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Understanding the experiences and supporting the challenges of Aboriginal-identified statutory child protection caseworkers in New South Wales

Thesis submitted by

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A thesis submitted to fulfil the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Social Sciences

In the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

The University of Sydney

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Statement of originality

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any other form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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Declaration on Ethics

The research presented in this thesis was conducted in accordance with approval granted by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), reference number EO295-20210831, including oversight by an Aboriginal supervisory team and an Aboriginal consultation panel.

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Abstract

The social historical context of the statutory child protection system is fraught with challenges in reducing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples engaged in child protection systems, and the associated challenges in ensuring appropriate Aboriginal staffing and improving a system which can better meet Aboriginal peoples' needs. It is hypothesised that there is a need to better understand the experiences and supports needed for Aboriginal child protection practitioners to improve recruitment and retention of staff within statutory child protection. There has been a significant lack of research about the experiences, wellbeing and support needs of Aboriginal statutory child protection practitioners.

This study relies on the lived experiences and insights shared by the participants to understand and answer the primary research question: "How can we understand the experiences and better support the challenges of Aboriginal-identified statutory child protection caseworkers in New South Wales?" The research design was underpinned by Critical Race Theory and decolonisation frameworks, viewing the participants as the experts of their own experience.

Data was collected through the application of a survey tool and semi-structured interviews for 33 participants. The research was guided by three main aims: to explore the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners, to better understand the challenges of the Aboriginal child protection caseworker role, and to learn about participant views of culturally responsive methods of support for Aboriginal child protection caseworkers. The research findings informed the development of a creative piece and a supervision prompt guide.

The outcome of this study generates new knowledge on how the workplace culture, practice and systems within the statutory child protection agency has impacted upon the engagement and experiences of Aboriginal practitioners, as a basis for supporting future research.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research explores the experiences of Aboriginal identified child protection caseworkers¹ working within the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) government statutory child protection welfare agency and develops an understanding about how staff can be supported in their role. The study design is mixed method, including qualitative interviews and a survey with qualitative and quantitative questions. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the aims and objectives of the research, and overview of the background, context and significance and urgency of the research.

This project will result in three key outcomes: 1) a doctoral thesis; 2) a resource guide that can be used to support consultation processes and supervision sessions involving Aboriginal child protection staff; and 3) a creative digital story.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to better comprehend the unique experiences of Aboriginal identified child protection workers in NSW, as opposed to the role of a generalist (non-Aboriginal identified) caseworker or that of other culturally diverse child protection staff. This research aims to understand the unique challenges which may exist for Aboriginal identified child protection staff working for Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). The research data and resources developed, given that they are developed in NSW, will be for specific use in NSW child protection

¹ The term 'Aboriginal identified casework staff' refers to the casework staff employed by the New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice who have been recruited for an Aboriginal identified child protection caseworker position or identify as an Aboriginal caseworker employed by the Department of Communities and Justice – child protection field. Torres Strait Islanders are not expected to be recruited as part of this project.

services. Project outcomes will identify strategies to improve the ways that Aboriginal child protection staff can be better supported in their role.

There are four objectives of the research:

- 1) To identify the support needs for Aboriginal identified child protection staff working with other Aboriginal people and communities in NSW.
- 2) To clarify how Aboriginal identified child protection caseworkers view the challenges they experience in their role and ways that child protection processes and systems support them (or could be further developed to improve support to them).
- 3) To develop a resource that could be utilised by DCJ non-Aboriginal identified managers and caseworkers to cultivate cultural competency and sensitivity as well as to provide guidance and support to Aboriginal child protection staff within their role. This is expected to be a resource guide that can be used to support consultation processes and supervision sessions involving Aboriginal child protection staff.
- 4) To develop a digital story based upon the interviews and data provided by participants with their consents, for the purpose of meeting the Doctorate degree course criteria and to add another layer of communicating the experiences of the Aboriginal child protection caseworkers/ practitioners.

The research design is primarily exploratory qualitative research using semi-structured interviews and utilising some quantitative methodology as part of the survey. This design is selected because the project is focused on the social and relational relevance of the research. The research seeks to understand how social experience is created and given meaning by Aboriginal-identified caseworkers working in statutory child protection. Within the scope of this research, data collection through surveys and interviews with the participants is imperative in understanding their personal and professional views around the challenges experienced.

The reason that surveys and interviews are being utilised as a method for understanding the participants' experiences is in support of the new approaches to framing Indigenous research, which are an alternative to the traditional and dominant Anglo-research paradigms. These alternatives are further outlined below and need to be considered to ensure cultural appropriateness and that the voice of Aboriginal peoples is upheld (White, 2010)

The three overarching research questions which this research aims to understand from the participants involved in this study are:

- What are the experiences and challenges experienced by Aboriginal identified caseworkers working in statutory child protection agencies?
- How does the system and agency support Aboriginal staff within their role as an Aboriginal identified caseworker?
- What can they suggest or recommend as to how the system/ agency can better support Aboriginal identified caseworkers with the challenges of their role?

1.3 Positionality statement

This research study is undertaken by Susan Carrasco (hereafter referred to as 'Researcher') for her doctoral degree in social sciences. Susan is a multicultural Australian who has had over 15 years of experience working with Aboriginal identified caseworkers, colleagues, Aboriginal families and communities. Within Susan's employment with DCJ, she has been in supervisory roles for over 10 years working with teams who have assigned Aboriginal identified caseworkers.

Susan's professional experiences has prompted the desire to understand the challenges experienced by Aboriginal identified caseworkers (Aboriginal practitioners) and how to improve the systems and strategies in place to provide better support, given how valuable Aboriginal colleagues are to the field of statutory child protection practice. The researcher has been

motivated to understand how managers may understand how to better provide support to Aboriginal caseworkers that they supervise.

This study arose from the researcher's desire to better support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners with whom she has worked with throughout the years in the child protection field. The intention of this research is to contribute to the knowledge and literature pertaining to the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection practitioners and lays a foundation for further research.

The opinions made by the researcher and participants of this research paper do not represent the opinion, position or policy of DCJ.

Chapter 2: Background theoretical lens and literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will develop an understanding of some of the cultural constructs in relation to child protection welfare systems relevant to Aboriginal peoples in Australia. The theoretical frameworks guiding conceptualisation of this research will further be identified through the review of applicable research and literature. This chapter will examine the supports that currently exist for Aboriginal identified caseworkers and how these supports might be improved. In order to do so, the following will be explored:

- a) the cultural inequities and issues that can create cultural dangers and challenges for Aboriginal identified statutory child protection workers;
- b) the current constraints that impact child protection work with Aboriginal families and communities; and
- c) the three key theoretical frameworks that form the lens to approach this thesis including: Critical Race Theory (CRT), anti-racist perspectives, Aboriginal wellbeing, and decolonisation constructs.

2.2 Literature review of Australian research

The literature review made evident that there was minimal paralleled research specifically relating to Aboriginal caseworkers within statutory child protection agencies in Australia. Instead, literature was more broadly related to the experiences of general child protection caseworkers or Aboriginal child protection caseworkers inclusive of non-government sectors.

