled out

for either positive or negative reasons, it may also be related to relationship of respect, for example a family, kinship or relationship which brings about cultural obligations such as by being an elder.

Vallance and Tchaos (2001) described shame as being connected to family and kinship ties and their importance to Aboriginal people, and described shame as “one of the most painful and powerful experiences for Aboriginals” (Vallance & Tchacos, 2001, p. 9). This seemed to echo the sentiments of the participants.

In summary, shame as described by the participants, may prevent Aboriginal people from disclosing sexual violence and may also result in families of alleged perpetrators blaming the victim or denying the allegation in order to avoid the shame being associated with their family name and the feeling that they will be negatively judged by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Shame and the importance of family along with previously described contemporary and historical factors provide a context in which participants indicated attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities should be understood. The following discusses attitudes to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities as described by participants.

### **Aboriginal Community Attitudes to Sexual Violence**

Participants described a range of attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. These attitudes and beliefs are discussed providing quotes from participants by way of illustration, and a discussion of the relevant research literature.

**Sexual violence and family violence.** When asked about sexual violence participants all gave responses which indicated that they viewed family violence as inextricably linked to sexual violence between adults, as illustrated by Participant CT’s statement below.

*Or rape, yeah and rape to me is when, I mean it can even happen within you know relationships as we know; marriages and that. It’s when one of the partners is not consenting to it. That’s what I believe is rape. And a lot of relationships you hear women saying they just do it you know just to shut him up, or just to satisfy him, or he could be drunk, or he could be just that way, you know he might be sober but he’s just very domineering in that way. So you hear it quite often.*

[Participant CT]



Participant CT's statement above reflects her understanding that a lack of consent is an essential factor in sexual assault; however she also acknowledges that a woman may reluctantly have sex in order to avoid further problems.

Participant JP discussed her belief that sexual violence is more than likely prevalent within family violence.

*and I think that, I wonder how much sexual assault there would be in DV. Umm and I think it'd be huge number. Yeah.*

[Participant JP]

Participant UV described family violence in Aboriginal communities as being similar to non-Aboriginal communities, except more 'intense'. She also noted that Aboriginal people may have been in a relationship since childhood.

*I think in that sense the DV stuff is very similar to normal [non-Aboriginal] DV stuff. It seems more intense and they might have been in the relationship since childhood or something...*

[Participant UV]

Participants' awareness of sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner in a family violence context reflects the literature related to violence in Aboriginal communities. That is, sexual violence is a common facet of intimate partner violence. Similar to the broader literature on the issue, participants remarked that sexual violence within family violence is generally hidden. Participant UV's statement that family violence "seems more intense" in Aboriginal communities is reflected in the literature which identifies that Aboriginal women who are victims of family violence by an intimate partner are more likely to experience serious physical injuries, sexual assault and potentially lethal assaults (AIHW et al., 2006; Guggisberg et al., 2010).

Participants described gender role stereotypes that they believed existed in Aboriginal communities around sexual violence. The following provides examples of these beliefs.

**Gender role stereotypes.** All participants were clear that sexual violence is not acceptable under any circumstances, however, they reported some Aboriginal individuals and communities justify sexual violence or blame the victim/survivor. Participant UV's statement below refers not to her own attitudes towards sexual violence, but is an explanation of attitudes she felt were prevalent in some Aboriginal communities and individuals. She noted that the same attitudes and

beliefs which blame the victim/survivor and justify sexual violence are present in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

*She asked for it, she was actin' all like that, he's just a man, he can't help it. I think the same biases we see in society Aboriginal people have that too.*

[Participant UV]

Participant UV's statement above reflects the idea that if women act in a certain way (i.e. flirting or sexually provocative), men are unable to control their sexual appetites and therefore they can't help themselves. The phrase 'he's just a man' is in stark contrast with the following comment by Participant DB, which describes a sense of entitlement she reported that some Aboriginal men have.

*...that's my woman and this is my right and don't give a fuck about her feelings or her mood or her whatever, I just want to satisfy myself. So it's not what a true relationship is which is give and take, discussions, nice conversations, nup too tired tonight can't be bothered, whatever.*

[Participant DB]

A similar belief was reflected by Participant JP, who reported a sense of ownership and a lack of respect for Aboriginal women by Aboriginal men.

*I think there's a lack of respect to women, umm more ownership, and definitely more ownership...I just like watch what you're going to do, where you're going to go, how much money is being spent, and when I have sex with you.*

[Participant JP]

The above statements by participants reflected the idea that men are superior and that women are subordinate on the one hand, and that women are responsible for being the guardians of sexuality because men are unable to control themselves on the other hand. Participant JP's and DB's comments above suggested that patriarchal attitudes are strongly held by some Aboriginal people and communities.

As discussed in the literature review, gender role stereotypes which endorse patriarchal attitudes have been found to be predictive of sexual violence (Check & Malamuth, 1983; York, 2011) and endorsement of rape myths, as well as victim blaming (I. Anderson & Bissell, 2011).

The justification of sexual violence based on gender role stereotypes has been reported in non-Aboriginal research literature (Burt, 1980; Edwards et al., 2011; Masser, Lee, & McKimmie, 2010). Burt (1980) proposed that gender-specific

sex roles are acquired through the developmental process and as a result of social practices, that is, they are learned.

However, the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2006) argued that the idea of patriarchy was foreign to traditional Aboriginal communities, which while relatively separate in terms of gender roles, were also equal in terms of power. "Aboriginal societies were gendered, women were not victims of men's power, but assertively affirmed their place and role in the community" (p. 34).

The idea that gender roles which support rape myths were not part of Aboriginal culture prior to colonisation was expressed by Participant FL. Participant FL stated that some Aboriginal communities do have 'old fashioned' ideas, but that these have been imposed on Aboriginal people through the process of colonisation and the importation of attitudes and beliefs about women.

*Some communities might be a bit more kind of... old fashioned in their thinking, because they're only articulating old White people's thinking. You know, any thinking that Aboriginal people are having around these sort of contemporary issues are just advocating thinking that they were raised within missions and so on, it's nothing to do with traditional Aboriginal society. You know, priests in a mission 50 years ago would say that girl there's a harlot, because she's showing a knee or something, and you know, so yeah it's got nothing to do with traditional ways of thinking or looking after each other, it's just what's been imposed. And some of that thinking has been embedded in thinking of today.*

[Participant FL]

The theory that Aboriginal people, via religious institutions such as missions and the norms of the dominant culture, absorbed the gender role stereotypes that were prevalent at the time of colonisation, which deemed that women were guardians of chastity, subordinate to their men (McGuire, 1990; Middleton, 2010) has been proposed by authors in Australia (Andrews, 1997; N. White, 2010) and also internationally (LaRocque, 1994). White (2010) argued that "Aboriginal women's place in traditional life was not understood or acknowledged by the newcomers, who tried to accommodate Aboriginal women's status within European patriarchal frames of reference" (p.10).

Participants described attitudes and beliefs to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities which denied that sexual violence had occurred, or minimised the

seriousness of the incident. In some cases, disclosures of sexual violence were met with disbelief.

**Denial and disbelief.** When faced with an allegation that the perpetrator has committed an act or acts of sexual violence, participants described a range of strategies that perpetrators may use to deny or defend the allegation. Participants stated that firstly perpetrators will deny that the sexual violence occurred, and secondly justify the behaviour for example by portraying the sexual violence as a consensual, loving relationship or blaming the victim by stating that the victim 'wanted it' or caused the sexual violence in some way.

Families may accuse the victim of lying or making up stories in order to attempt to discredit the victim's character. Participant ML stated that Aboriginal women in older generations may accuse a person who discloses sexual violence of lying or being untrustworthy. She noted that this occurs particularly within Aboriginal families where disclosures are made.

*It didn't happen. And this is particularly with women, and women I suppose in the generation before mine and probably in my grandmother's generation, there's this whole discrediting of anything a victim says. She's an alcoholic, she takes drugs, it's all lies, it's all bullshit, I don't know why she makes those things up...are the things that you hear, in families in particular and in communities about women that are starting to disclose.*

[Participant ML]

The issue of people not wanting to believe that sexual perpetrators are in the community was raised by Participants RL and FL. Participant RL reflected that people in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities do not want to believe that sexual perpetrators are in their communities. In addition to this, Participant FL identified protecting people's reputation as another reason people disbelieve disclosures of sexual violence.

*Sometimes I think it's just people are just in denial that they can't possibly believe that this person that they've trusted, known and loved could ever do something like that. So I think it's part of that. Then I s'pose there's always times when it might be around protecting, protecting reputation.*

[Participant FL]

Participant UV described how Aboriginal community members may be silent about someone who is 'known' to be a perpetrator of sexual violence, yet they may

treat the victim as if they are to blame. As, discussed previously in this chapter, this may be due to shame and the desire to protect the family name.

*And even when we know that an offender is an offender, it will always be hush-hush, but everyone knows about it but it's all undertones. Whereas they'll come straight out and blame someone, loudly proclaim publically. 'You threw yourself at that bloke. You shouldn't have done that because...' To me they seem to think the offender is the victim. He can't help what he does, but we can help what, you know victims can help what they do by not throwing themselves at him that kind of thing.*

[Participant UV]

Disbelief and denial are common responses to disclosures of sexual violence in the non-Aboriginal research literature (Cromer & Freyd, 2007; S. C. Taylor & Norma, 2013) and may be related to the prevalence of 'rape myths' which state that women and children make up stories of sexual violence. The Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce (2006) suggested that denial, a 'culture of silence' and other responses to disclosures of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities was related to a lack of understanding of the issue.

A fear of not being believed has been reported as a barrier to disclosure of sexual violence by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal victims/survivors (Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce, 2006; Lievore, 2003; Willis, 2011). And while the tendency for people not to believe disclosures of sexual violence is something that occurs across different cultural groups (Ullman, 2010), Ullman (2010) argued that cultural or religious groups which value the collective over the individual may discourage help-seeking, to avoid shaming their families.

Participants' views that some members of the Aboriginal communities may deny that sexual violence has occurred, or blame the victim, resonate with both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal literature. However, the emphasis that Aboriginal communities place on the collective rather than the individual (Gee et al., 2014) may increase the discouragement of disclosures through denial, disbelief and victim blaming.

Participants were asked about their views in relation to the prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The following describes participants' views about helpful prevention strategies.

## Prevention

Participants raised a number of issues related to the prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Strategies relating to prevention suggested by participants included the need to engage young people and Elders and to employ a holistic approach that addresses a range of related issues.

Participant JP suggested that prevention programs need to work with men and youth through accessing existing structures such as sporting clubs, utilising existing role models such as coaches. She suggested that coaches often know more about teenagers than their parents.

*Yeah programs, you need programs with men, but I just don't know what, it's so hard enough to get women to programs let alone men. In things like, stuff like in football and things like that it's great now in sports I think that's you know starting to get a bit more momentum umm even in things like junior football clubs and things like that, I think places like sport that have to look at, they are the role models you know, the coaches are the role models whereas, they can have a huge impact, they do know more about what the teenagers are doing than lots of parents, they do see stuff that other people don't see.*

[Participant JP]

Participants generally identified the need to involve Elders in any prevention programs, along with the need to engage young Aboriginal people. Participant CT below discussed her belief that young Aboriginal people would be the ones who would promote the prevention messages going forward.

*I'd get young mob, talking about it, because I feel there'd be a lot more young people who were more comfortable with it. You know I'm only saying some, I know a lot wouldn't be, but I feel that with the support of Elders, you know women and men Elders, because to me they have that support of the Elders there, you know talking with them. But I think that coming from the young fellas it will get carried through because you know the Elder ones a lot of them are retired, you know they don't mind getting involved and supporting, but they wouldn't be in that sort of long term you know carry this forward, and I think if you use young people, at least it can get carried forward for a while.*

[Participant CT]

Participant DB discussed the importance of ensuring that any prevention media campaigns are developed in order to target their intended audience appropriately, that is primary prevention campaigns are culturally relevant to Aboriginal people. She also suggested that targeted community engagement strategies were undertaken, as well as ensuring Elders were engaged in the process so they could recommend other Aboriginal community members engage in the service.

*...it would be very low key advertisements so that if I was to target ads and then the other little suburbs where I know there's quite a large Aboriginal community. I love the caravan idea, the big, not caravan, but the big long one, where you would have, one bit would have STI testing in there and you would have counsellors on it too, and it would be getting the Elders to come in check it all out, getting them to see you're ok, getting the Elders to go back into community, 'you need to go and yarn with [participant], she's got some really good stuff happening up there,' because they would know probably if there was something happening in their community.*

[Participant DB]

Participant UV expressed the idea that Aboriginal people cannot prevent sexual violence in their communities without the support of the broader non-Aboriginal society. Participant UV suggested that addressing social determinants of health, as well as the acknowledgement of Aboriginal people through teaching Aboriginal culture in schools would have the effect of improving Aboriginal peoples' self-esteem, which could decrease violence in Aboriginal communities.

