

**TURN UP THE VOLUME!**  
2024 Australian Elder Abuse Conference

**22-24 July 2024**  
Adelaide Convention Centre



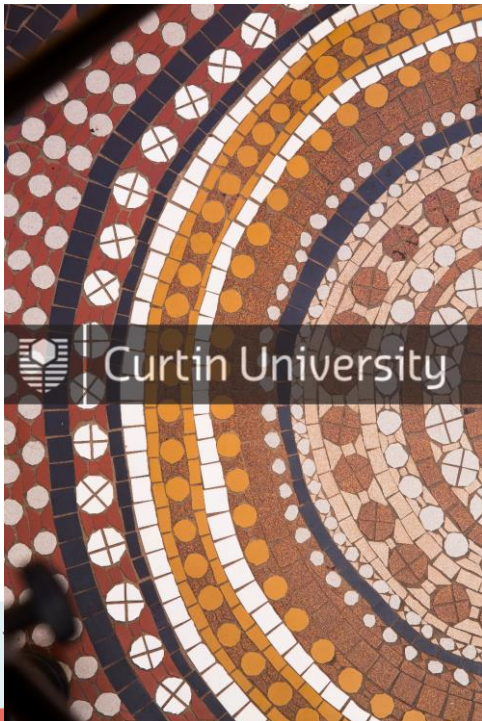
# Australian Elder Abuse Conference

## Exploring Rural/Remote Service Responses to Mistreatment of Older Aboriginal People



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Curtin School of Allied Health

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We acknowledge the Kurna people of South Australia and Whadjuk Noongar Boodja where Curtin University is situated and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of all First Nations people. We pay respect to Elders and Senior Knowledge holders for their contributions to our communities, culture and Country. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded and that it always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

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# Mistreatment of Older Aboriginal People

- It is more culturally appropriate to refer to it as 'mistreatment' (OPA, 2005)
- Prevalence of mistreatment of older Aboriginal people appears disproportionality high (18%; Boldy et al., 2005).
- Specific types experienced may include: humbugging (financial abuse), caring expectations with no financial/emotional support, forced houselessness, overcrowding and not being allowed in shelters (Roe & O'Hara, 2022)



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## Background

- Mistreatment of older Aboriginal people in rural and remote areas is under-researched
- There are specific considerations related to cultural, social and historical factors may serve as barriers or enablers for service access
- Social Work Honours project built on previous and contemporary work (Blundell & Warren, 2019; Boldy et al., 2005; Darwin Community Legal Service, 2018; Kimberly Birds, 2020; Office of the Public Advocate (WA), 2005; Roe & O'Hara, 2022; Warren & Blundell, 2018a, 2018b)
- Previous literature recommended organisations embed understandings of Aboriginal cultural practices in their service, including cultural obligations of reciprocity and resource sharing within family networks (Kaspiew et al., 2016; Kimberly Birds, 2020)
- May be difficult for service providers to differentiate mistreatment from cultural obligations at times (Kaspiew et al., 2016)

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## Service Barriers in Rural and Remote WA



- Geographical isolation: lack of services and unsuitable urban-centric models of service provision (Warren & Blundell, 2018b)
- Diversity of Aboriginal communities in different geographical locations – difficulty generalising research (Kaspiew et al., 2016)
- Racism (Government of South Australia, undated)
- Reluctance to engage due to historical mistreatment by statutory authorities (Government of South Australia, undated)
- Lack of culturally appropriate responses (OPA, 2005)

(unknown, u.d.)

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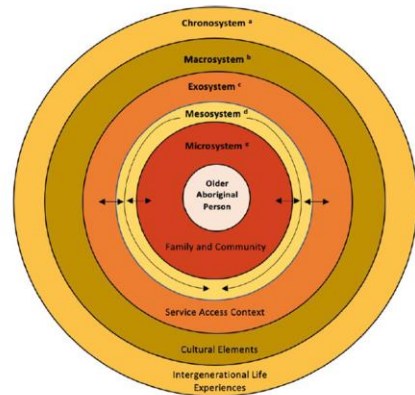
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## Research Aim

To explore staff experiences of working within services that respond to mistreatment of older Aboriginal people in rural and remote WA, highlighting potential service response improvements that align with existing cultural safety frameworks:

- Department for Child Protection and Family Support (2016)
- Department of Health (2019)
- Golan & Stacey (2021)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association (2016)
- NT Health (2016)
- Wungening Aboriginal Corporation (undated)

Application of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory to Study Context



(Pitts, 2022, p. 6)

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## Research Process and Participant Demographics

Exploratory sequential mixed-methods:

- Phase 1: anonymous survey (n=15)
- Phase 2: interviews with staff (n=5)

Inclusion criteria:

- work within a service that supported or responded to older Aboriginal people experiencing mistreatment in rural or remote WA within the past 6 months.