The most similar research in Australia was that of Oates (2018), which drew upon information obtained from 13 participants who had been previous employees / practitioners for the Queensland (QLD) statutory child protection agency, known as 'The Department of Communities,

Child Safety and Disability Services' (DCSSDS). Oates' research identified practice barriers in contemporary statutory child protection systems that may contribute to the disproportionate representation of Indigenous children in the statutory child protection system.

The most relevant Australian based research for this study further outlined, which is useful to contextualise the current research conducted, related to relevant child protection systems and practice themes. The themes for relevant Australian research included: 1) the role of social work within the historic forcible removal of Aboriginal children, genocide within the racism of child protection practice; and, 2) contemporary child protection systems and practice impacting Aboriginal peoples.

2.2.1 Historic racist child protection practice within the forcible removal of Aboriginal children

The history of child protection practice is a significant consideration when reviewing the experiences and understanding the support needs of Aboriginal identified child protection practitioners. There are continued impacts, trauma and perceptions caused as a result of historical forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families. The first Australian child protection system was based upon the enactment of policies that resulted in the removal of Aboriginal children, a practice that functioned as an "instrument of social control" (Bennett, 2013, p. 19). Child protection practitioners or social workers were perceived as being a significant part of the dispossession and oppression of Aboriginal peoples (Bennett, 2013). This impacts upon the views regarding the role that child protection practitioners have today within the child protection system. This is also supported by Aboriginal Australian research conducted by Menzies and Gilbert (2013), which emphasises that the first removal of Aboriginal children from their families was a result of implementing racialised policies which valued and privileged White and non-Aboriginal perspectives above Aboriginal voices and views.

Arguably, this past history has perpetuated fear and suspicion towards social workers within the current government and child protection system. In the research of Harms and colleagues (2011), there is the acknowledgement of the impact that still exists today regarding the deep distrust and scepticism by Aboriginal peoples regarding the child protection system and its practitioners. This analysis is aligned with Zon and colleagues (2004), who identify that there can be a viewpoint from Aboriginal communities and families that even Aboriginal child protection practitioners are aligned with the White government agency and be perceived as collaborators with the state, and in turn traitors to their own culture and peoples.

2.2.2 Contemporary Child protection systems and practice impacting Aboriginal peoples

In most available reviews and research, there is a resounding and consistent critique which identifies the lack of culturally inclusive or safe practice, systems and policies within the current child protection system (Bennett, 2013; Briskman, 2014; Lewis & Burton, 2014; Lonne et al., 2008). Research indicates that there continues to be a lack of understanding of the ways in which historical trauma presents within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the ongoing impact upon child protection agencies' inability to engage in culturally competent practice, processes and system structures which considers the implication of that trauma today (Atkinson, 2002; Bessarab & Crawford, 2013; Harms et al., 2011; Menzies & Gilbert, 2013). Furthermore, it is understood that by developing Indigenous models and frameworks within the statutory child protection systems, that there would be an increase of responsiveness and cultural safety (Creamer et al., 2022).

There are significant concerns which continue to be raised regarding the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children continuing to be removed from their families and communities (Bessarab & Crawford, 2013; Funston & Herring, 2016; Stanley et al., 2003). This is further supported by the noted 3.7 % increase of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children entering statutory out-of-home-care (OOHC) since 2019 according to the statistics from Closing the Gap information repository, socio economic area 12 by (The Australian Government Productivity Commission 2023).

Haskell and Randall (2009) suggest that practice with Aboriginal children and communities needs to better address trauma through a framework that explicitly attends to and integrates an analysis of social context, including the social relations of inequality—race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, sexuality, abilities and disabilities. There is the perspective that the traditional trauma framework currently being used is not broad enough to capture and consider the complexities of Aboriginal people's trauma experiences (Haskell and Randall, 2009). It is argued by Newton (2019) that the policy and practice of organisations needs to acknowledge and address the impact of trauma in shaping the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples.

There are some initiatives and practice changes being made by Queensland Government's Child protection agency 'The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services' (DCSSDS) to improve cultural inclusivity. Some of these initiatives include employment of cultural practice advisors, staff engagement in the 'starting the journey' i-learn training modules, staff engagement in the 'Our journey, My story' resource, and availability of cross cultural workshops, which are referred to in the Queensland government, Child Safety Practice manual (2024).

There have been similar practice changes and innovations evident in NSW DCJ. This includes the implementation of Aboriginal identified/ specific casework specialist roles, as there were already Aboriginal identified casework consultant positions and Aboriginal reference groups established. There has been the commencement of a variety of projects initiated by the Aboriginal outcomes unit based upon the recommendations of the Family Is Culture report (FIC) focused at improving processes and systems which directly contribute to outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. These changes include reviewing assessment tools such as Child Protection Assessment Safety and Risk Assessment Tool (SARA), alternate assessment and restoration tools, training and career pathways for Aboriginal students, reviewing induction and ongoing cultural training available to staff. The main ways of working with Aboriginal communities is also outlined in the DCJ NSW government community inclusion page on their website in 2024.

2.3 Review of international research

International research provided valuable insight and context regarding the experiences, challenges and support needs for child protection / child welfare practitioners in various countries that similarly have faced issues within their welfare systems and services for Indigenous families and communities. These countries share similar concerns across their child protection systems internationally, with researchers identifying a need to strengthen the health and social frameworks in a way that is Indigenous designed and led, with similar challenges to Australia given the historical context of having previously been led by White child protection services (Dobbs, 2021).

A way of increasing an Indigenous-led child protection system is through the development of culturally appropriate policies and practices (Haight et al., 2018). Some of the limitations identified within child protection systems to enable a more culturally responsive service is through the investment in Indigenous staff and leadership (Haight et al., 2018), discussed further in Chapter 2. Research by Canadian social work academics Nikolova and colleagues (2017) provide context to the barriers for such change, which include complex reasons such as lack of time, resources and support that hinder child protection training from actually improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples. They urge the welfare system to implement new and innovative ways of thinking.

Haight and colleagues (2018) identify the challenges within the North American public child welfare system, specifically continued racism, mistrust, and disconnect from culturally responsive practice. These issues have created challenges within the welfare system from both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous practitioners. It is believed that only by addressing these cultural inadequacies in the system, that there will be a direct correlation to improving outcomes for Indigenous families and communities.

There is a similar shared view by Love (2002) who highlights the experience shared by Māori practitioners in statutory child protection agencies in New Zealand. The Māori workers perceived that there was significant stigma regarding working within and following the constructs of their

statutory welfare systems, which was often viewed negatively by their whānau, hapū, iwi and communities. It was evident in Love's (2002) research that the perception of Indigenous – Maori workers being traitors to their own people by doing the work that was previously done by White social workers was a challenge faced by the practitioners.