*We need money, we need better services, we need appropriate services... Education would go a long way, and government accepting Aboriginal people as worthwhile by saying 'we should be learning Aboriginal culture in school'. Something as simple as that would go 'yeah I feel a bit good about myself right now'.*

[Participant UV]

Participant ML described the importance of building Aboriginal leadership within families. She suggested this could provide an alternative to non-Aboriginal ways of managing sexual violence.

*I think you've really got to bring that back to leadership in Aboriginal families. And these Aboriginal families can govern their own processes of you know what's acceptable and what's not. Then we're really running this whole*

*gauntlet of the western system being the only system of the way that we try and tackle this problem.*

[Participant ML]

All participants described the need for sexual and relationship education as a key factor for preventing sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Education of this nature was suggested for both children and adults in Aboriginal communities. Participant RL describes the need for sexual and relationship education below.

*...it's a learned behaviour a lot and umm how effective umm has dialogue been with young people to explain you know, what is sex, you know and under what circumstances does this occur...Or even before even that discovering your own body and sexuality and things like that...*

[Participant RL]

Participants were clear that prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities should include a range of strategies across primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, focussing on victims/survivors, perpetrators and the whole of community. Sexual violence prevention is in it's infancy in Australia (M. Carmody et al., 2009), however, the participants' views on prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, are supported by strategies suggested by some Australian sexual violence prevention literature such as *A comprehensive framework for preventing youth sexual violence and abuse* (Smallbone & Rayment-McHugh, 2013). The Framework drawing on crime prevention concepts and the public health model, suggested that strategies should target communities, victims/survivors, situations and perpetrators, across the three levels of prevention. Examples of primary prevention strategies focused on communities given by Smallbone and Rayment-McHugh (2013) were capacity building and community education, which mirrored those suggested by participants.

According to VicHealth (2007) developing effective sexual violence prevention strategies in culturally diverse communities can be achieved by ensuring that structural inequalities and barriers faced by various communities are addressed; the development of partnerships with communities including involving community leaders; and ensuring cultural and linguistic appropriateness and relevance. Addressing the structural inequalities and barriers faced by Aboriginal peoples was identified as an important aspect of sexual violence prevention by participant UV, as well as being identified as a factor participants viewed as contributing to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. However, addressing structural inequalities and barriers requires long-term investment, the development of partnerships, as well



addressing issues which pertain to the wider Australian community such as racism and the accessibility of government services (Osborne, Baum, & Brown, 2013).

Ensuring that community members, including Elders, are involved in meaningful way in any prevention activities was seen as critical for the success of prevention activities by participants. Jumper-Thurman, Edwards, Plested, and Oetting (2003) also suggested that engaging community members and community leaders creates community ownership which in turn increases the likelihood of success. However, Jumper-Thurman and colleagues stated that communities experience different stages of readiness, and that individual community readiness should be determined in order to develop and implement the most appropriate strategies.

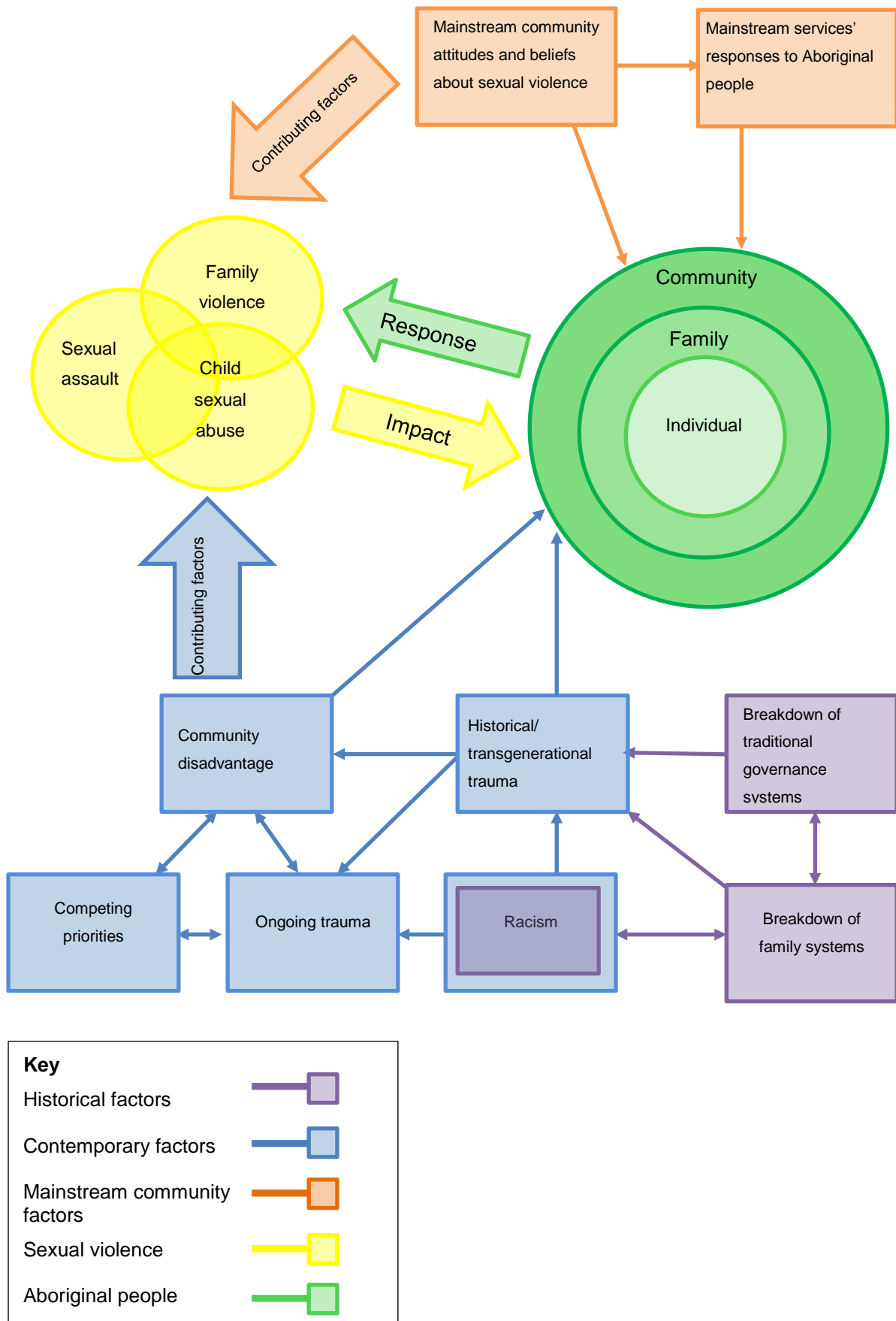
Prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities as described by participants includes addressing sexual violence through community education, enhancing Aboriginal leadership, addressing social determinants of health, and support from the broader Australian community. This reflects a multi-dimensional approach to sexual violence prevention which reflects the complexity of factors which participants related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

The following presents a pictorial representation of the multiple factors that participants identified as being related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. This diagram provides a means to summarise the breadth of these factors as well as indicating their relationships to each other.

### **Factors Related to Sexual Violence in Aboriginal Communities**

*Figure 5* was derived from the participants' data and describes a range of factors which they believed contributed to the prevalence, response to, and the impact of, sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. *Figure 5* provides a detailed visual representation of the complexity and interrelationship of these factors which are grouped into the following categories: historical, contemporary and mainstream community.

Figure 5. Factors related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities



Historical factors (Figure 5, bottom right) included the *breakdown of family systems* and the *breakdown of traditional governance systems*. *Racism* was described by participants as both a contemporary factor and a historical factor. As a historical factor, racism, along with other historical factors, was described by participants as contributing to the contemporary factor *historical/transgenerational trauma*.

Contemporary factors are represented in blue. As a contemporary factor, racism is shown as contributing to *ongoing trauma* in Aboriginal people's lives. Historical/transgenerational trauma, along with other contemporary factors: *ongoing trauma*, racism and *competing priorities*, are shown as culminating in *community disadvantage*. Community disadvantage in turn, is shown as a contributing factor to *sexual violence*.

Sexual violence is represented as three overlapping circles to the left of *Figure 5: sexual assault, child sexual abuse and family violence*. This reflected the participants' definitions of sexual violence, and their view that sexual violence and family violence are intrinsically interrelated.

Aboriginal *individuals*, their *family* and *community* are shown as three nested green circles (*Figure 5, right*). The nesting of the circles illustrates the strong connection between Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, as described by participants. Aboriginal individuals, families and communities are shown as being influenced by the contemporary factors community disadvantage and historical/transgenerational trauma. The influence of community disadvantage and historical/transgenerational trauma impacts on Aboriginal individuals, their family and/ or community's response to sexual violence, which is shown by the green arrow labelled *response*. The yellow arrow labelled *impact* represents the impact of sexual violence on Aboriginal individuals, families and communities. The impact of sexual violence is shown as being influenced by the previously-noted contemporary factors which culminate in community disadvantage.

Participants reported mainstream or non-Aboriginal community factors (*Figure 5*) as impacting on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. These factors included *mainstream community attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence* and *mainstream services' responses to Aboriginal people*. Mainstream community attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence are shown as a contributing factor to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, in that Aboriginal people are exposed to the attitudes of the broader non-Aboriginal community to sexual violence, through schools, employment, social and cultural norms, media and other community and societal contexts. Additionally, mainstream community attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence are

depicted as impacting on Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, along with influencing *mainstream services' responses to Aboriginal people*.

Participants described a process of having to balance a range of competing historical and contemporary factors in regards to any responses to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The following describes this process.

### **Weighing up**

'Weighing up' was the basic social process in relation to the actions and interactions that participants described regarding decisions about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Weighing up was raised by the researcher as a category in response to participants' explanations of the factors that must be balanced against each other when responding to or disclosing sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

Factors included historical factors such as the breakdown of traditional governance and family systems, the loss of Aboriginal men's roles, exposure to violence and racism which have contributed to historical/transgenerational trauma which impacts on Aboriginal people today. In addition to historical factors, Aboriginal people face contemporary issues such as ongoing trauma, community disadvantage, competing issues and racism. These historical and contemporary factors along with the importance of family and feelings of shame were described by participants as impacting on the decisions Aboriginal people make in relation to sexual violence.

*Figure 6* illustrates the domains that participants described as being taken into consideration when a decision is being made about sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The individual Aboriginal person in the centre of the diagram is encompassed by family and community relationships on all sides, representing the significance of family and kinship ties for Aboriginal people. The influence of non-Aboriginal society in contemporary Aboriginal communities intersects with Aboriginal individuals, family and community; however the majority of the circle does not overlap with the individual, family and community, suggesting a 'separateness' between the wider non-Aboriginal society and Aboriginal people. Historical factors, which are shown as encompassing Aboriginal people, have a continuing significant impact on Aboriginal people in contemporary life, and their relationship with non-Aboriginal society. Contemporary factors which impact on Aboriginal people encircle the Aboriginal individual, family and community along with historical factors.

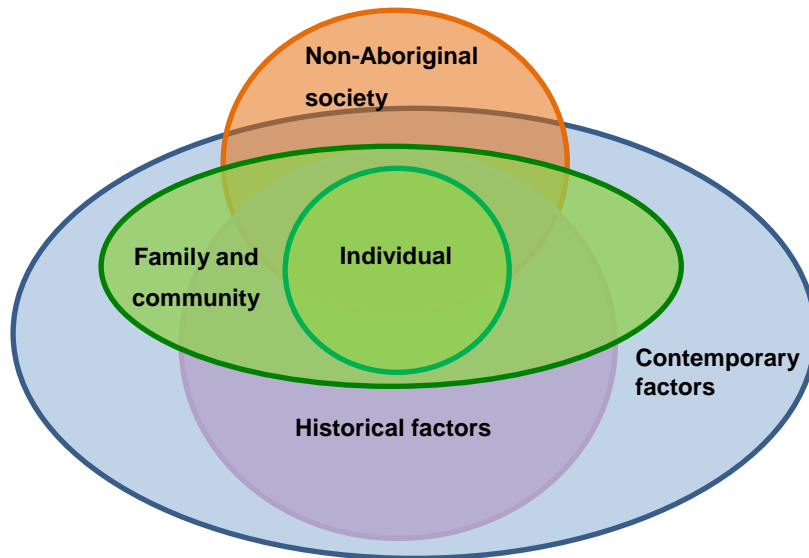


Figure 6. The 'weighing up' model

Weighing up acknowledges that Aboriginal women, as described by the participants, are affected by intersecting oppressions due to their status as both women and Aboriginal (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). The model also acknowledges that individual Aboriginal women have diverse experiences and knowledge in relation to their family and community, experience of historical trauma, experience of racism, cultural identity, and socio-economic position.