Mistreatment witnessed last 12 months:

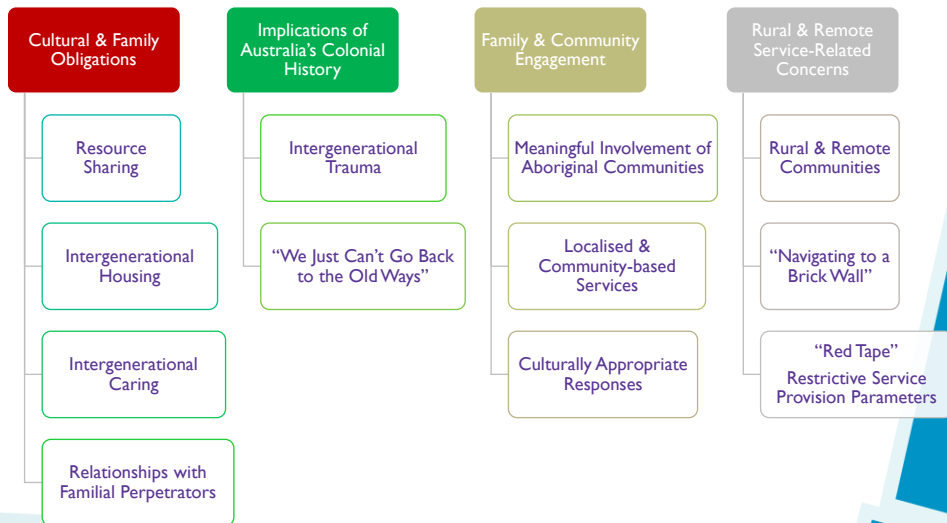
- 2-5 incidents – 60% (n=9)
- 6-10 incidents – 26.7% (n=4)
- 11-20 incidents – 6.7% (n=1)
- 20+ incidents - 6.7% (n=1)

Participant Demographics	Survey (n=15; no data=4)	Interviews (n=5)
Gender		
Female	10	
Male	1	
Culture		
Caucasian	7	
Aboriginal	4	
Sector		
Advocacy	4	1
Legal	2	-
Health	4	2
Govt.	3	1
Casework	2	1
Capacity		
Frontline	13	
Location		
Metropolitan town	1	-
Rural town	2	-
Remote community	6	2
Very Remote	2	3



## Findings

### Themes and Sub-Themes

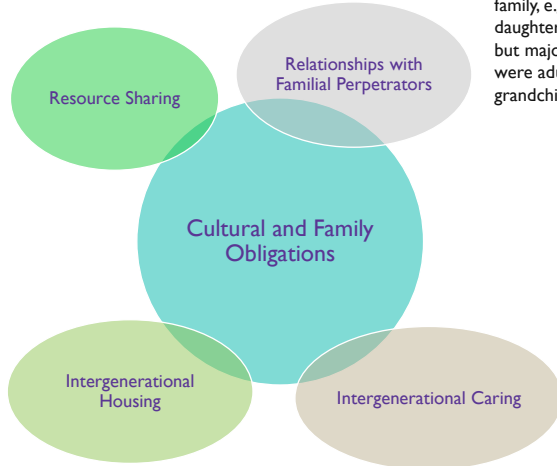


## Cultural and Family Obligations

*The Elders actually like to pay the bills...it's their capacity to pay the bills that is a barrier. Because the electricity bill goes up, the air conditioning is used, and the food is being eaten that they've bought out of their money. They're left with no money to buy more food. The co-dependency on all these families and their culture – 'what's mine is yours', it is a wonderful system, but it's not that system now. (Tahnee)*

Survey Respondent 5:

*...cultural obligations with family can lead to household overcrowding, due to the older people being forced to have various family members living in their houses.*

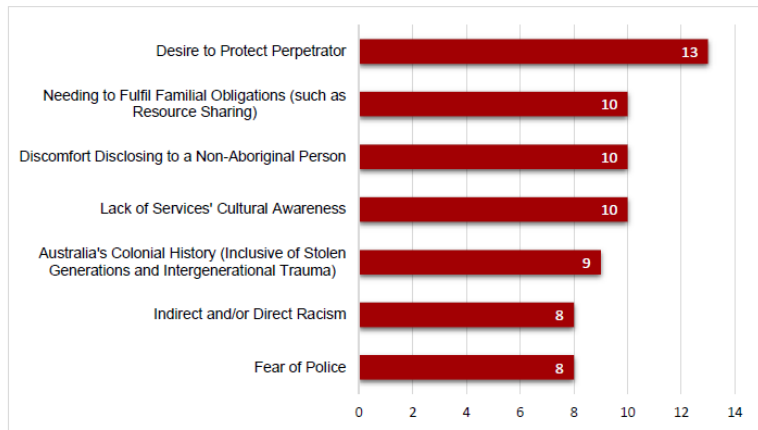


Relative perpetrators not necessarily close family, e.g. cousins, daughter/in-law's family, but majority examples were adult children and grandchildren

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### Additional Barriers to Service Access for Older Aboriginal People Experiencing Mistreatment