2.4 Research regarding methodology approaches

It is hypothesised that a culturally appropriate method for understanding cultural specific practice draws from the expertise, the insight and experience of Aboriginal identified child protection workers. In actively engaging in meaningful consultation directly with Aboriginal peoples, this can provide relevant analysis and review of the measures of support within an organisation and system. Libesman (2007) expresses the importance of self-determination of Aboriginal people as part of assessing the progress and delivery of changes to child protection services and practice for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

The history of research pertaining to Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal land has been contentious and has built resentment, given that it was predominantly conducted without permission, inclusion or consultation with Aboriginal peoples themselves, up until recently (Wilson, 2008). The first example of this in Australia, was evident in the false declarations of Captain Cook upon his invasion, referring to Aboriginal peoples in his findings as 'objects of curiosity' (Martin, 2003, p. 1). Therefore it is imperative to acknowledge an awareness of what the competing interests are between the government inextricably linked to injustice and colonisation, the white constructs of research itself, to the tension created for Aboriginal peoples who are being engaged in the research. There has been a growing understanding of decolonising methodologies and critique of the Western modes of research since the 1990's (Kurtz, 2013). Moreton-Robison (2013) expresses the risk of research being used to control a particular discourse which privileges authority.

As a way of attempting to privilege and value Aboriginal perspectives in this research, I ensured the consideration of colonial historical research in the context of striving not to perpetuate

colonial inequality. I strived to frame the research from the lens of the 'Aboriginal paradigm', which not only considers decolonising methodologies, but further ensures overarching cultural governance through supervision, cultural consultation, Aboriginal specific ethical practice review, within the research process (Moreton-Robinson, 2013). I considered the risks of racist paradigms in this research, which is where the cultural consultation in every part of the research process to ensure that there was culturally appropriate avenues for hearing and capturing the voice of Aboriginal participants was paramount in upholding self-determination of Aboriginal peoples as supported in the research of Krakouer, Tan & Parolini (2021).

2.5 Theoretical approach and theories guiding conceptualisation

This research will extend on knowledge to improve sustainability for Aboriginal identified caseworkers in terms of workforce capacity within the statutory child protection system. It will explore this from the lens of the experiences and supports for Aboriginal identified child protection caseworkers working for the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) in New South Wales. The issue of workforce capacity and the need to actively recruit, train and support specific Indigenous practitioners are matters raised in a range of reviews of child protection systems such as the Research Centre for Children and Families (2023), The Northern Territory (2010), and Wood (2008). There is, however, limited research available that focuses on the experience of Aboriginal child protection caseworkers working specifically in statutory child protection agencies.

Additionally, there is limited research available that communicates the perspectives of Aboriginal identified child protection workers regarding strategies which can be implemented to provide better support. It is important to understand and hear within this research, specifically from Aboriginal identified child protection workers their ideas in terms of support needs and strategies, as part of being able to ensure that decolonising welfare systems is driven from Aboriginal people to enable meaningful and sustained change as identified in the research of Menzies (2013) and Libesman (2004).

Oates (2018) conducted research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection staff in Queensland (QLD). She outlined potential solutions offered by practitioners in her research, including: a) the inclusion of cultural supervision for non-Indigenous practitioners; b) training for non-Aboriginal-identified caseworkers, regarding cultural safety and Aboriginal history; and c) further forms of developing support groups/supervision for Aboriginal identified caseworkers. These suggested solutions were viewed as significant to supporting the trauma experienced by Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers and increasing cultural safety within child protection practice. The trauma referred to in this thesis refers primarily to psychological trauma specifically, however, in light of the historic impacts of the past brutality of colonisation the detrimental physical and physiological trauma and impacts need to be acknowledged in the scope of individual Aboriginal wellbeing. Psychological trauma is identified as experiences of severe distress resulting from events that challenge the emotional capacity of a person to process it (Ford, 2013).

The research of Oates (2018) highlighted the issue of tokenistic inclusion of experienced Aboriginal-identified child protection practitioners in practice reform, identified as a critical error of successive governments. It is envisaged that this current research will extend and build upon the knowledge already established in the research of Oates (2018). The distinction between the research of Oates (2018) and this research, is Oates explored the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection practitioners in QLD who were no longer employed by the statutory child protection agency and had a smaller sample size of 13 Aboriginal participants.

This thesis will further explore the perceptions of Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers in relation to their participation and inclusion in practice reform and process change. These perceptions are important in understanding what involvement and input Aboriginal-identified caseworkers have in the processes to create system change, as part of ensuring the self-determination of Aboriginal people in leading welfare systems and constructs (Menziez, 2019).

There have been progressive shifts in the cultural constructs within the Department of Communities and Justice, the NSW statutory child protection agency, over the past 10 years. These shifts are evident by the changes in reforms, policies, processes and strategies being implemented. Some of these changes include:

- Principles of self-determination- Section 11 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998, whereby Aboriginal and Torres strait Islander people are enabled to participate in the care and protection of their children and young people as much as is possible. This is evidenced with family centred family action planning/ case planning and the availability of culturally sensitive Family Group Conferencing.
- The Section 13 of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 elaborates upon the placement and decision making for children within statutory child protection court orders, embedding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle. The s13 Principle are articulated clearly in the DCJ agencies practice framework.
- DCJ not only ensures that these principles articulated in legislation are mandated but are additionally referred to within the assessment and consultation processes and systems for service delivery provided to Aboriginal clients. Examples of such practice and system change and reform conducted by DCJ is also further outlined within this research discussion.

It is unclear from the available research how the above-noted principles are implemented and experienced by the Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers. The *Family Is Culture* (FIC) Report (Davis, 2019) identifies the need for Aboriginal staff to engage more meaningfully in developments to reforms, practice and policy change. The report highlights that by staff having meaningful input to drive change within statutory child protection systems, this will positively impact upon service provision, and improve the way Aboriginal clients experience the child protection system and improve the outcomes impacting Aboriginal families and communities. The

FIC report (2019) identifies the need to better support Aboriginal-identified staff and improve cultural awareness within statutory child protection.

The FIC (2019) highlights that by providing better supports for Aboriginal-identified staff, this will in turn influence improved service provision to Aboriginal clients, leading to better outcomes for Aboriginal families, and communities engaged in statutory child protection systems. This current research intends to build upon the recommendations made within the FIC by further understanding and hearing the perspectives of Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers in relation to suggestions of possible support strategies specifically for Aboriginal child protection practitioners.

In a cultural safety review available on the DCJ Evidence portal, Zumlumovski (2021) identifies necessary areas for change and development. This is relevant to this current research, in terms of the need to understand and improve support mechanisms for Aboriginal practitioners employed within child protection systems, such as:

- the need to recruit, train and support more Aboriginal staff in the sector
- the limited guidance on how to provide cultural safety
- the need to include a whole organisation approach which entails change and responsibility at a system, policy and managerial level, not only by practitioners
- the need to provide training to non-Aboriginal staff

Rhys Price-Robertson and Myfanwy McDonald (2011) identified specific strategies when working with Aboriginal communities in welfare systems and the need for their increased support. These strategies include better cultural training available to welfare staff, increased consultation with Aboriginal people in decision making processes, increased culturally safe policies and practices. Price-Robertson and McDonald (2011) stress that it is important to identify how the child protection system can better support Aboriginal statutory child protection caseworkers in carrying out these strategies and in achieving good outcomes for communities, families and children.

There are three key theoretical frameworks and constructs which are relevant, and therefore, will form the lens to approach this research/ thesis undertaking. These are: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing and decolonisation methodology which will be further discussed below in terms of their relevance and application to the research being conducted.