### Strengths

The strengths of this study relate to the processes that were put in place to address cultural safety and security. The researcher and Critical Reference Group developed a range of strategies to ensure that the research process was culturally secure.

Additionally, the use of a constructivist grounded theory research methodology ensured that the participants' voices were prominent and that data was used to develop a theory, rather than utilising an existing theory that may have had little cultural relevance.

The findings contribute further to the research on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities by providing a 'thick description' by providing an insight into the attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence of professional Aboriginal women residing in Perth, Western Australia.

The results of this study offer insights into future sexual violence prevention activities in Aboriginal communities; service provision to Aboriginal people who have experienced sexual violence, along with future research into sexual violence in

Aboriginal communities particularly in the area of attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence.

### **Limitations**

This study had several limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted with a small number of participants and while it was not expected that the findings of this study would produce generalisable results, a larger number of participants may allow for an increased depth of understanding.

Additionally, participants for this study had undertaken tertiary education and/or worked professionally in the human services field. Therefore the views that the participants expressed may differ significantly from Aboriginal people who have different levels of education or who have no experience working in a human services role.

While this study examined the attitudes and beliefs of professional Aboriginal women who resided in Perth, Western Australia, five of the seven participants had lived in non-metropolitan areas, having either grown up there or lived in a non-metropolitan area in their adult life. Therefore their knowledge and experiences cannot be viewed as representative of Aboriginal women's beliefs and attitudes from any one location.

Despite any attempts to build in processes to the research to promote cultural security, as the researcher is member of the dominant society and a White woman from a middle-class background, the researcher's cultural lens cannot be entirely erased. For example, the researcher had not anticipated that racism would be such a prominent issue in relation to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, because it was not her lived experience. However, the researcher did take steps to militate against cultural bias through consultation with a Critical Reference Group, as well as careful selection of research methodology and relevant ethical considerations.

Finally, following the researcher writing the findings and discussion, the researcher realised that the questions used for the semi-structured interviews were too broad. The semi-structured interview questions were deliberately designed to be broad and to reflect themes that existed in questionnaires regarding attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence. While this approach allowed for a large amount of data to be generated from the interviews, perhaps more focussed questions would have increased the depth of the data that was generated.

### **Summary**

This chapter has presented the findings of this research discussed in the context of the relevant literature. The findings reveal participants' stories of a historical context that has eroded traditional governance structures, dislocated families and resulted in transgenerational trauma. The historical context has shaped the contemporary context

for participants as it contributes to the level of community disadvantage, shame and internalised oppression. The participants' sense of separateness from the non-Aboriginal community is reinforced by their experience of racism, social disadvantage and lack of cultural understanding from the non-Aboriginal community, including services that respond to sexual violence.

Participants described responses to sexual violence from some Aboriginal community members may utilise strategies to deny or justify sexual violence, utilising gender role stereotypes and other rape myths in an effort to avoid or deflect shame.

Participants' described a range of interconnected factors related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, including historical and contemporary factors, and the importance of family relationships. Participants described a range of prevention strategies such as community education, enhancing Aboriginal leadership, addressing social determinants of health, and obtaining support from the broader Australian community.

From the participants' data, the basic social process of *weighing up* was identified. Participants described a process of weighing up of historical and contemporary factors, along with the importance of family and the influence of the wider non-Aboriginal society which influence the impact of and response to sexual violence.

The final chapter provides the conclusion of this research, and recommendations for future consideration.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

This thesis commenced with an introduction, which defined and discussed key terminology used in the research. This was followed by a description of the organisation of the thesis.

This was followed by a literature review which discussed the prevalence of sexual violence in the broader Australian community and amongst Aboriginal people, key theoretical approaches to sexual violence including the intersectionalist approach, followed by an overview of the ecological model for understanding violence. The key literature into research about attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence was described, followed by a review of the literature related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The aim of the study was described as being to examine the attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence held by a group of professional Aboriginal women, residing in Perth Western Australia.

Seven Aboriginal women with backgrounds in the human services field participated in the research which was conducted using semi-structured in-depth interviews. The research was overseen by a Critical Reference Group (CRG) of Aboriginal women to ensure that the cultural biases of the White researcher were minimised and careful consideration was given to ethical issues related to research with Aboriginal people throughout this research. Constructivist grounded theory was employed as an approach to the data analysis. Data analysis was an iterative process and themes identified from the data were checked and verified with both participants and the CRG.

Themes emerged from the analysis of the data which related to historical experiences of colonisation as reported by participants; the factors which participants viewed as impacting on Aboriginal peoples in contemporary times; the importance of family for Aboriginal peoples; participants' views on Aboriginal community attitudes about sexual violence and participant ideas about prevention of sexual violence. These themes were consistent with the available literature related to violence and sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

Participants viewed colonisation as resulting in the breakdown of traditional governance systems, as reported by participant UV "*there was always the Elders or the people who kept law and standards, and now that that's gone*". The breakdown of cultural governance systems was viewed by participants as having an impact on the functioning of some Aboriginal communities today and developing the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to re-establish cultural governance systems was viewed by some



participants as an important tool in the prevention of sexual violence, evidenced by participant ML's statement: *"I think you've really got to bring that back to leadership in Aboriginal families"*. The loss of traditional governance systems has been cited in a range of reports related to violence in Aboriginal communities as a contributing factor, which indicates that participants' views are supported by the literature.

The impact of colonisation was seen by participants as having continued effects on Aboriginal people today through the breakdown of family structures which occurred through the removal of Aboriginal children and their placement in missions. Participants reported that being placed in a mission meant that Aboriginal children were exposed to unhealthy environments, including abuse, not shown love and not shown how to parent, all of which was seen as contributing to difficulties with parenting, including showing love to their own children, and views about sex and nudity as being sinful and dirty. As participant FL noted ...*"they've had unhealthy sexual relations modelled. They've grown up in unhealthy environments"*... There is ample documentation articulating the devastation that the *Stolen Generations* has caused for Aboriginal peoples. Research evidence is now emerging which demonstrates the negative impacts of forced removal on the person who was removed, but also intergenerationally, including an increased risk of being a victim of violence, mental illness and incarceration. This supports the participants' views that the breakdown of family structures continue to have an impact on Aboriginal people today.

Some participants also described the loss of role for Aboriginal males, which they viewed as contributing to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities for example, participant CT states ...*"just from colonisation men have lost their place in society so the whole power struggle is more so for Aboriginal men"*... Participants who spoke about the loss of Aboriginal men's roles as a contributing factor to sexual violence, tended to view sexual violence as an attempt by some Aboriginal men to regain some power in their lives. The loss of Aboriginal men's roles following colonisation has been identified in the literature as a contributing factor to violence in Aboriginal communities, however some authors warn against viewing Aboriginal men as more affected by colonisation than Aboriginal women.

Historical trauma from colonisation and its aftermath was seen by participants as an underlying factor related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities today. Participant UV's statement describes the views that all participants held... *"that trauma has never really been addressed but has just passed down from generation to generation"*. The transgenerational transmission of historical trauma has had some powerful support from studies examining the effects of Holocaust survivors' experience of trauma on the next generation. There is now evidence that neurobiological changes

can occur in the generation following those who experienced great trauma. These neurobiological changes in the next generation can result in increased risk of mental ill-health.

The significance of colonisation and historical trauma reported by participants, resulted in historical factors featured as a large underlying domain in the weighing up model. However, exposure to trauma for many Aboriginal peoples has not been confined to history.

Participants reported that there is ongoing exposure to trauma in many Aboriginal people's lives, including the experience of sexual violence, which as participant RL stated contribute to alcohol and other drug use, self-harm and suicide ...*"and this is where you get the high incidence of suicide or self-harm or drug and alcohol abuse and stuff like that"*. Research has demonstrated a link between violence victimisation and increase risk of further victimisation, along with the potential for increased risk of mental illness and alcohol and other drug use. Several reports into sexual violence in Aboriginal communities have linked the higher rates of suicide and alcohol and other drug use as being related to sexual violence victimisation, along with a range of other factors. Statistics related to Aboriginal health and welfare have demonstrated that many Aboriginal people are worse off in relation to a range of health, social and educational indicators, than other Australians.

Participants' descriptions of historical and ongoing trauma paint a powerful picture of some Aboriginal people struggling with enormous burdens of trauma, which are compounded further the experience of community disadvantage in the form of poverty, ill health, unemployment, poor housing and lack of meaningful educational opportunities. The social determinants of health were seen as both a contributing factor to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities and resolving the social determinants of health was seen as an important measure in preventing sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Participant FL summarised this issue by saying ...*"some of this stuff is not going to go away until we address structural determinants and poverty."*

Racism was an issue that was identified by all participants as contemporary factor related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Participants described racism as being a continued experience for many Aboriginal people, which they viewed as limiting their willingness to engage with non-Aboriginal society including services, and on a systemic level contributed to the historical and ongoing trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples. Racism was reported by participants as being experienced both in overt and covert forms by many Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people have been shown to experience high levels of racism in Australia. Research relating to racism has

demonstrated that experiencing racism can contribute to poor physical and mental health, and racism can ignite existing historical trauma.

Additionally participants viewed racism as contributing to internalised racism within some Aboriginal communities, which they viewed as a contributing factor to sexual violence and contributing to contemporary community disadvantage. Participant FL remarked “[a]nd anyone who rises above that will get pulled back into line, umm so jealousy it’s huge”, illustrating that jealousy, which can be viewed as a form of internalised racism, is a significant issue in Aboriginal communities which participants viewed as contributing to violence in Aboriginal communities.

The impact of contemporary issues, including ongoing trauma, on Aboriginal people was identified by participants as resulting in some Aboriginal people having to choose between competing priorities. That is, sexual violence could be one of a number of issues faced by Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, and therefore, contemporary issues were identified as another domain that the participants described as having to contend with in relation to sexual violence.

The importance of family was illustrated by participants, who described family as being central to Aboriginal people. This is reflected in participant UV’s statement “[w]hen you don’t have your mob you don’t kind of feel like you can ever be yourself anywhere else”. The importance of family, and by extension, community for Aboriginal people, is more than likely magnified by experiences of racism by the wider Australian society, in both historical and contemporary contexts. The importance of family was described as influencing the willingness to disclose and the response to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. The importance of family as described by participants was also connected to shame.

In the contemporary context, shame was described as a powerful motivating factor for Aboriginal people due to the culturally unique meaning of shame. Participants viewed shame as being connected to the experience of colonisation whereby religious and cultural beliefs about nudity and sex were imposed upon Aboriginal people by the European colonisers, particularly through the experience of missions. Participants described shame as being connected to the fear of being judged by other Aboriginal people, which also then attaches shame to their family. Shame was also described as a perception that Aboriginal people are viewed negatively by the broader non-Aboriginal community, for example participant CT described her mother telling her that White people were looking at her when they were eating at a restaurant “Like ‘oh look you know Wadjela mob looking at you’, and we’d be look ‘oh shame’ ”, suggesting that shame could also be connected to the experience of, or the fear of racism.

The influence of shame in an Aboriginal context as a moderator of behaviour should not be underestimated. Shame was repeatedly mentioned by participants in relation to the disclosure of sexual violence by the victim/survivor. Participants' views suggested that shame may motivate the families of perpetrators to blame the victim/survivor or deny that it occurred in order to protect their family name in the eyes of other members of the Aboriginal community. Participants' descriptions of shame being associated with sexual issues suggests that shame could be a barrier to discussing sexuality issues, including sexual violence victimisation as a means of preventing sexual violence, or for those who wish to disclose sexual violence.

Findings of this research suggest that gender role stereotypes exist within some Aboriginal individuals, families; and communities that identify women as guardians of morality, and men as dominating and sexual aggressors. As participant UV stated "*So I think they get the double whammy, Aboriginal women*" in that they are discriminated against for both their race and their gender. However, the participants themselves did not hold gender role stereotypes. The participants' data illustrated the existence of 'rape myths' based on gender role stereotypes that are present in the wider non-Aboriginal community; however participants saw gender role stereotypes in the context of colonisation and the importation of European gender roles and religious views into Aboriginal communities.

Participants described denial and disbelief as responses to disclosures to sexual violence in the Aboriginal community. Participants' views that some members of the Aboriginal communities may deny that sexual violence has occurred, or minimise the impact of sexual violence, resonate with both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal literature. However, the emphasis that Aboriginal communities place on the collective rather than the individual may increase the discouragement of disclosures through denial, disbelief and victim blaming. The protection of the collective over the individual may be understood in the context of historical trauma, as well as the experience of ongoing trauma, community disadvantage and racism.

Prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities was described by participants as needing an Aboriginal community driven approach which engages Elders, young people and the whole of community across the spectrum of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention activities, with support from non-Aboriginal society. The prevention of sexual violence was also viewed by participants as necessitating the improvement of Aboriginal peoples' social determinants of health, the healing of historical trauma and the acceptance of Aboriginal people by the wider Australian community.

From the participant data, a complex picture of interrelated factors related to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities emerged, which is illustrated by Figure 5. The interrelationship of these factors means that in order to address sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, a holistic and systemic approach must be taken which addresses the social disadvantage and racism experienced by Aboriginal people as well as localised approaches which support prevention activities in Aboriginal communities. Examples of holistic and systemic approaches include, addressing racism within the broader Australian community and sustained efforts to reduce social and economic disadvantage in Aboriginal communities, as well as the development, implementation and evaluation of culturally secure, Aboriginal community led, sexual violence prevention activities.

From the participant data, the basic social process that participants described in relation to sexual violence was identified as 'weighing up'. Weighing up acknowledges the domains that participants described having to consider in relation to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. Contending with the domains of contemporary Aboriginal communities' lives, the world of the dominant culture and the legacy of colonisation, within the context of a collective worldview, may mean that decisions are made in response to sexual violence for what is viewed as the greater good. This may contribute to responses that deny or disbelieve sexual violence and which utilise gender role stereotypes to blame the victims/survivors or justify sexual violence.

The researcher had envisaged that rape myths and stereotypes regarding sexual violence would be a prominent feature of the data gathered. And while participants described being aware of some rape myths, the most prominent themes identified by participants were the impact of historical and contemporary factors on sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. These factors described by participants indicated that responding to sexual violence is a very complex, multi-faceted issue for Aboriginal women. Racism was a salient issue for participants, which the researcher had not anticipated as being so prominent, perhaps due to the researcher's lack of awareness of the extent of her own White privilege prior to the commencement of the research. This highlights the importance of developing culturally secure prevention strategies and responses to sexual violence in consultation with Aboriginal people.

## **Recommendations**

Recommendations from this research relate to both the prevention of sexual violence and responding to the Aboriginal victims/survivors of sexual violence and their families and communities. Importantly, Aboriginal people should be involved in all aspects of decision making regarding such strategies and services to prevent and/or

respond to sexual violence in their communities, as issues which are salient to Aboriginal people may be overlooked by people with a different lived-experience.

**Prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.** A range of recommendations related to the prevention of sexual violence can be drawn from this research:

- Prevention strategies should include primary, secondary and tertiary strategies.
- Where deemed appropriate by the Aboriginal community, facilitate cultural renewal utilising aspects of Aboriginal culture that support the prevention of sexual violence, respectful relationships and respect for both women and men.
- Education strategies which promote healthy, respectful sexual relationships (and respectful relationships in general) should be developed and implemented within Aboriginal communities, driven by local Aboriginal stakeholders addressing the entirety of the community in order to promote Aboriginal ownership and the cultural safety of such strategies.
- Strategies which aim to prevent sexual violence should begin in the early primary school years, utilising age-appropriate strategies, such as culturally secure protective behaviours packages; for example, the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council, Social and Emotional Wellbeing Unit “Protective Behaviours Community Way”<sup>7</sup>.
- Prevention strategies are unlikely to succeed if historical and contemporary factors are not addressed. This requires developing culturally secure strategies that address the social determinants of health, such as poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing and levels of Aboriginal community disadvantage. Strategies that engage individuals and communities in healing from trauma (including historical/transgenerational trauma) should be implemented and sustained over time to ensure that healing can occur.
- In light of participants’ views that some members of the Aboriginal community may view the victim as being responsible for their sexual victimisation it is important that education relating to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities addresses victim blaming.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.kamsc.org.au/resources/resourcepbcw.html>

**Responding to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.** It is important to recognise that the solutions to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities do not just lie in the hands of Aboriginal people. Service providers in the broader community have an important role to play in supporting Aboriginal people affected by sexual violence:

- There is a need for service providers to be educated to respond to Aboriginal people in a culturally secure way and for services to implement strategies to address cultural security.
- Given the powerful nature of shame in an Aboriginal context, non-Aboriginal services which respond to people who have experienced sexual violence would benefit from cultural education in order to develop an understanding of shame and its connection to the importance of family, and the impact it may have on Aboriginal clients.

**Implications for future research.** Given that participants noted that the link between sexual violence and family violence was important, this research supports an argument for ensuring that future research into family violence specifically raises the issue of sexual violence, and conversely, when research is undertaken into sexual violence, family violence must also be considered part of the context in which sexual violence occurs. However, acknowledgement of sexual violence that occurs outside of the context of family violence should be incorporated into sexual violence prevention in Aboriginal communities, as well as addressing the links between sexual and family violence.

This research should be viewed as an initial study to examine professional Aboriginal women's attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in Perth, Western Australia. Future research expanding on this study is recommended. This will allow further development of knowledge in this area. Much more information is needed. For example, research which examines the attitudes and beliefs of a broader range of Aboriginal people, participants from different locations and/or a broader range of educational backgrounds, and/or Aboriginal males.

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## **Appendix A: Participant information sheet and consent form**

### **Urban Aboriginal Women's Attitudes and Beliefs About Sexual Violence:** **Information for participants**

My name is Judi McGlynn (at work I use my maiden name Judi Stone). I am a non-Aboriginal woman of Irish heritage, born in Perth. I am 44 years old, married and have a 14 year old son. I have been working as a counsellor for more than 20 years. I have worked with Aboriginal people for over 10 years. At the moment I am working on a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder prevention project in Aboriginal communities, my role is develop and deliver culturally secure education and training to health professionals.

I have worked in Sydney and Perth in the areas of mental health and drug and alcohol and for over 8 years I worked with people and communities who were trying to deal with sexual assault (rape) and child sexual abuse.

I am also a student at Curtin University doing a Masters of Public Health degree. I am currently doing some research with Aboriginal Women about their beliefs and attitudes towards sexual assault and child sexual abuse. This is because I became interested in what Aboriginal women think when I was working with people who had experienced sexual violence and teaching health professionals about what research said about sexual violence and its prevention. I wondered if the research was relevant to the experience of Aboriginal women.

The reason I am doing this is because I want to find out what Aboriginal Women in Perth believe and feel about sexual assault and child sexual abuse. This will help Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal agencies develop training and education that is culturally respectful about the areas of sexual assault and child sexual abuse. I would like to invite you to participate in this research. Your opinions and ideas are important to me.

#### **What the research involves**

The research involves yarning about sexual violence. You don't have to talk about any personal or shame experiences you or other people have had - just general thoughts and ideas. If you do want to talk about personal things I will treat them seriously and with respect.

I will be working as a researcher during our contact, but I will provide everyone I speak to with a list of support services. I will have a few questions to guide me, but if we end up talking about something different that's ok.

The interview will take about an hour and a half. I will need to contact you after the interview to check things with you. You and/or I may wish to organise another interview to explore some ideas that come up from the first interview.

We can stop at any time you want for a break. If you want to continue at another time, that's ok. You can withdraw from the research at any time you want to until the interview is analysed. If you withdraw all the information you have given me will be destroyed.

To do this research properly, there are several steps I am taking:

- 1.** I am following the National Medical and Health Research Council Guidelines for Conducting Research with Aboriginal People and I am following Curtin University and the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Information Ethics Committee ethical guidelines. I have ethics approval from Curtin University and the Western Australian Aboriginal Health Information Ethics Committee.
- 2.** I am working with an Aboriginal Critical Reference Group who will guide me so that I work in a way that is respectful of Aboriginal culture.
- 3.** I am using Aboriginal Terms of Reference for this research.
- 4.** All information will be confidential, unless you tell me details of a child at immediate risk of harm from abuse, or if you are very suicidal. Then I will talk to you about what I would do to try and make things safe.

For the research any details that might identify you will be changed or removed before publication and I will show you what I have done to make sure you are happy with how I have done this. I will also disguise your details when I talk to anyone else about the interview with you like the Critical Reference Group or my supervisors.

- 5.** I will make a voice recording of the interview so that what we have discussed can be typed out word for word. I will give you a copy and check this with you once it is typed. If there are any mistakes you can tell me and I will fix them.

I will give you a copy of the voice recording and the final typed document if you want them.

**6.** All information collected by me, including voice recordings, will be stored in a secure way, in a locked room on the campus of Curtin University so that no one else will access it. Any information that is not kept at Curtin University (for example if I am studying at home) will only have a code on it, not your name. Any information kept on a computer will be protected with a password.

**7.** Information gathered will be examined for themes or key ideas that occur. For example, a theme or key idea would be if several people talk about the same sorts of ideas. Once the information has been examined, I will bring it back to you to check with you to see whether I have understood the information you have given me and whether you think I am on the right track with the themes.

**8.** I will take any feedback you give me about anything to do with the research seriously.

**9.** At the end of the research I will give you a plain language report of what I found from the research. I will also destroy the tape of the interview once the University says I do not need to keep it any more if you ask me to (this could be up to 7 years after the research has been completed).

**10.** Your out of pocket costs incurred because you took part in the research (such as transport and child care) will be reimbursed up to the value of \$50.00.

You can ask me any questions you want to about the research or about me at any time.

If you want to check anything about the research you can contact my supervisors on the details below.

Associate Professor Rosemary Coates

Sexology Program

School of Public Health

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**“Urban Aboriginal women’s attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence”**

**Research Participant consent form.**

I have read/ had explained to me and understood the participant information sheet for the study “Urban Aboriginal women’s beliefs and attitudes towards sexual violence”, and I agree to participate in the research.

I understand that the information I provide will remain confidential at all times unless I provide information regarding a person at current risk of harm.

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time and my information can be withdrawn from the study up to the time that the interview is examined for themes.

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Name	Signature	Date
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**Appendix B: Data analysis sheets for 'missions' node**

Missions analysis	
<p>9 references coded [4.14% Coverage]</p> <p>Reference 1 - 0.24% Coverage</p> <p><b>CT 44:</b> Yeah she did. Oh yeah. Yep. You've got some old girls out there, especially the ones that have been in a mission, I notice it more mission, because my mum was one of those old girls and then but she passed away,</p> <p>Reference 2 - 0.10% Coverage</p> <p>But I know my mum like, when something has happened to me, this is just to get across this attitude</p> <p>Reference 3 - 1.01% Coverage</p> <p>You know what she did, she made me go with her, with him, we drove all the way from [location] to [location] where his father was living and working, and umm 'cos he was running the place and made him, you know dropped him there to be with his dad, but you know no one else knew about it, only me and her, and I had to travel in the car, all the way, and you know the feeling, you know how it's just, if you've been through it yourself you'd know what it was like, it's a feeling that no one else would know unless they'd been through it and 'cos this happened a number of times, and you sort of think, you know that way of thinking, but then when I got older, I put it into perspective 'cos I thought, well my poor old mum was in a mission you know, she was in [mission] from the age of two and then she was sent down to the [location], you know the girl's school, you know the [location], yeah that old one way out in the fields, she used to go there for school</p> <p>Reference 4 - 0.28% Coverage</p> <p>So she rebelled and he said 'right umm, I'm gonna send you to [name] mission' and that was known as [particular type of</p>	<p>Old fashioned ideas about women and their roles- particularly noticeable with women who have been in a mission Mother was in a mission</p> <p>Attitudes to sexual violence/ sex came from the missions</p> <p>After disclosure mother kept secret- made daughter ride in car with perpetrator to drop him back with his father.</p> <p>Felt alone with the secret</p> <p>Mother sent to mission from age of 2</p> <p>Mother sent to a worse mission because she rebelled. Sent to a mission that would</p>