(n=13)



Note. Respondents were encouraged to select all applicable options for this question

(Pitts, 2022, p. 16)

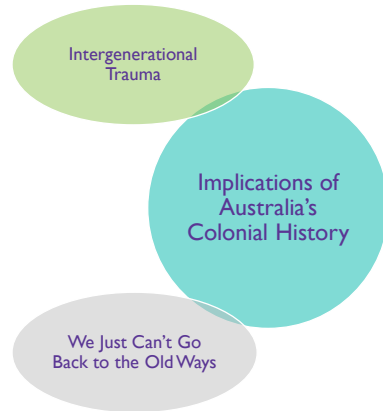
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# Implications of Australia's Colonial History

## Patterns of Intergenerational Trauma

*I've worked a lot with women, particularly older Aboriginal women...and they experienced physical abuse and coercive control from their children...And that was a replication of patterns of domestic and family violence they had grown up with. (Maali)*

*...the Redress money came in and families were hounding him...And then it's gone...there's no Redress money. And we don't want to go back to the old ways... We can't control the money because that's not right... But we need to find some way of [protecting him]. (Tahnee)*

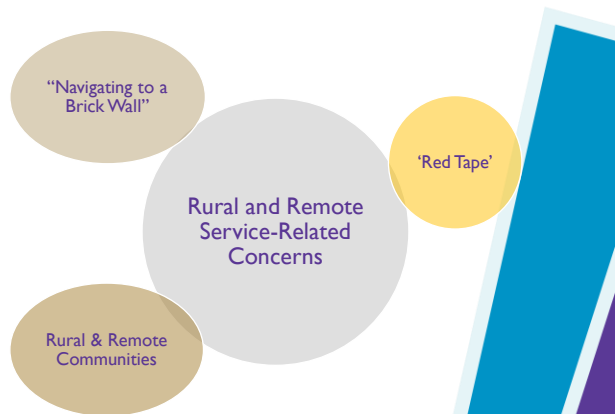


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# Rural and Remote Service-Related Concerns

*Every time I've tried to call the services...they just don't have the staff...by the time we go through the whole process of referring someone...to then to turn around and say, "I'm sorry, there's nothing that we can offer you"... We're not really helping them. (Clarise)*

*They will make an appointment at 10 o'clock, but if someone pulls up with a car and says, "I'm going down the shop, do you want to come?" That might be their only opportunity... So, they just go and not think about how that's walking on to the service. (Tahnee)*



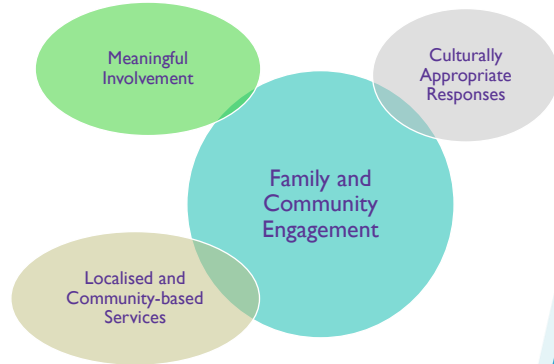
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# Family and Community Engagement

*I would go out with [worker], who's an Elder employed within the organisation. She would just come with me, and sort of stand back and yarn... If you're like, "Oh I went to so and so's place, but I can't find them"... She would go "Yeah, try over there and if she's not [there], she'll be at sister one's..." (Clarise)*

*...you need to either be based there [community] or you need to have a significant period of time where community get to know you...so if there are concerns, they feel they can trust you enough to talk to you about them. (Isla)*

4 interview participants and 6 survey respondents did not refer to cultural frameworks often, though elements were embedded in their work



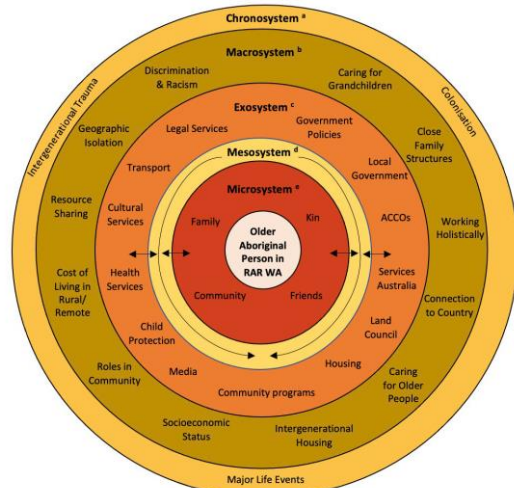
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## Findings mapped to Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Model

(Pitts, 2022, p. 56)

# Key Findings

- An understanding of intergenerational experiences and cultural obligations of older Aboriginal people must underpin practice.
- Service delivery models must be flexible and appropriately resourced.
- Consultation and co-design with community and ACCOs are fundamental to success.
- Whilst cultural safety frameworks are often not formally referred to, service providers identified elements of these as essential to appropriate service responses.



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