2.5.1 *Critical Race Theory and Anti Racist Theory*

2.5.1.1 What is Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

Anti-racist theory compels consideration of how the impact of racism has been significantly overlooked, evident by the creation of theoretical frameworks that examine cultural competence for practice with multicultural or Aboriginal clients. This directly correlates to the views of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Dominelli (2018) identifies CRT as the need to understand the conceptual frameworks which underpin racism which emerges in White dominated social work practice and systems. Monani (2018) raises an additional problem, being when professions such as social work down-play the effects of racism and historic systemic discrimination towards certain communities.

Critical Race Theory can be perceived as having an emphasis on race, whereas anti-racism aims to not only address issues of racism but also other forms of oppression. Looking at it simplistically, anti-racism is defined as “an action-oriented, educational and political strategy for institutional and systemic change that addresses the issues of racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression; sexism, classism, ableism” (Dei and Calliste, 2000, p. 13). These concepts are relevant to this research, given the intent to understand the ways in which power inequities can affect the daily experiences, interactions, actions, words and lives of Aboriginal Statutory child protection caseworkers. Anti-racism provides a solid framework from which we can not only begin

to examine societal conditions that silence racially marginalised populations, but we can begin to examine the power relations that lead to these conditions (Lau, 2008).

2.5.1.2 Understanding intersectionality

The terms 'intersectionality' and 'anti-essentialism' referred to by Delgado & Stefaniec (2012) identify that everyone has potentially overlapping identities, which can at times lead to conflict and overlapping loyalties and allegiance. Intersectionality is a relevant consideration within this research, as it can be a significant dilemma for Aboriginal identified child protection staff, who often identify within what can be at times conflicting identities and roles.

Crenshaw (1991) developed the concept of intersectionality and discusses how it applies to social movement within organisations that have marginalised women of colour and ethnically and socially disadvantaged communities. This is a powerful aspect of Critical Race Theory as it seeks to understand the social expectations, disadvantage and what possible racism exists around cultural identity and roles within the organisation.

2.5.1.3 Relevance to the topic of study

The Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society states that government services must prevent discrimination through ongoing cultural diversity training for staff (Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1998). This charter has been endorsed by Commonwealth, State, and Territory Governments, and by the Australian Local Government Associations, and progress toward its implementation is reported in the Access and Equity Annual Report by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (2004a). This relates to intersectionality by understanding how Aboriginal peoples experience engagement within child welfare systems, from the Aboriginal practitioners to the community members.

States and territories have policies and reporting mechanisms that relate to anti-racism. For example, public sector agencies in New South Wales are required to have an Ethnic Affairs Priorities Statement (EAPS) which shows how they will provide training for staff on cultural diversity issues. Each year the Community Relations Commission for a Multicultural New South Wales assesses and monitors the performance of public sector agencies, and reports on this performance in an annual Community Relations Report (HREOC, 2006). In these reports, the component regarding experiences, challenges and support needs of Aboriginal identified practitioners is not, however, reviewed specifically, which is another aspect of the layers of accountability for the individual agency to be considered.

Systemic racism and discrimination are evident within government and welfare systems. McDonald, Harris and Wintersteen (2003) argue that social work systems are entrenched in bureaucratisation and clinical processes. This perspective can additionally be extended to child protection, whereby culture is considered and made to conform within the existing processes and practices. Arguably, it would be more appropriate to address the underlying systemic issues that impact on the system construct, beliefs and attitudes of employees, and considers cultural implications as part of developing responsive service approach and delivery. Krakouer (2023) expands on the need to disrupt the status quo of systemic racism, by ensuring there is Indigenous ownership of solutions which create radical transformation to whole organisation's, systems and structures.

It is important to contemplate that welfare can become a space where white hegemony can be perpetuated within its systems. The development of social constructs such as the categorisation of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' within service provision further fortify White welfare approaches (Jakubowicz, 1989). Evidence of this is expressed by the Aboriginal caseworkers in the Family is Culture (FIC) report by Davis (2019), that they are not always being provided with an opportunity to be consulted in a particular matter or context, unless directly related to their specific case or role. This raises as an area for exploration within this thesis, to better understand the

opportunities for cultural consultation and how Aboriginal staff experience these processes and are supported to engage in sharing their cultural insights.

From this lens and theoretical approach, organisations are to go beyond cultural competence, so that inclusive practice can thrive. Practitioners must continuously be challenging the status quo and advocate against injustice and insular perspectives, speaking up against racism. Policy makers and practitioners are needed to stop resisting change to decolonise the system, otherwise they run the risk of merely perpetuating assimilation processes and practices (Monani, 2018). decolonisation can be defined as the process of addressing the ongoing impact of colonisation in Australia and working to rectify the wrongs committed to Aboriginal peoples (Korff, 2023).

Racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia are global phenomena (Okolie, 2005). The constraints of Western systems are empirically based on colonial constructs which still often perpetuate the experience of exclusion, subordination, violence and discrimination. It leaves us to question how systems alter these paradigms and address the issue of intersectionality as a perpetuated issue within our government agencies and the policies which underpin child protection practice, culture and attitudes.

If we consider that racism against Indigenous Australians permeates the very fabric of contemporary Australian society (Cowlshaw & Morris, 1997), it is suggested that oppressed people often meet adversity and injustice with resistance. Resistance can be perceived as radical, violent, or a revolt against the system, in turn creating opposition to change. In this research, it is important to be open to the opportunities and idea that systems must be shaken, and that there is still the need to understand the experience of Aboriginal practitioners in light of the history of Aboriginal people's oppression and adversity caused by the government if fundamental transformation is to take place (Gilroy, 2002).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is described by Delgado and Stefanić (2012) as a theoretical perspective which examines the constructs of race and racism across dominant cultural modes of

expression. This is understood as how race can be viewed and racism is developed within various societal cultures. Critical Race Theory looks at challenging preconceived ideas of culture and has an emphasis on social activism and transforming societal views around race, racism, and power. It should look not only at an individual's identity and experience, but how these roles relate to other components of one's identity.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is valuable in better examining the socio-cultural forces that shape how people perceive, experience and respond to racism. An aspect of the approach which is beneficial in really understanding the components of racism, by not only exploring the impacts of those affected by racism, but also enabling analysis into those who perpetrate racial prejudice within the statutory child protection system.

Newton et.al (2024) expands on the need for organisations to engage in rigorous thinking about how best to develop policy, professional structures and practices for people who are poorly served by society and institutions. In viewing disadvantaged people and communities as the experts in their own lives, this can better guide research principles, indigenous methodologies which honour First Nations ways of being, doing and relating. This can then translate to building the skills and resources required to meet the complex needs of Aboriginal people and families.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) explore the viewpoint that race is a socially constructed concept and can be perceived as a means to maintain the interests of the White population that constructed it. From the perspective of CRT, the racial inequality emerges from the social, economic, and legal differences that white people have created between "races" to maintain elite White interest, is transferable knowledge to delve into how the Australian welfare system can actually apply an 'anti-racist' praxis, where social workers struggle to move beyond 'individual interventions' (Harrison & Turner, 2011).