<p>mission]. And he done that to really shame my mother, because he thought she was a little upstart, you know trying to rebel against him I'll show you.</p> <p>Reference 5 - 1.11% Coverage</p> <p>With a big towel on, not showing anything but oh that was just disgusting to mum. And then dad would say 'oh go on and get dressed bub and then come out here and have a warm.' He was different 'cos he was never raised in a mission. His father hid him in the bush see. He had a different way of thinking, which I think was good for us because we sort of got to then have a balance. 'Cos we could understand where mum was coming from but we also knew how dad was, you know. He used to say to you 'whatever you want to do you do, as long as you do it to the best of your ability and you mean it and you do it with your heart, because if your hearts not in it, then don't even bother doing it'. He had a different way, whereas mum, she'd say 'well where do you think girls get pregnant?' 'Cos I wanted to go on and do fourth year, but I had to go to [location], she wouldn't allow me because she said that 'that's where girls get pregnant.' It was always. 'how do you, you know, how do you think girls get pregnant?' or 'where do you think girls get pregnant?'</p> <p>Reference 6 - 0.54% Coverage</p> <p>, if only the community would come together on it, and it umm stems a lot from the mission days, I believe that that plays a big part of it, because a lot of our older people are still from the mission times where they're shamed about it; you don't talk about that stuff, you know you grin and bear it, oh well that's life it just happened to you like that, you just get on with it, you know and sort of like umm you know toughen up, stop you know whingeing about nothing and that's how, kids have been out there and I</p>	<p>shame her.</p> <p>Mother's attitude – was disgusted by any form of partial nudity-even in an innocent context.</p> <p>Participant saw father's views as different because he wasn't in a mission- father hid him in the bush. Father was more openly nurturing.</p> <p>Mum was worried about girls having sex- wouldn't let her go on in school</p> <p>Mother was always worried about girls getting pregnant.</p> <p>If only community could come together and talk up the issues around sex, sexual health and sexual assault more but the attitudes from the missions prevent it. Shame about sex / nudity You don't talk about it Grin and bear it It's just life Get on with it Toughen up Stop whingeing about nothing</p>
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<p>Reference 7 - 0.33% Coverage</p> <p>Yes, and because that missionary you know religion coming into it, it has made sex you know to do something that you only do to procreate you know and all this, and people are thinking, oh well you know, I know people know that you're doing it not just for that, so it's sort of, there's a lot of things that come in</p> <p>Reference 8 - 0.26% Coverage</p> <p>Because I notice with the missionary influence it's sort of umm you know like left a gap there for all of that, whereas when you talk to girls that their mum may not have been in a mission they sit down and talk to them about everything you know like,</p> <p>Reference 9 - 0.25% Coverage</p> <p>I think there's many reasons. Umm but I really believe the missions, you know like the parents and grandparents that have been raised in a mission, even the cousins that have been raised in a mission, that's had a major impact on it,</p> <p><a href="#">&lt;Internals\Interviews\Transcript Final FL 50 301112&gt;</a> - § 3 references coded [0.94% Coverage]</p> <p>Reference 1 - 0.16% Coverage</p> <p>Yeah it's wrong, it's sinful you'll burn in hell kind of information,</p> <p>Reference 2 - 0.61% Coverage</p> <p>There is very good evidence to suggest that from a range of reports, Stolen Generation of course and so on of the high level of sexual abuse in institutions [inaudible]. Umm yeah, there's ...so people weren't exposed to healthy sex education in those environments.</p> <p><a href="#">&lt;Internals\Interviews\Transcript Final ML 36 171012&gt;</a> - § 2 references coded [0.83% Coverage]</p>	<p>Sex is a taboo topic. Missions- religious attitudes made sex about only procreation.</p> <p>Conflict with what people know re sex for pleasure as well.</p> <p>Wasn't able to talk to mum about the sex, pregnancy, contraception. Missionary influence left a gap – by not talking about sex – notices a difference when talking to women whose mothers haven't been in a mission they will talk about everything</p> <p>Causes of sexual violence- influenced by generations raised in the missions</p> <p>Attitudes to sex in missions- wrong, sinful, burn in hell.</p> <p>Documented evidence of high levels of sexual abuse in missions (inquiries, reports).</p> <p>People weren't exposed to healthy sex education in the mission environments.</p>
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<p>Reference 1 - 0.19% Coverage</p> <p>and it was a result of when I was sent away to work, or you know from the mission or in the mission,</p> <p>Reference 2 - 0.64% Coverage</p> <p>And I think that the issue, that is that's definitely an impact of missions. And missions having, I suppose not being educated about things. It's a huge thing then for the parents not to educate their kids, not just sex education and general sexual health but then access to pornography and you know what I mean the appropriate use of that.</p> <p><a href="#">&lt;Internals\Interviews\Transcript final UV 51 291112&gt;</a> - § 2 references coded [1.31% Coverage]</p> <p>Reference 1 - 0.31% Coverage</p> <p>Mission. From a young age. So the men she's had in her life, they're all violent, all jealous, don't think twice about assaulting her and she doesn't think it's assault, she thinks it's love, you know so. I think that's really common.</p> <p>Reference 2 - 1.00% Coverage</p> <p><b>UV 51:</b> Because their parents raised them that way, and their parents raised them that way and somewhere along the way... like my mum, I could only give my own example, she was in mission...god someone's got the heater on. She was a real staunch woman, she never hugged us and she was never soft to us. She was really strict, just like we were on the mission. And as she got older we would hug her and she would just stand there 'cos she didn't know what to do. And she got really old and she'd give us a little tap. It was extremely hard for her, and I think though that is what we see, mum, they don't raise their children for love, and probably because they didn't know what right love was or, and, it just, every road points to colonisation for me.</p>	<p>Grandmother and her sisters sent to the missions- took time to feel safe enough to talk about it- probably impacted on the way they responded to disclosures.</p> <p>Impact of the missions- not being educated about sex, sexual health.</p> <p>It's a huge thing for parents not to educate their children about sex ad sexual health- emotional aspects of sexuality not just technical.</p> <p>Contextualising pornography-</p> <p>Aunty raised in mission- thinks the violence from men in her life is love. Low opinion of herself. Thinks this is common situation.</p> <p>Mum was raised in a mission- didn't show affection- very strict parent- like the mission. People raised in missions don't know what love is so; don't know how to raise their children in a loving way.</p>
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## **Appendix C: Final summary of all nodes November 2013**

### **IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

- Violation- traumatic-whatever form of sexual violence it is it still has an impact
- Self-blame and guilt- conflict between knowing it was wrong and normalisation from perpetrator-not something easy to 'get over'
- Reporting sexual violence-fear of retribution-one disclosure impacts many people in the family-retraumatising
- Impact on trust
- Victims try to find some power and control-who they do or don't disclose to- sex for money
- With support can move forward- takes a lot of strength and time
- Impact on family relationships- intrafamilial abuse makes it harder to trust-poor relationship with non-offending parent
- Feel violated, used and abused, stuck in unhealthy relationships- sexual violence normalised
- Drug and alcohol use -self-medication to survive.
- Psychological impact- mental health issues- distress-weight problems
- May not be able to deal with abuse- focused on surviving day to day

### **SHAME**

- Shame is connected to the fear of judgement by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people grow up feeling that they are different, looked down upon by non-Aboriginal people.
- Shame is carried by everyone and affects the whole extended family that is close to the perpetrator when a disclosure is made.
- Shame is a form of internalised oppression linked to the feeling that Aboriginal people are seen as less than non-Aboriginal people- caused by external oppression by dominant culture- including missions.
- Aboriginal people don't want to be the lowest of the low.
- Shame is used to control behaviour- e.g. don't do that it's shame
- People may defend perpetrators or blame the victim to avoid shame on the family name.
- Noongar children grow up not knowing about their culture- believe being noongar is being drunk, violent and different.
- Sex and sexual violence are considered shameful to speak openly about. While there are cultural rules around men's and women's business- the shame around sexual issues is related to experience of missions/religion.

### **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

#### **UNDERSTANDING CONSENT**

- Under 16 can't give consent

- Mandatory reporting- confusion around legal consent and emotional consent e.g. two people under 16
- If someone is intoxicated you can't assume that they have given consent- informed consent.
- Lots of cases participant has heard of where consent has been assumed by the man, but the woman is intoxicated.
- Consent is when both parties are able to give an informed agreement to participate in sexual activity.
- Sometimes people agree to go along with sexual activity they don't really want to in order to prevent further violence. (see also FDV)
- People with an intellectual disability may be taken advantage of sexually.
- There is a conflict between what the law says re age of consent and how consent is viewed. How community responds depends on factors such as the age of the girl, her physical development.

### **SEXUAL ASSAULT**

- within domestic violence or within an intimate relationship it is harder for people to see as sexual assault. If it happens outside the family then people are more likely to believe it is a sexual assault.
- Sexual assault often occurs within a FDV relationship - may not be violence- coercion, manipulation or to avoid violence. This is not really consent.
- FDV and SV are both about the loss of men's roles and their attempt to gain power. Sexual violence is a way of having some power and control.
- Sexual assault involves physical contact- lack of consent- people feel threatened or overpowered. Sexual assault is about power and control.
- Rape involves sexual penetration- lack of consent. If there is violence involved it is more likely to be accepted as rape.
- Same- sex sexual assault occurs in prison between women-similar dynamics to other sexual assaults e.g. grooming, coercion, and manipulation.
- Women have been victims of violence for so long-can't believe women would do that to another woman.
- Legal issues around consent are complex.

### **CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

- seen as broader than sexual assault, not necessarily violent- involves grooming, contact and non-contact sexual behaviour.
- Child sexual abuse seen as psychologically damaging.
- Involves grooming, coercion and manipulation into acts that they don't fully understand.
- Seen as wrong-power difference between adults and children.
- Perpetrators can pick out vulnerable families and children-children who are on the outer, or whose caregivers are not paying attention.
- Perpetrators have access to larger numbers of children due to extended family networks.

- Grooming is a longer process for Aboriginal people-starts in childhood and may only end in mid-20s when victim has partner/children.
- Intrafamilial sexual abuse common in Aboriginal families- affects generations of women.

### **PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES**

- Prevalence higher in Aboriginal communities.
- Due to extensive kinship networks- greater opportunities
- Sexual violence occurs in non-Aboriginal communities as well, but the Intervention is specifically targeting Aboriginal people- response is different.

### **COMMUNITY VIEWS**

- It is wrong.
- Stereotypes and misconceptions around culture and sexual violence aren't accepted by most Aboriginal people-but are used as an excuse by perpetrators, or people who don't understand the culture (e.g. promise brides) including non-Aboriginal people.
- Community needs to be able to talk about it to stop it from happening.
- How people define sexual violence varies from community to community.
- Different communities have different views about sex and sexuality
- Normalising of violence in some communities
- Victims of sexual abuse are subjected to gossip. Blaming the victim to decrease blame on perpetrator. Victims are discredited.
- Lots of myths about sexual violence- similar to mainstream. E.g. she asked for it, victim dressed skimpily.
- Victims should grin and bear it, toughen up.
- Victim and perpetrator will be treated differently by the rest of the community.
- Aboriginal community less educated about sex, tend to have old fashioned views.
- Attitudes to women are old fashioned- but have improved.

### **SERVICES**

- Needs to be a better understanding of what Aboriginal people need from mainstream services- services need to have their capacity built to work more effectively with Aboriginal people.
- Need to invest in the education of Aboriginal workers - proper training, be supported, and valued within the workplace. Support by workplaces for family and cultural obligations.
- Survive the work- drawing on the strength of clients- their survival is empowering.
- Clients would benefit if therapeutic services were present from the beginning of the police interview-could allow them to build trust/make a connection.
- Services are not funded or resources sufficiently.
- People who write the policies/manage the funding don't understand what really happens for victims/survivors.
- Services are defensive if you complain.

- Important to explain processes to people, treat them respectfully, give them a choice of service providers. Could change the client's life if they receive an adequate response- help them begin healing.
- Feels that services aren't willing to advocate for Aboriginal clients to ensure they get culturally secure service /service they need. Lack of understanding.
- Need for therapeutic services based on the needs of clients.
- Government services need to work together.
- Safety of victims and reporters important.
- Sense that DCP doesn't want to tackle situations that are too difficult- or settle for 'good enough' rather than what is best. DCP deal with the squeakiest wheel. Not much faith in DCP.
- Police don't want to deal with family and domestic violence involving Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal people don't trust police- history of feeling victimised by police within families/communities.
- Don't feel it is worth pursuing legal response if victim of sexual violence.
- Have been let-down by services, didn't feel prioritised.
- Services don't evaluate themselves enough to see if they are meeting the needs of Aboriginal people.
- Lack of cultural security in non-Aboriginal services.
- Services don't understand the complexities of Aboriginal communities.
- Aboriginal people don't always feel confident in medical settings; don't trust non-Aboriginal people, police.
- Negative experiences in services will be shared with other Aboriginal community members.
- Going to an Aboriginal service isn't always the best option-fearful of lack of confidentiality or being seen accessing the service.

## **LEGAL SYSTEM**

- Wasn't aware how much the court process would affect her at the time. Let down by legal system- left her in unsafe situation.
- jailing of perpetrator didn't make victim happy- still in fear for their life, threats, rumours
- Going through legal process very hard, lack of understanding of traumatic memory- why can't you remember. Knew perpetrator was in the same building.
- Small amounts of people are prosecuted.
- Some people don't see a whole lot of benefit from pursuing legal options, people will find out and not likely to get a good outcome. People find it too hard and give up. Safer not to.

## **FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

- Sexual assault often occurs in the context of family and domestic violence
- Intimate partner violence about power, sense of ownership of women.

- Violence and abuse is normalised. Doesn't always involve physical violence, could be controlling, verbal abuse, jealousy- not allowed to talk to other men.

### **FAMILY IMPORTANCE**

- Fear of family finding out if report sexual violence to the police/ attend services.
- Sexual abuse and sexual assault are similar in non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal families- but kinship systems in Aboriginal communities' means perpetrators have access to a very large extended family network.
- Not just blood relations are important, relations by marriage are important and often there is no separation between the two of them.
- Aboriginal families tend to stay connected to each other a lot more and are therefore exposed to a lot more issues.
- Sometimes people who are victims of sexual violence won't move away from their family/community even though it would stop the abuse.
- People will be protective of family name and family members (see shame)
- There are lots of good things about having a big family; Kids get to do amazing things together.
- Connection to family and country extremely important to Aboriginal people.
- Fine line between being with family and being the person you want or having the life you want.
- Aboriginal people are in a lonely place if they are not with their family. Very hard to make the break from family. Aboriginal people who separate from family connect with other Aboriginal people.
- Turning your back on your family is an extremely lonely thing to do, but you must want something better and can see how family is stopping you from getting there. It's a huge sacrifice.
- Being disconnected from family means becoming disconnected from culture.
- You don't feel like you can be yourself when you are not with your family.
- Feel most secure and comfortable with your family. At the same time you don't want to live with family or next door to them.
- It was easier to work in a location where you didn't come from because there was no history of family conflict.
- Walking in two worlds- constantly re-evaluating non-Aboriginal ways of thinking with Aboriginal ways of thinking.
- Sometimes having partner and child is a protective factor against sexual violence.
- It's not just as easy as picking up and moving to another place. Similar to issue of domestic violence-not being able to leave.

### **JEALOUSY**

- Man jealous because woman talks to men at work or at family functions.
- Believes Noongar men have low self-esteem and lack confidence and trust because communication skills aren't there.
- Jealousy prevalent in Aboriginal communities.

- People can be jealous of anyone and everyone not just confined to sexual relationships. Might be connected to shift from Traditional society where everything was shared to a capitalistic society where some people have more.
- Jealousy is a form of internalised oppression which keeps people locked into poverty.
- Jealousy is vicious.
- Women will fight using violence for their man. Believes it is to do with poor self-esteem.
- If a man treats a woman badly the jealousy is more intense. She loves him and she's put up with his behaviour and then he flirts with someone else.
- Better the devil you know. Who else is going to have me?
- Jealousy seen as a sign of love.
- Men's jealousy can be very violent and can mean big consequences for women.
- Jealousy is normalised.
- Domestic violence is intense and Aboriginal people may have been in a relationship since childhood.

## **DISCLOSURE**

- Disclosure can result in being ostracised or being subjected to threats and/or violence.
- People may need to move away to keep safe.
- People may go their whole lives and never talk about it.
- Don't talk about it. It didn't happen.
- Fear of word getting around to family/ community is a barrier to disclosure.
- Can become labelled by others in the community if you disclose.
- People get shut down or silenced when they disclose to protect family and community relationships.
- Should listen, believe and try to help if a child discloses.
- Family members will take sides following a disclosure.
- Family members of the perpetrator and the victim's own family may turn on the victim.
- Family of the victim also suffer when a disclosure is made.
- Some victims use disclosure or the threat/ hint of disclosure as a means of gaining some power in family relationships.
- People disclose when they feel safe enough.
- People disclose to someone they feel will help them in the family-there may be initial support- but nothing may happen.
- Victims need healing whether they disclose or not.
- Some people feel they are safer in prison
- perpetrators deny anything happened if there is a disclosure or may manipulate people into believing it isn't true.
- Non-disclosure to protect perpetrators can also put other people at risk.



- Other people's reactions to disclosure may be because of their experience of abuse, because they are busy surviving.
- Need to be resilient to hear disclosures and not be traumatised.
- One disclosure can lead to many disclosures.
- It's more shameful for men to disclose due to gender role stereotypes, but there are more men disclosing now.
- Reasons for disclosure-to find out where you stand, empowerment, punishment, so someone else knows what happened, to protect others.
- More likely to disclose if they are less dependent on their family; have children and partner of their own.
- Disclosure doesn't make everything better.
- Have to weigh up the costs and benefits of disclosing-it's an individual decision.
- Absence of traditional governance structures which would guide how to respond to disclose.
- Victim has to wear the feeling that people think they made it up, or did it happen to the degree it happen.
- Victims remember being shut down or not believed and this helps sexual violence to continue. Become aggressive and bent out of shape when they are older.

#### **ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS**

- AOD not a reason to perpetrate
- AOD doesn't cause people to commit sexual violence but may reduce inhibitions so people act on their impulses
- Thoughts and feelings have to already be present
- Intoxication can be used as an excuse.
- Environments where there is a lot of AOD use may result in people not keeping their children safe. I.e. not being watchful.
- Aboriginal people more open about things like drinking- children are exposed to it more.
- Participant has observed increased drug use in Aboriginal communities- especially heroin and methamphetamine
- Some Noongar people are self-medicating with drugs to manage childhood trauma and adult violence.
- Mother / caregivers being intoxicated may not protect child. People's perceptions are skewed when they are intoxicated.

#### **GROOMING**

- Developing a relationship with child and family, setting things up to enable them to abuse and not get caught- e.g. targeting single mothers, providing helpful support. Becoming the trusted person within the family- to make sure no one believes the child if they do disclose.

- Grooming a much longer process with Aboriginal people, but becomes swift when opportunity presents itself- and the way that perpetrators are able to target particular women and girls within families and communities.
- Victim is trained into the sexual abuse; train the victim to think it's normal.
- Cultural element used as an excuse- as a way for perpetrators to pull victims in. (also covered in perpetrators node).

## **MISSIONS**

- Two participant's mothers, one participant's grandmother and her sisters, and one participant's aunty was sent to missions in childhood.
- Connection between lack of parenting and nurturing in missions to being able to show open affection to children, poor self-esteem, old-fashioned attitudes to women more noticeable, acceptance of violence as part of their lives and attitudes about sex and nudity being sinful or dirty.
- Missions influenced attitudes to sexual violence.
- Documented evidence of high levels of sexual abuse in missions in inquiries and reports. Exposure to sexual violence in missions, institutions, foster care, prisons.
- Influenced how people who spent time in missions respond to disclosures of sexual violence by those around them-you don't talk about it- just get on with it, stop whingeing about nothing.
- Missions influenced how sex is viewed-weren't exposed to healthy sexual relationships, weren't educated about sex or sexual health, healthy sexual relationships-taboo topic, shame, only for procreation- therefore uncomfortable discussing these issues with the next generations.

## **PERPETRATORS**

Various views about perpetrators within participants and their communities:

- perpetrators can't be stopped or control themselves
- Have been abused themselves. Others believe being abused doesn't make people perpetrate.
- caused by exposure to warped views of sex- e.g. pornography
- could be a chemical imbalance, genetics may be involved
- AOD/intoxication can play a part,
- Exposure to dysfunction (e.g. FDV, violence, child abuse) during childhood a consistent view.
- Men's loss of power connected to FDV and sexual assault.
- Some perpetrators have intellectual impairment- don't understand what they are doing.
- Lack of education about the issue of sexual violence/ sex/ consent
- Community moral standards have lowered.
- Not sure why they do it.
- General sense that community doesn't support perpetrators attitudes- e.g. community flogged a perpetrator.

- Older women might confront perpetrators.
- Wouldn't let perpetrators anywhere near their children- even a child

Perpetrators respond to or avoid disclosures through:

- Denial, victim wanted it, dress it up as a loving relationship, threats to hurt to victim or their siblings, culture as an excuse, believe it is their right, justify their behaviours.
- Manipulate people into believing the disclosure isn't true.
- Perpetrators look for vulnerable children and families, mostly opportunistic, some premeditated, often respected in community, continue to abuse people from childhood into adulthood, or offend against their children.
- Groom child, family and community- often in a position of power and authority, respected community member.
- If a powerful or person with high status is abusing in the community- nothing is done because they are in a position of power and respect.
- Families may protect perpetrators- denial, non-disclosure, keep it hush-hush. Defend perpetrators. (See shame/ disclosure)
- Need to work with perpetrators in order to stop them offending again- healing. E.g. Hollow Waters. Prevention starts with trying to break the cycle of abuse- i.e. working with children who have been abused to prevent it.

#### **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE- SOCIAL/ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS**

- Peer pressure
- Internalised oppression/lateral violence. Connected to impact of colonisation and external oppression
- Upbringing-not taught how to respect or treat people and have empathy.
- Morals, boundaries and standards have lowered. Expectations about what sort of person they should be has lowered. People are more aggressive.
- Dysfunctional families and communities can't maintain a healthy society, expose children to violence and are less protective of children.
- Culturally people's weaknesses can be used against them- so that they can't control it.
- **Social problems** (Large range of social problems such as overcrowding, poverty, ongoing trauma, racism, incarceration which contribute to sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.)

#### **CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE-INDIVIDUAL FACTORS**

- Genetics
- Values around right and wrong, capacity to understand the concepts of right and wrong.
- May be caused by organic brain damage
- Some people born with it
- Caused by not being true to your own sexuality.
- Men make excuses- she was asking for it, the way they were dressed Men can't help themselves. It's how men's brains are.

- Could be caused by mental illness.
- Attitudes to women- sense of ownership of women
- People sexually assault because they misunderstand social cues, their perceptions are skewed.
- Being intoxicated doesn't cause people to sexually abuse but it may cause disinhibition.
- Some people clear being abused is not a causal factor but others believe that it is a learned behaviour from being abused themselves.
- Power and control
- Exposure to trauma and violence as a child.
- People misinterpret sexual signals.
- Early sexualisation through exposure to pornography without a context

### **PREVENTION**

- Not helpful in isolation, needs to be wrapped up in a range of other strategies.
- Secondary and tertiary prevention need to be included for a holistic approach.
- Sexual violence is one of a range of psychosocial issues affecting Aboriginal people today- e.g. poverty, incarceration, high mortality, unemployment (social determinants of health)- makes it a lower priority- too busy surviving
- Sense that dealing with sexual violence in Aboriginal communities is not a big priority for government.
- Aboriginal people need to feel valued by mainstream society.
- Prevention starts with trying to break the cycle of abuse- i.e. working with children who have been abused to prevent it.

### **ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP**

- Need to build Aboriginal leadership, resilience and capacity
- Prevention programs need to build relationships within community first.
- Can use victim/survivors as role models
- Research is needed to understand the scope of the issue.
- Aboriginal people need skills to deal with their own issues so they can take on a leadership role.
- Cultural renewal needed to restore Aboriginal governance processes bringing traditional life into the context of today.

### **EDUCATION**

- Need for education about healthy relationships, protective behaviours, boundaries, sex education and what's right and what's wrong- including sexual violence and consent.
- Education should challenge existing norms.
- Adults and children need to be included, men, women, Elders and strategies to engage young people.

- Use existing systems to conduct education- schools, sports clubs.
- Holistic approach.
- Non-Aboriginal people need to be educated about Aboriginal culture- i.e. busting myths around Aboriginal culture and sexual violence e.g. promise brides.

## **SEX EDUCATION**

- Sex education is needed- STIs, rates of young pregnancies, but also needs to include the emotional and relationship aspects of sex.
- Today girls get into relationships very young.
- Sexual behaviours is normalised, not seen as valuable.
- Also needs to include information about consent, appropriate and inappropriate behaviours- using age appropriate and correct language.
- Need to encourage and empower families to discuss issues around sexuality from an early age. Adults need tools to help them to feel confident about talking about it with their children.
- There is misinformation in the community about sexual health info e.g. Breastfeeding =contraception.
- Missions had a major impact on people's ability to talk about sexual health and issues around consent, childbirth, puberty and contraception.
- Religious views- sex for procreation only, not ok to talk about these things uncomfortable talking about these about these issues.
- Sex education does happen in some families - sometimes in a humorous way.
- Different families have different levels of comfort talking about sex education issues.
- People tend to learn about the emotional side of relationships as they get their own life experience.
- Girls who have been sexually abused sometimes confuse sex with love.
- Could use traditional structures to educate young girls- e.g. aunties, older women.
- Yarning –comfort, connection with other women, supportive.

## **TRADITIONAL CULTURE**

- Traditional governance/ kinship structures were protective. Everyone had a role which ensured that someone responded to issues in the community. Maintained social order.
- Current society lacks structures which ensure someone responds/intervenes or monitor situations.
- Traditional systems of governance would have dealt with sexual violence.
- Traditional governance of sexual relationships – e.g. promise brides- men and women involved in process, closely governed, not necessarily about sex 13/14 year old girl- looking after older men- may not have sex until older.
- Women also chose young men- may have more than one. These practices are not understood today- viewed through a Western lens.
- Traditionally sexual violence would have been severely punished- may involve payback.