The discourses of racism and White privilege reinforce belief systems and societies that benefit individuals and those affiliated with the dominant culture (Daniels-Mayes, 2016). The

development of an anti-racist praxis within social welfare and child protection systems therefore can only occur by understanding and then altering the White privilege that still exists within those systems.

Australian governments have apologised for past colonial practices and the unjust removal of Aboriginal children. However, Weeks (2000) expresses the limited accounts or analysis available for the actual details of social workers in historic practices. The limitations of the accounts and analysis of historic welfare practice is further viewed by Weeks (2000) as a hinderance to enabling transformation to collective strategies which adequately equip non-Aboriginal social workers in being culturally competent. Whilst there are limitations in understanding historic welfare practices, the link to understanding the impact, trauma and devastation to Aboriginal peoples and culture is a vital part in decolonising the welfare system and preventing the same errors to reoccur in current statutory child protection systems, policies and practice. Newton (2019) also highlights the need to understand the errors of past welfare practices to enable current practices to be well informed and prevent the continuation of trauma caused by statutory child protection agencies.

There needs to be the philosophical understanding which shifts thinking and in turn changes practice, as supported by Mendes (2005). By delving into the real experiences and insights of the Aboriginal identified caseworkers around the context of the government child protection system, better understanding can be developed to effect meaningful change. This change towards anti-racist approaches will mean more meaningful and sustainable change, given that it would be driven by Aboriginal people rather than a colonial led system.

2.5.1.4 Application to the research

By applying the concepts of CRT and Anti Racist theory, we can better analyse and understand the experiences of the Aboriginal identified caseworkers:

- the participants' viewpoints of any preconceived ideas by other non-Aboriginal agency staff, about culture in the context of their role.
- the participants' perspectives around how the agency demonstrates and engages in social activism in relation to culture and how they may engage in practices which support transformation of societal views around race, racism, power.
- how the participants have experienced support and understanding around their individual identity in relation to culture by other staff within the agency
- how the participants understand how well the agency understands and educates its staff around the historic colonial practices of the welfare/ child protection agencies
- the participants' views around how the agency can further build upon learning and extend this knowledge and awareness of the past child protection practice mistakes and errors
- the participants' perception around racism which they experience within their role, and how they are supported around this, or could be better supported in relation to this
- the participants' viewpoints on how the agency has supported anti-oppressive practices, the dignity and self-determination of Aboriginal people and prevented/ reduced racist approaches
- how the participants feel about being supported by the agency to balance the varying roles/ identities that they may need to juggle as part of their Aboriginal culture, e.g. family role, caseworker role, community member, professional cultural leader or consultant
- how the participants feel they can manage the varying interactions between these various identities, and how they are supported by the agency to navigate this in relation to their culture
- the participants' views of how the system and processes support culturally inclusive and safe service approaches and delivery which impacts the beliefs and attitudes of the employees
- the participants' perspectives around the equality of opportunities and support between Aboriginal identified and non-Aboriginal casework staff

In summary, the framework of CRT and Anti-racism theory will assist to draw upon the inclusion of cultural constructs, experiences of racism, societal views when exploring the challenges and supports for Aboriginal identified caseworkers in this research. CRT is a valuable theoretical approach, as it compels the disruption of systemic discrimination and prompts curiosity within this thesis. The questions that Anti-racist theoretical framework evokes for the research include those relating to Aboriginal identified caseworkers perspectives of: a) the agency's participation in social activism and anti-oppressive practices regarding racism and White hegemony, b) their support from the agency to navigate various roles and identities, and c) the equality of opportunities in consideration of culture.

2.5.2 Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) approach in the context of trauma recovery

The key aspects of Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing is a critical concept for further consideration when attempting to better understand the support needs of Aboriginal identified child protection caseworkers. SEWB is one of the primary concepts and objectives for supporting all child protection caseworkers. There really needs to firstly be an understanding of what SEWB specifically means for Aboriginal peoples.

2.5.2.1 What is Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) for Aboriginal Australians?

The term '*social and emotional wellbeing*' is a construct developed by policy makers, service providers and researchers. The definition which was first developed for the National Aboriginal Health strategy (NAHS) in 1989, acknowledged that Aboriginal health was more than just physical wellbeing of an individual, but rather encompasses the mental health, social, emotional and cultural wellbeing for all Aboriginal community, which is a significant culturally specific differentiation to consider in this research (Dudgeon, 2013).

The nine guiding principles which underpin SEWB, are further considered in the analysis of the experiences and within the overarching themes when reviewing the shared experiences and views of the participants in this research. The nine guiding principles of SEWB include consideration of: 1) health as being holistic, 2) the right to self-determination, 3) the need for cultural understanding, 4) the impact of history in trauma and loss, 5) recognition of human rights, 6) the impact of racism and stigma, 7) recognition of centrality of kinship, 8) recognition of cultural diversity, and 9) recognition of Aboriginal strengths. These guiding principles are helpful to consider in the development of the supervision guide to support conversations between managers and Aboriginal practitioners as well. The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) have centered their vision of SEWB, as the value of Aboriginal people enjoying quality of life through self-determination as a whole community, in addition to individual spiritual, cultural, physical, social and emotional wellbeing (NACCHO, 2019).

According to Grieves (2009), SEWB is perceived to be an integral component of the health reform agenda. It can be viewed, however, that this construct whilst at the forefront of government-led health systems, does not necessarily capture Indigenous social, cultural and historical understandings. There is the philosophy that forms the basis for the concept that personhood in Aboriginal culture stems from spirituality (Grieves, 2009).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2012) provides a general definition of SEWB as “the way a person thinks and feels about themselves and others. It includes being able to adapt and deal with daily challenges (resilience and coping skills) while leading a fulfilling life” (p. 8). Aboriginal SEWB is therefore understood to be a much broader and far more complex concept than that of Western understandings of mental health and wellbeing. Overall, Aboriginal SEWB is more about connection to people, country, language and law through deep listening and the telling of stories.

The research of Grieves (2009) on Social Emotional Wellbeing in Aboriginal communities concludes that the connectedness that exists in Aboriginal society—to family, kin, the natural world and the universe is to be found in spirituality, as the basis for culture. The opportunity to have a social life that provides a framework for social, psychological and economic security, comes from this concept of personhood (Grieves, 2009). The aspects of security noted above derived from the concept of ‘Personhood’ are often considered within casework provision, holistic needs assessment and case plan development with Aboriginal clients, however, would equally be a relevant consideration when supporting Aboriginal practitioners within the field of child protection.

This thesis will consider how well Aboriginal caseworkers’ sense of ‘Personhood’ is supported within their role. Grieves (2009) highlights in her analysis of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) program the need to review and evaluate approaches which enable Aboriginal practitioners to be recognised, valued and supported. Grieves identifies the importance of organisations to enter the realm of social and emotional wellbeing practice which has adequate resourcing and provides an opportunity to explore the context of spirituality.