- Skingroup/kinship systems very large.

### **TRADITIONAL PRACTICES TODAY**

- Diversity of levels of adherence to Traditional practices. The roles have been lost in some areas but not so much in others.
- The cultural governance including the governance of sexual relationships needs to have women involved.
- Culture can be misrepresented- turned into a rationale for behaviours. e.g. 'punishments'- using firestick wrong way (sexual assault) , promise brides against their will, and saying its culture.
- Community dealing with disclosures by bashing perpetrator- similar to traditional type of practices
- Attitudes to sexual violence are related to colonisation, not related to Traditional Aboriginal society. Sexual violence is not an acceptable part of Traditional culture
- A lot of Noongar people weren't brought up with traditional cultural practices like law, so talking about spiritual punishments are very scary things for people to talk about (in relation to spiritual sexual assaults) -speaking about it makes it happen to them.
- Skingroups not practiced as much in Noongar region- due to impact of colonisation.
- Bringing back some traditions could be positive. Positive affirmation of culture and self.

### **COLONISATION**

- Missions/cattle stations/institutions/ foster homes- Aboriginal people exposed to more sexual violence/ violence historically- women raped, men tortured. Conflict during colonisation- resistance.
- Aboriginal communities were dismantled through children being sent to missions, creation of reserves, acts and policies, break down of traditional governance systems- systems of care and control.
- Transgenerational trauma through the effects of colonisation and normalisation of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities is a result of this. Transgenerational trauma will take generations to heal. Similar to effects of the Holocaust. Exposure to ongoing trauma as well.
- Groups of people who have experience lots of trauma, violence, dispossession, colonisation- often results in increased sexual violence in communities.
- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people find it difficult to understand each other because of their very different experiences of colonisation and the separation that this process caused.
- Aboriginal men have lost their place in society as a result of colonisation- women still have a role as carers. Men's role is to protect their family and provide for them- but can't get a job, sense that White systems are against them- increased aggression by Aboriginal males.
- Aboriginal people are caught between two worlds- Aboriginal and White. Due to the impact of colonisation people don't maintain cultural practices and obligations
- Women's behaviour changes under the influence of colonisation from nudity being culturally acceptable to covering up.
- Racism is still prevalent and a regular occurrence.

- Lack of understanding by non-Aboriginal people why Aboriginal people are impacted- e.g. why don't you just get over it, it happened 200 years ago, why don't you just get a job.

## **COMMUNITY DYSFUNCTION**

- Past trauma from colonisation, policies and acts, along with transgenerational trauma, ongoing dysfunction and social problems =powerlessness for Aboriginal people. Need for healing from past traumas. Many Aboriginal people don't understand the impacts.
- Impact of ongoing racism- on people who already have low self-esteem, lack of confidence, difficulty with employment and housing. Small incidents can trigger off anger (micro-aggressions)
- Most Aboriginal people don't think they are valuable, having been told they are not worth anything since they were young (by wider society, by family/community). Therefore they have no incentive to act any differently
- Lateral violence/internalised oppression. Sexual violence is one expression of internalised oppression.
- Aboriginal people have turned on each other 'like a pack of dogs' - trying not to be the bottom of the heap- internalised oppression.
- Similarities between problems in dysfunctional Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families and communities.
- Some Aboriginal people's relationship to non-Aboriginal society parallel process to women in FDV situations, powerless so they don't leave/ can't change the situation.
- Dysfunctional families/communities are less protective- less supervision of children, intoxication (having functional family can be a protective factor)- lack of loving, empathic environment, not as caring towards others.
- People raised in dysfunctional environments have a different perspective on relationships.
- So much dysfunction it's hard to know where to start.
- Violence just a part of life- normalised.
- Same sex sexual assault in prisons not uncommon-related to power.
- Use of drugs and alcohol- way of coping with life.

**Appendix D: Details of interviewee and CRG communication regarding interviews and data analysis**

<b>Correspondence with research participants</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Participant RL</b>	
14.09.12	Interview with RL (at researcher's work)
10.10.12	Emailed to check transcripts
12.10.12	Email re transcript
11.11.12	Email reminder re transcript.
19.11.12	Email from RL re not read yet
19.11.12	Email suggesting options
14.01.13	Email re transcript typos
14.01.13	Email from RL confirmed transcript ok.
14.10.13	Email with data update
21.10.13	Email with data update
28.10.13	Email with data update
04.11.13	Email from RL re data update
19.12.13	Email with update
17.02.14	Email with data update
23.03.14	Email re ecological model and list of topics
17.04.14	Email with data update
02.06.14	Email with data update
14.06.14	Email with data update
<b>Participant FL</b>	
10.11.12	Interview with FL (at FL's home-Interview didn't record-notes taken)
30.11.12	Interview with FL (at FL's work)
13.12.12	Email sent with transcript for review.
11.2.13	Email to FL with transcript attached
13.2.13	Email from FL confirmed transcript ok.
14.10.13	Email with data update
21.10.13	Email with data update
22.10.13	Email from FL re data update
28.10.13	Email with data update
19.12.13	Email with update
17.02.14	Email with update
<b>Participant working in new role- now very busy</b>	
<b>Participant DB</b>	
26.10.12	Interview with DB (at researcher's work)
26.11.12	Email from DB confirmed transcript ok.
06.10.13	Email with data update
07.10.13	Email from DB re data update
14.10.13	Email with data update
21.10.13	Email with data update
28.10.13	Email with data update
19.12.13	Email with update
17.02.14	Email with data update
23.03.14	Email re ecological model and list of topics



17.04.14	Email with data update
02.06.14	Email with data update
14.06.14	Email with data update
<b>Participant ML</b>	
14.10.12	Interview with ML (at researcher's work)
4.11.12	Email sent with transcript for review.
14.10.13	Email with data update
21.10.13	Email with data update
28.10.13	Email with data update
19.12.13	Email with update
17.02.14	Email with data update
23.03.14	Email re ecological model and list of topics
17.04.14	Email with data update
02.06.14	Email with data update
14.06.14	Email with data update
<b>Participant JP</b>	
10.12.12	Interview with JP (at JP's work)
10.2.13	Email sent with transcript for review.
17.2.13	Email reminder re transcript.
12.4.13	Email reminder re transcript.
30.4.13	Email reminder re transcript.
13.6.13	Email reminder re transcript.
16.5.13	Email from JP confirmed transcript ok.
23.9.13	Email re research update
25.9.13	Email from JP re maternity leave
6.10.13	Email with data update
14.10.13	Email with data update
21.10.13	Email with data update
28.10.13	Email with data update
<b>JP on Maternity leave November 2013</b>	
<b>Participant CT</b>	
10.12.12	Interview with CT (at researcher's home)
27.12.12	Email from CT re reference
03.01.13	Email from CT confirmed transcript ok.
09.01.13	Email to CT re checking detail
09.01.13	Email from CT re checking detail
14.10.13	Email with data update
<b>Participant CT left job- sent hardcopy of data via friend with message with my contact details. No further contact</b>	
<b>Participant UV</b>	
29.11.12	Interview with UV (at UV's work)
29.11.12	Email thank you for interview
30.11.12	Email from UV re interview
04.1.12	Email reminder re transcript.
07.1.12	Email from UV confirmed transcript ok.
14.10.13	Email with data update
21.10.13	Email with data update
21.10.13	Email re catching up
28.10.13	Email with data update

19.12.13	Email with update
17.02.14	Email with data update
23.03.14	Email re ecological model and list of topics
17.04.14	Email with data update
02.06.14	Email with data update
14.06.14	Email with data update

<b>Correspondence with Critical Reference Group</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Subject</b>
25.11.11	Email update to CRG following return from leave of absence
22.03.12	Email to CRG re PhD converted to Masters
22.03.12	Automated email response CD on leave for 12 months
22.03.12	Email from DC re masters research update
26.03.12	Email to DC re WAAHEC and masters research update
10.06.12	Email to CRG to update re WAAHEC approval
11.06.12	Email from CS re updated participant information sheet
11.06.12	Email to CS acknowledging her email
26.06.12	Email to CRG re review of participant information sheet
06.07.12	Email to CRG re review of participant information sheet
09.07.12	Email from CS re interview and participant information sheet
17.07.12	Email to IC re participant information sheet
20.07.12	Email from IC re participant information sheet
20.07.12	Email to IC re participant information sheet
02.08.12	Email to CRG re updated participant information sheet
02.08.12	Email from US re updated participant information sheet
02.08.12	Email to US re updated semi-structured interview questions
02.08.12	Email from US re updated semi-structured interview questions
03.08.12	Email from IC re updated participant information sheet
06.08.12	Email from DC re feedback on participant information sheet
13.08.12	Email to DC re feedback on participant information sheet
2.09.12	Email to CRG re looking for interview subjects
7.12.12	Email to CRG re interview and transcript progress
29.07.13	Email to CRG re mind map
19.09.13	P/C and email with RW
06.10.13	Email to CRG re updated data
07.10.13	Email response from US
9.10.13	Email from KM
14.10.13	Email to CRG re updated data
14.10.13	Email response from RW
21.10.13	Email to CRG re updated data
21.10.13	Email feedback from RW
28.10.13	Email to CRG re updated data
4.11.13	Email response from IC
9.12.13	Email to CRG update re progress

<b>Correspondence with Critical Reference Group (continued)</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Subject</b>
21.01.14	Email feedback from RW re mind map
27.01.14	Meeting with RW to discuss research progress
17.02.14	Email to CRG re disclosure node analysis
23.03.14	Email to CRG with ecological model and list of topics
24.03.14	Email from RW re terminology & ecological model
27.03.14	Email to and from RW re above
27.03.14	Email to CRG with RW's feedback
17.04.14	Email to CRG re terminology
17.04.14	Email from CJ (previously CS) re terminology to CRG
17.04.14	Email from CJ re articles
17.04.14	Email from RW to CRG re terminology
18.04.14	Email to CRG re terminology
18.04.14	Email from CJ re terminology
18.04.14	Email to CJ re terminology
18.04.14	Email from CJ re terminology
18.04.14	Email to CJ re terminology
18.04.14	Email from RW re terminology
02.06.14	Email to CRG re discussions and findings
05.06.14	Email from RW re discussions and findings
05.06.14	Email to CJ re discussions and findings
07.06.14	Email from CJ re discussions and findings
07.06.14	Email to CJ re discussions and findings
10.06.14	Email from US re discussions and findings
10.06.14	Email to US re discussions and findings
10.06.14	Email to CRG re acknowledgements
11.06.14	Email from DC re acknowledgements
11.06.14	Email from US re acknowledgements
11.06.14	Email from CJ re acknowledgements
14.06.14	Facebook message to IC re acknowledgements
14.06.14	Text message to KM
14.06.14	Email to CRG re findings and discussion and acknowledgements
15.06.14	Email from RW re acknowledgement and findings

## **Appendix E: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2012) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies**

**Principle 1:** Recognition of the diversity and uniqueness of peoples, as well as of individuals, is essential.

**Principle 2:** The rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination must be recognised.

**Principle 3:** The rights of Indigenous peoples to their intangible heritage must be recognised.

**Principle 4:** Rights in the traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions of Indigenous peoples must be respected, protected and maintained.

**Principle 5:** Indigenous knowledge, practices and innovations must be respected, protected and maintained.

**Principle 6:** Consultation, negotiation and free, prior and informed consent are the foundations for research with or about Indigenous peoples.

**Principle 7:** Responsibility for consultation and negotiation is ongoing.

**Principle 8:** Consultation and negotiation should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed research.

**Principle 9:** Negotiation should result in a formal agreement for the conduct of a research project.

**Principle 10:** Indigenous people have the right to full participation appropriate to their skills and experiences in research projects and processes.

**Principle 11:** Indigenous people involved in research, or who may be affected by research, should benefit from, and not be disadvantaged by, the research project.

**Principle 12:** Research outcomes should include specific results that respond to the needs and interests of Indigenous people.

**Principle 13:** Plans should be agreed for managing use of, and access to, research results.

**Principle 14:** Research projects should include appropriate mechanisms and procedures for reporting on ethical aspects of the research and complying with these guidelines.

The complete guidelines are available at:

<http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/files/research/GERAIS.pdf>

## **Appendix F: Critical Reference Group Terms of Reference**

### **Terms of Reference for the Critical Reference Group for the research project “Urban Aboriginal women’s attitudes and beliefs towards sexual violence.”**

#### **Purpose of the Research Project**

The prevention of sexual violence from the perspective of many theorists relies on altering the attitudes and beliefs that the community holds towards it. Many sexual violence prevention programs address myths about sexual violence that are commonly held by the community. Despite the enormous attention directed towards sexual violence in Aboriginal communities in the last few years, very little information has been gathered about the beliefs that Aboriginal people hold about sexual violence. Yet sexual violence prevention education programs incorporate the “rape myths” that have been gleaned from American college student surveys.