Aboriginal Social Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) encompasses the “interconnections between spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, behavioural, social and economic factors, and their collective importance for the health outcomes of individuals, communities and populations” (Haswell et al, 2013, p. 24). These interconnections of wellbeing are imperative in better understanding the impacts of trauma for Aboriginal peoples. Korff (2023) delves into the transgenerational trauma faced by Aboriginal peoples that extends beyond the definitions of trauma being deeply distressing or disturbing experiences from terrible events. The importance of considering this interconnection within all agency support and social welfare work is illustrated in the model drawn upon by Garvey et al. (2021). Garvey (2021) describes the interconnection of dimensions, informed by the voices, values and preferences of Aboriginal peoples, likened to the imagery and the cultural practice of weaving.

The range of historical trauma that Aboriginal people have experienced either directly or vicariously from the acts of violence, systemic or institutional, include capture and abuse of Aboriginal peoples, removal and genocide of Aboriginal children, the invasion and destruction of Aboriginal people's lands, homes, community, culture, provisions, resources, families and connection, and stolen generations. This kind of trauma extends generationally given the continued impact today and evidence of trauma through government neglect, deaths and maltreatment in custody, continued removals, continued disconnection from family, continued increased of varied abuse psychological, physical and sexual, in addition to traumatic grief and the community violence, bullying and harassment still experienced by Aboriginal peoples today (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2019).

Newton (2021) has acknowledged that Aboriginal social work academics can be better supported in their wellbeing to feel culturally safe through shared and collaborative learning experiences, practical supports so they can be better equipped for their role, which assists to prevent re-traumatisation given intensive and consistent exposure to traumatising content. This is a transferable consideration for Aboriginal child protection practitioners, who also have a high exposure to traumatizing and retraumatizing information and experiences.

2.5.2.2 Relevance to the research investigation

There is the notion that wellbeing for Aboriginal people will entail recovery from the trauma they have experienced intergenerationally. Herman (1992) proposed that traumatised individuals and groups require social acceptance and recognition of their suffering. This kind of healing from trauma is hypothesised to require a societal response that acknowledges these events and experiences as traumatic, declares the need for restitution, and seeks to gain widespread public recognition of the trauma that has been experienced. The relevance of this notion to this thesis is the understanding of how opportunities can be provided to all Aboriginal identified child protection caseworkers to speak about the impacts of their own experiences and trauma of the families and children they work with. The opportunity to speak out can be considered a form of remembrance,

important in the recovery from historical trauma. Social acceptance can promote recovery from traumatic experiences and events and is upheld within the processes and systems of government agencies as argued by Menzies (2019).

This research provides an opportunity for to hear the experiences of Aboriginal practitioners as a way of also supporting emotional wellbeing by inviting cultural discussions and viewpoints to the forefront of the social context of welfare, as part of the recovery from historical trauma. Although the view of cultural healing or recovery can be viewed as a Western paradigm, it is important to consider what are the Aboriginal perceptions regarding wellbeing. It has been observed by Haswell et al. (2013), in their report on SEWB and Indigenous youth, that “it is important to recognise that traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture does not conceive of illness, mental or otherwise, as a distinct medical entity. Rather, there is a more holistic conception of life in which individual wellbeing is intimately associated with collective wellbeing” (p. 24). They stress, drawing on the earlier work of Swan and Raphael (1995) on the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Policy, the “interconnections between spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, behavioural, social and economic factors, and their collective importance for the health outcomes of individuals, communities and populations” (Haswell et al., 2013, p. 24).

To enable research which builds knowledge and understanding in the area of social and emotional wellbeing, the Collaborative Research Centre in Australian History (CRAH) identifies the importance of key concepts such as resilience, risk and protective factors. Spirituality and the lifeways that are developed in the philosophical basis of culture produce wellbeing for Aboriginal people according to Grieves (2009). Therefore, “the pathways and methods whereby resilience can be built on and enhanced to measurably improve the wellbeing and outcomes or life chances of Aboriginal individuals, families and groups’ that the CRAH identify as the focus of the social and emotional wellbeing, are those that promote and enhance spirituality” (Grieves, 2009, p. 3).

It is my view that spirituality is often not a significant consideration when engaging in NSW child protection-based systems and assessment processes as part of the cultural considerations for Aboriginal clients or staff. Evidence of this perspective is supported in review of child protection systems and processes in NSW, which have very limited reference to Aboriginal spirituality within the practice framework, and no mention of spirituality noted in child protection legislation, or staff supervision templates.

This does not necessarily factor the individual practices of child protection staff who may incorporate the consideration of spirituality in processes such as supervision, case discussions/ consultations, support mechanisms and case planning, however, there are apparent limitations evident in existing formal processes. It would be beneficial to explore how this component of spirituality can be considered as a form of support, and part of building and developing resilience and wellbeing for Aboriginal identified child protection caseworkers.

One of the key aspects of supporting wellbeing relevant to Aboriginal people, is the concept of 'recovery' as a spiritual path, to rebuild and further develop Aboriginal peoples' cultural healing. There are the concepts of connectedness and relatedness, which gives light to the way that Aboriginal peoples connection and sense of community are a vital part of cultural strength, support, recovery and healing (Martin, 2005). Recovery is a concept applied to the cultural implications and impacts upon children in OOHHC or foster carers (Spaniol, 2002), however, it is applicable and transferable in ensuring cultural sensitivity for Aboriginal practitioners as well. This raises the need to consider that Aboriginal staff must have opportunities for recovery, when the nature of child protection work can trigger their own personal trauma, evoke emotional, social and cultural conflict and the impact that child protection work has upon their cultural experiences, and connections with family and community.

Menzies (2019) advocates that that a more in-depth understanding of trauma could assist those working in human services, including welfare sectors to develop better responses in terms of

early intervention and treatment programs designed to support and engage individuals and their families. It is imperative to understand where the trauma has derived from as part of developing appropriate interventions and therapeutic services.

By better understanding the origins of the trauma and impact, practitioners can better provide responsive service delivery and adjust or change it (Atkinson, 2013; Browne, 2012). This prompts the consideration of this question: If there is not an acute awareness and understanding of the trauma behind the behaviour or impacts of it, then how can we really ensure the wellbeing for staff or clients in the human services sector?

2.5.2.3 Application to this research

The concept and approach of 'Aboriginal Social Emotional Wellbeing' is relevant to this research, to better understand how the experiences of Aboriginal identified caseworkers can bring healing from trauma. Some of the considerations that will be helpful to explore within the research will be the participants' views of:

- how their spirituality is impacted and supported by the organisation and how the system and processes support cultural healing.
- what social and emotional wellbeing means for Aboriginal people in their current role and how this can be supported by the organisation
- any recommendations or suggestions on how their spirituality could be better supported by the agency
- understanding how the participants have opportunities for recovery when their role may trigger their own personal trauma, evoke emotional, social and cultural conflict
- the participants' views on the impact that child protection work has upon their cultural experiences, and connections with their family and community. Noting the important

distinction between how Aboriginal culture in and of itself does not create trauma, rather it is the impacts of historical and current racism or injustice.

In summary, it is invaluable to gain understanding of the trauma experienced by Aboriginal people to enable any change to occur as outlined by Karen Menzies (2019). The understanding of the experiences and trauma experienced by Aboriginal identified child protection workers is vital in best developing strategies aimed at supporting their wellbeing and cultural safety within their role. In better understanding Aboriginal people's lived trauma experiences, the racialised child protection systems can be reviewed and improved to create opportunities for the following: a) healing from trauma, b) spiritual recovery, and c) increased social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal identified caseworkers.

The flow on effect of understanding and supporting trauma for Aboriginal identified child protection caseworkers can impact upon the service delivery and the way Aboriginal families, children and communities experience the child protection system, processes and practices. Overall, an understanding of Aboriginal social and emotional well-being assists in informing and promoting an anti-racist approach to child protection, that in turn, enact a decolonising approach, now discussed.

2.5.3 Decolonising methodology approaches:

2.5.3.1 What are decolonising approaches?

Decolonisation can be understood as the process of contesting and reframing societal narratives about Indigenous communities' histories, colonialism, genocide, and cultural assimilation (Smith, 1999). Carol Downing (2014) expresses that decolonisation is about repairing damage and to genuinely acknowledge the trauma inflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through colonialism. decolonisation explores the importance of non-Indigenous people engaging in learning and education about colonial history so that past errors are not repeated. There is the importance placed upon the need to refuse to accept racism, acknowledging that there must be

sobering honesty that challenges white constructs which exist, even that of the research and academic institutions (Watego & Whop, 2020). One of the means to repairing and healing the damage of Australia's colonial legacy and the pain caused by Aboriginal child removal, is to better understand the direct impact upon Aboriginal people and continue to advocate for the changes needed to decolonize the statutory child protection system (Krakouer, 2019).

2.5.3.2 Relevance to the topic of study

There is the premise that while child protection systems cannot physically go back in time and change the history, we can learn from these past wrongs to ensure the future is different and supports healing through its systems, policy and practice. This section explores decolonising approaches in relation to child protection, which entails welfare agencies needing to address and acknowledge past colonial policies and practices to inform current legislation and policy, and not merely as a 'policy statement', but as a living document, which changes current practice.

Libesman (2007) expresses the way towards improving outcomes in the longer term for Indigenous children involves a process of 'de-colonising attitudes', establishing new Indigenous child protection structures and empowering Indigenous agencies through training and the provision of resources" (p .19). This addresses the need to explore how the current child protection system supports Aboriginal staff in driving changes to policy and practice and addressing systemic cultural and issues of racism. The need to extend the decolonisation of child protection systems beyond the whole organisation and broaden the scope of influence, by addressing the systemic racism which proliferates all facets interacting and associated with the child protection agency, including partner agencies, other mandatory government and non-government agencies who have a role and part in child protection systems as further explored in the works of Krakouer (2023).

In understanding the societal narratives for Aboriginal people, it is relevant to consider some of the highly exploitative ways in which Aboriginal Australians have been incorporated into the workforce (Kidd, 2008), identified as another impact of colonisation born out of two centuries of

racist colonialism. This view prompts the need to explore whether the system/ frameworks that Aboriginal Australians are expected to operate from, appropriately considers and supports their cultural context. This thesis will attempt to better understand how Aboriginal child protection casework staff experience supports in relation to their cultural context within the statutory child protection agency.

There is evidence of statutory child protection agencies attempting to address the need to increase and develop cultural competence for non-Aboriginal staff. The legislation and child protection agency reforms in NSW outline the principles and practice aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities. The legislation and reforms do not however, necessarily encompass the interrelation and implications in terms of cultural safety for Aboriginal staff working in the area of statutory child protection. Libesman and Gray (2023) highlight the importance of reviewing the practices, policies and processes in a way that is not tick-a-box and tokenistic to really drive meaningful systemic change in child protection agencies. It lends itself to the importance of ensuring that reviews holistically encompass the views and participation of all participants of the welfare system, from its Aboriginal employees, clients, service users/ providers and Aboriginal community.

Part of decolonising welfare can be the way in which we educate and create awareness of the past colonial practices and acknowledge the errors of past government welfare agencies to the front-line child protection staff. Front-line child protection workers mostly receive limited training in understanding cultural competence and the quality of this training varies significantly with little evaluation of its quality (Finan et al., 2018). Menzies and Gilbert (2013) state “Cultural competence training needs to consider issues related such as Indigenous culture, collective experiences, historical events and diverse viewpoints. This not only requires empathy and understanding but also is a commitment to diversity and the capacity to negotiate, work through differences and resolve conflicts” (p. 66).

Menzies (2019) has proposed that three key components should be included and guide any training curriculum on cultural competency within statutory child protection agencies, which supports the decolonisation of welfare. These three key components are: 1) past forcible separation and assimilation laws, policies and practices; 2) current child protection legislation; and 3) trauma theories and the impact of trauma. It is further considered by Morrison and colleagues (2019) that to really engage in meaningful change that acknowledges the oppressive past practices and reduces the possibility of repeated practice errors, training must be more than essentialist, and reductionist and must address issues which are more than mere surface level.

It is suggested by Menzies (2019) that child protection agency staff need training which ensures the understanding of the assimilation planned attempts of eradicating the race completely. This is essential for Aboriginal peoples' voices and experiences to really be heard and understood by welfare practitioners so that they can have a deeper insight into the re-traumatisation experienced by the Aboriginal people due to the intergenerational removal of children by the welfare systems. The continued re-traumatisation and disconnection of Aboriginal children to culture and family in out of home care and engaged with child protection services is highlighted by Krakouer (2021), as perpetuating loss and the issues pertaining to assimilation.

The FIC report (Davis, 2019) highlights the need for training being conducted by child protection caseworkers on forcible child removal practices and policies, to better understand the context of intergenerational trauma. Bamblett (2006) highlights that this training will assist to increase understanding of the social and behavioural responses of clients towards statutory child protection workers/ agency -referring to cultural abuse where the outcomes and impact of behaviours seen as a way of coping and surviving the intergenerational trauma.

If trauma is significant in better understanding the Aboriginal communities and clients that child protection practitioner's work with, then it can be reasonable to suggest that considerations

around this same historical generational trauma experienced by all Aboriginal people is a consideration in understanding support for Aboriginal child protection workers within this study.

2.5.3.3 Application to the research

Decolonisation approaches within welfare systems outlined previously should not be considered a tokenistic processes, but rather should ensure that cultural sensitivity is developed and practiced from the basis of respect. Drawing upon the research of Oates (2018), this research takes the position that decolonisation practices and approaches are imperative to enable effective social, system and cultural change.

This thesis contributes in a meaningful way to inform child protection agency strategies to better retain staff through identifying improved anti-racist and decolonisation practices and supports. This acknowledgement of some of the cultural dangers informs suggestions on how to increase cultural safety. This could then assist supervision functions and ongoing communication between non-Aboriginal managers and co-workers working together with Aboriginal identified child protection staff. It is hypothesised that through identifying the support needs of Aboriginal Child protection staff there will be a better and more responsive service provided to Aboriginal children, families and communities.

It is a vital part of decolonising welfare systems that we can hear directly from the voices of Aboriginal people (Libesman, 2007). This research will ensure that the perspectives and experiences of Aboriginal identified caseworkers are obtained to inform recommendations for how the system can improve supports for Aboriginal practitioners. Higgins and Butler (2007) further extend this by stating that in the realm of child protection work, successful outcomes for clients is dependent on staff, who are vital in maintaining the quality assurance of the program. An Indigenous service provider, as cited in Higgins and Butler (2007) commented: “What makes it work is people. The staff have expectations of themselves and of colleagues. They're self-managing” (p. 13).