This study seeks to elicit and explore the beliefs and attitudes towards sexual violence that are held by Aboriginal women in Perth, Western Australia, to increase knowledge and understanding of these beliefs. This in turn may facilitate culturally competent approaches to the primary prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities.

#### **Role of the Critical Reference Group**

A Critical Reference Group of Aboriginal people is essential to the process of this research.

The role of the Critical Reference Group (CRG) is to provide guidance and advice to the researcher in order to ensure the cultural safety of the researcher’s actions and the research process. The tasks of the CRG include, but are not limited to:

- Guide construction of interview questions.
- Provide advice relating to written material associated with the research provide information and advice about verbal and non-verbal communication with participants.
- Provide advice to develop guidelines for maintaining the confidentiality of participants i.e. suggest what sort of details from participants may be potentially identifiable.
- Provide feedback on the development of coding categories and themes.
- Provide clarification of cultural issues and guide the researcher in any way that the CRG consider will ensure “culturally safe” research.
- Provide assistance to the researcher to access potential subjects for the research study.
- Other advice and support the Critical Reference Group deems appropriate.

The **role of the researcher** in this reference group is to:

- Listen to the advice and suggestions given by members of the reference group.
- Respect the knowledge, lived experience and advice of the Reference Group members.
- Provide transparent reasons for decisions making processes affecting the research study process.

- Provide regular updates and information regarding the research study to members of the CRG.
- Provide non-confidential information about the research project as requested to members of the CRG.
- Provide due credit and formal acknowledgement regarding the input of the Reference Group in any publications relating to the research project.

## **Cultural Respect**

The Critical Reference Group supports cultural respect principles. Cultural respect is defined as the “recognition, protection and continued advancement of the inherent rights, cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples<sup>8</sup>.” Cultural Respect acknowledges the need to move beyond cultural awareness (i.e. knowledge about culture) to embodying attitudes and behaviours which Aboriginal people identify as important to themselves and their communities.

This includes:

- Acknowledgement of and respect for Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal ways of knowing: the research process will respectfully incorporate the cultural advice from members of the CRG and formally acknowledge their contributions in all publications related to the research project.
- This research project has an intersectional approach—“An intersectional approach takes into account the historical, social and political context and recognizes the unique experience of the individual based on the intersection of all relevant grounds<sup>9</sup>. The researcher and the CRG recognise the impact of racism, colonisation, genocide, transgenerational trauma, micro-aggressions<sup>10</sup> and ongoing trauma as contributing factors towards Aboriginal people’s current lives, which impact on how people form their attitudes and beliefs.
- Working together – the importance of partnerships and reciprocity. The researcher and CRG will work together in partnership.
- The researcher acknowledges power imbalances that are as a result of the researcher’s white privilege<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> (Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council - Standing Committee for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Working Party, 2004, p. 7)

<sup>9</sup> (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2001, p. 3)

<sup>10</sup> (Evans-Campbell, 2008)

<sup>11</sup> “White privilege refers to the advantages and benefits that White people generally, including White feminists, derive socially and economically, as a result of being White”(Hovane, 2007).

- The CRG and the researcher recognize that solutions to problems are already within communities. The research project hopes to broker solutions that already exist within Aboriginal communities.
- The research project has the intended outcome of directly benefiting Aboriginal people by informing sexual violence prevention education theory and practice within Aboriginal communities
- Accountability – reciprocal accountability between the researcher and the Critical Reference Group.

### **Confidentiality**

The researcher and the members of the Critical Reference Group agree to keep all information discussed within the CRG meetings relating to individual people's personal stories confidential, unless the information relates to the risk of immediate harm to another person or a child at risk.

### **Meeting frequency**

Meetings will be every 4-6 weeks. This may vary according to the CRG's wishes or under specific circumstances with the CRG's agreement.

### **Meeting duration**

Meetings will run for approximately 1 hour, unless agreed by CRG members.

### **Membership**

Membership is on a purely voluntary basis and members are free to withdraw their services at any time.

Current Membership consists of:

Dorinda Cox: Manager, Indigenous Healing Project.

Cazz Schmidt: Department of Child Protection, Laverton.

Cheryl Davis: Senior Lecturer, Gunada, Curtin University.

Polly Dann: Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Sexual Assault Resource Centre.

Kathy Mocaraka: Manager, Anawim Women's Refuge.

Ursula Swan: Senior Workforce Development Officer, Aboriginal BBV Prevention Capacity Building Project, Aboriginal Alcohol & Other Drugs Program, Drug and Alcohol Office.

Margaret Gidgup: Health Service Manager, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service

Robyn Davis: Project Coordinator, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service

Ingrid Cumming: HR Employment Support Officer, Central Institute of Technology

Judi McGlynn (the researcher, Masters of Public Health student, Curtin University).

Additional members may be identified by the researcher or CRG members and invited with the agreement of the CRG. Sub-reference groups on specific issues may be formed with different membership, for specific purposes at the suggestion of and with the agreement of the CRG and the researcher.



**Minutes**

The researcher will keep minutes of the meeting and distribute these to CRG participants and her supervisors. The minutes are not for distribution outside of the CRG and university supervisors without the agreement of the researcher and the CRG.

If meetings are audio recorded (with the permission of those in attendance), the recording will be made available only to those CRG members present at the meeting and the researcher. The audio recording/s will be stored securely for 5 years after the end of the research project after which time, they will be destroyed.

**Review**

These Terms of Reference are subject to review as discussed by the CRG and the researcher.

## **Appendix G: Sexual violence services for participants**

### **Counselling and other support resources**

Sometimes talking to someone about sensitive topics can bring up issues that we thought we had dealt with in the past, or didn't know would affect us. If you feel that you would like to seek some more support for you or someone you know, there are some services listed on this page that could be useful.

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### **Yorgum Family Counselling service ph 9218 9477/ 1800 469 371 or 9221 2733**

Yorgum aims to offer Aboriginal people an autonomous, Aboriginal specific community based, counselling and referral service that acknowledges the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people. Yorgum provides an environment to enhance the healing process for Aboriginal individuals and their families experiencing emotional distress, and working towards empowerment collectively and individually. At all times, Yorgum operates within the framework of Aboriginal terms of reference.

### **Yorgum Services**

- Child Sexual Abuse Treatment Service and Aboriginal Children Experiencing Family Violence
- Family Violence Advocacy & Counselling Program
  - One-on-one counselling
  - Family violence counselling - (When Available)
  - Grief and loss counselling
  - Sexual assault counselling
  - Crisis/Trauma resolution
  - Relationship counselling
  - Aboriginal identity counselling
  - Specialised cultural therapeutic practises

### **Link-Up Service**

Works with Aboriginal people who have been removed by past government policies and practices. We provide a reunion,-family tracing for Stolen Generations

### **Building Solid Families-Mental Health and suicide counselling**

Yorgum offers a unique team consisting of counselors, workforce support officers and caseworkers. The target group are Aboriginal children, male and female individuals and families.

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### **Sexual Assault Resource Centre (SARC):**

SARC provides a service to males and females over the age of 13 years who have been the victim of sexual violence. SARC is a free and confidential service.

Services include:

#### **For past (more than 2 weeks ago) sexual assault or sexual abuse:**

Emergency telephone counselling between 8.30am-11 pm **(08)9340 1828**

The SARC face-to-face counselling Monday to Friday 8.30-5pm, phone and speak to the Duty Officer during the above hours to discuss counselling on **9340 1828**.  
duty officer can also provide information and support.

#### **For sexual abuse or assault within the last 2 weeks:**

A 24hr Emergency service for people who have experienced a sexual assault within the last 2 weeks and would like to have a medical or forensic examination and counselling support. 24 Hour Emergency Line 08 9340 1828 or 1800 199 888 (freecall from landlines)

An Aboriginal Liaison Officer is available to support Aboriginal people if they wish during business hours.

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### **Child Protection Unit - Princess Margaret Hospital**

Medical, forensic and counselling services are available for children who have experienced recent sexual abuse.

Telephone advice is available to people who are concerned about a child under the age of 16 who is at risk of current harm.

**Ph 9340 8222**

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### **Crisis Care**

24 hr Emergency service for people in crisis, including domestic violence, child abuse and suicide counselling ph **(08) 9223 1111** or **1800 199 008** (country freecall)

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### **Anglicare Relationship Services (KinWay) Reception**

**Ph 9263 2050** (Head office) to find the office closest to you.

Kinway provide a range of services including relationship counselling, domestic violence services and children's counselling services.

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### **Centrecare (Catholic Church)**

**Ph (08) 9325 6644** (Main office for information about programs)

Provides specialised social services, especially in the area of marriage and family services, including counselling, support and mediation. Includes a range of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal services.

## **Appendix H: Semi-structured interview questions**

### **Questions to guide semi-structured interviews**

These questions are meant to serve as prompts to the interviewer to make sure all the information needed for the research is discussed, however, how or if they are asked will depend on the participant and researcher's interaction. Some questions may not be relevant to some participants depending on their answer to earlier questions.

Research about sexual violence informs sexual violence prevention and much of the available research has largely been done in the form of questionnaires which include a list of attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence. The questionnaires often ask people to indicate how much they believe an attitude or belief applies to them. The questions are used to prompt the interviewer are based on the sorts of questions asked in a range of "rape myth" questionnaires and beliefs about sexual that are documented in the literature.

Underneath each question is an explanation of why that question may be asked. This list of questions won't be given to the participants unless they ask for it, as the interview is not meant to be totally structured and going off in a different direction from the questions asked may provide data that is very valuable.

#### **1. In your opinion what do you think rape or sexual assault is?**

People have different ideas about what sexual assault is. It is important for the researcher to understand what participants define as sexual assault to make sure the researcher and participants are yarning about the same thing.

#### **2. In your opinion what do you think child sexual abuse is?**

This question is being asked to make sure the researcher understands the participant's point of view.

#### **3. Can you tell me what you believe causes or makes people sexually assault or abuse others?**

Research has focussed on certain attitudes towards women, gender role stereotyping, acceptance of violence against women and cultures that believe that males are most important, as contributing to an overall patriarchal society that allows or at least does not discourage sexual violence. This question is designed to see what beliefs participants have about the causes of sexual violence.

#### **4. In your opinion, how do you think people who sexually abuse or assault others can be stopped?**

This question aims to expand on the question about the causes of sexual violence and provides information on what the participants think are appropriate responses to sexual violence.

#### **5. Tell me a bit about what you think some of the problems with sexual violence are in Aboriginal communities?**

This question is designed explore the general context for sexual violence in Aboriginal communities from the participant's perspective. For example, how frequently or how prevalent the participant believes sexual violence is, whether there are problems because of specific community characteristics, issues that relate to how sexual violence is managed.

**6. In your opinion do you think these problems are similar or different to mainstream communities?**

This question is designed to explore whether there are perceived differences in the nature, prevalence or other factors in Aboriginal communities compared to non-Aboriginal communities.

**7. In the instance of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities, what do you believe the cause of sexual violence is in Aboriginal communities?**

This question is for exploring participant's beliefs about the causes of sexual violence, specific to Aboriginal communities. It may be unnecessary to ask this question if participants have indicated their thoughts on this issue earlier in the interview.

**8. What do you think need to be done to prevent sexual violence in Aboriginal communities?**

This question is designed to prompt discussion about what the participant believes will assist in prevention of sexual violence in Aboriginal communities. It may be unnecessary to ask this question if participants have indicated their thoughts on this issue earlier in the interview.

**9. Throughout your lifetime, has any Aboriginal person shared their experience of sexual violence with you? Can you tell me a bit more about that?**

The aim of this question is for the interviewer to develop an understanding of how prevalent the participants believe sexual violence is but also to build a picture of other Aboriginal people's experiences through their eyes. It also helps to explore the participant's attitudes and beliefs about sexual violence in more detail, building on answers to questions 1-8.

**10. In your opinion do you think there are times that women cause or encourage sexual assault?**

It may be unnecessary to ask this question if participants have indicated their thoughts on this issue within the interview.

In research about myths about sexual violence there are commonly held myths across many different societies and culture which blame women for sexual assault because of the way they behave (e.g. where they go, what they wear and what they do), these myths also reduce the perpetrator's responsibility for sexual assault. Many education programs about sexual violence feature "myth-busting". This question is designed to see if this myth is relevant to participants.

**11. In your opinion do you think there are times when children cause or encourage sexual abuse?**

It may be unnecessary to ask this question if participants have indicated their thoughts on this issue within the interview.

This question is similar to the one above- many societies hold myths which blame children and/or excuse perpetrators for child sexual abuse. As many sexual violence prevention programs feature myth busting, it is important to see if this issue is relevant to participants.