This research intends to engage in courageous conversations, which should as Singleton and Linton (2006) describe, extend beyond the rhetorical, and intentionally address racial gaps and inequities. I am prompted to awaken the discussions about racial colonialism and White privilege within this research, which can create discomfort or raise feelings of indifference, guilt, resistance, shame, and mistrust that lead to avoidance or denial, however are needed to alter the racist paradigm (Tatum, 1992). There is the need to acknowledge how past White government have been complicit in racism and unless people develop awareness there cannot be the necessary changes to thought, practice or policy within organisational systems. Critical questions present the truth, so that conceptions of how we understand racism can better support change. The insight regarding complicity of shifting not only individual paradigms but also institutional paradigms in order to change the attitude of organisational culture and practices is shared by Applebaum (2016).

It is imperative to realise that avoidance of the subject of race is not afforded to Aboriginal peoples, and really comes from a position of privilege, and can be a form of denial of racism (Cowlshaw, 2005). This applies to the need for the bravery of practitioners and the agency to being open to engaging in conversations even when they are uncomfortable, regarding Aboriginal peoples' experiences within the child protection system, in order to truly understand how to create change for Aboriginal staff, families and communities.

Daniel-Mayes (2020) describes courageous conversations as being a process of social construction, providing an opportunity to deconstruct the narrative of race and inequity. In context of this study, it relates to a need to come with bravery and courage into these conversations to genuinely hear the experiences, the challenges, what can be the uncomfortable truths about history and current realities to strive and be open to change which fosters healing within these relationships and child protection practices.

Some of the four key aspects to assist in executing courageous conversations raised by Singleton (2016) include: 1) stay engaged and involved in the dialogue 2) experience the discomfort

and commit to bringing issues to the open in order to bring healing, 3) speak your truth and be open about assumptions, stereotypes without glossing over the issues, and 4) expect and accept non-closure, by not rushing to find the solutions and engaging in dialogue which does not blame even with the uncertainty. These are not only aspects to employ within the conversations taking place with Aboriginal caseworker participants, but is additionally a valuable concept and strategy for the child protection welfare agencies to implement within their interactions with Aboriginal colleagues, communities or clients.

The concept and approach of 'Decolonisation' is relevant to this thesis to better understand the experiences of Aboriginal identified caseworkers/ participants in terms of the following:

- how the participants' understand and view their agency's acknowledgement of past colonial practices and historical errors of the child protection/ welfare systems
- the participants' perspective around strategies they believe would better support acknowledging these past colonial practices and errors of the child protection/ welfare systems
- the participants' views around how the system and agency supports Aboriginal staff with culturally specific and relevant training
- the participants' views around how the system and agency supports non-Aboriginal staff with Aboriginal cultural relevant training
- the participants' views on how the agency can increase cultural safety for staff and what further strategies could be recommended for implementation by the agency
- the perspectives of the participants around how meaningful and purposeful the Aboriginal consultation and Aboriginal specific practices, policies or frameworks are in supporting the work they do in their role
- the participants' views on how the agency supports Aboriginal staff in sharing their cultural insight, perspectives, experience and knowledge

- how the participants are able to share any cultural dangers or safety issues which may arise in the context of processes, systems, or practice context within their role and with their supervisor
- understanding of how the participants manage the cultural expectations of their role and communicate that with colleagues and supervisors
- how the participants have opportunities to share the possible impacts of re-traumatisation from the work they do either with fellow Aboriginal colleagues, or other support networks within the organisation or within supervision with their supervisor
- the Aboriginal participants' views around how well the child protection caseworker training addresses and educates around the complex trauma caused by historic assimilation policies and practices and the errors of past colonial practices
- the participants' views on how well their non-Aboriginal colleagues understand historic assimilation policies and practices and the errors of past colonial practices

2.5.3.4 Summary

In summary, decolonisation should not be considered a tokenistic process and needs to hear directly from the voices of Aboriginal people to create change to the welfare systems. A significant way of ensuring the decolonisation of welfare systems is by ensuring all child protection staff are trained in and understand the impact of trauma upon Aboriginal people through past errors in colonial and government practices, assimilation laws, and the intergenerational removal of Aboriginal children.

2.6 Additional key concepts to be explored within the research

There are additional concepts which provide further insight and understanding of themes and what the research aims to understand about Aboriginal identified child protection staff's experiences around support. These concepts may be referred to within this thesis, when analysing data or identifying themes.

2.6.1 Cultural Safety

'Cultural safety' enables measurement of how safe clients and workers feel to express their cultural identity within their service or work environment (Zon et al., 2010). Cultural safety was a concept initially identified in the health sector, describing how well someone from a minority culture may have the opportunity to feel respected and listened to when providing their insights to another cultural group. This extends to not being disempowered or demeaned by the delivery systems and actions of the other culture (Ramsden & Spoonley, 1993).

The research of Aitchison (2013) highlights areas of challenge which Aboriginal child protection staff specifically face in terms of cultural safety working within a statutory child protection agency in Alice Springs, NSW. There is an analysis of these issues, however, the research does not identify tangible strategies in a way that is easily accessible to non-Aboriginal Child protection staff to support and guide 'culturally safe' practice. This study will attempt to identify some prompts and recommendations for non-Aboriginal staff in supporting Aboriginal identified practitioners in culturally safe workplace environments and support practices.

2.6.2 'Professional identity' in the context of cultural safety

'Professionalisation' is explained as the process which occurs before an individual can be considered a 'professional.' Professions are socially constructed concepts as detailed by Friedson (2001). There are three main considerations which Friedson (2001) explains in this process including: a) meeting the demands of the market; b) the undertaking of higher educational qualifications; and c) engaging in essential specialist training in order to equip practitioners with advanced knowledge of their chosen field of practice. Golts et al. (2014) extends on these considerations by noting that there are identifying characteristic traits evident in all members of a profession. The characteristic traits/ aspects include status, privileges, power in terms of assumed knowledge, and positions, which all contribute to one's professional identity and support the transition from occupational worker to professional. Friedson (2001) termed the method by which industries or institutions regulate the

abovementioned characteristics of a profession and are able to retain control over their desired resources as 'gatekeeping'.

This prompts a consideration that many of the characteristics of the statutory child protection profession has been initially constructed from colonial perspectives and approaches. It leaves a question regarding what the role of gatekeeping looks like for the professional identity of Aboriginal child protection caseworkers? A secondary consideration is how well does the Aboriginal identified caseworker professional identity align with their own personal and cultural values of working with Aboriginal children and families? A third consideration would be how well the organisation supports the specific professional identity of the Aboriginal child protection caseworker in terms of the three main areas of professionalisation noted earlier.

There is research which identifies the development of professional movements to create recognition and protect its members from outside scrutiny. This can be defined as 'social closure,' which is distinct to a particular discipline, by creating an enclosed safe space for those within that discipline (Lentin & McVeigh, 2006). Examples of developing an occupational distinctiveness, include exclusive professional memberships (e.g., professional associations or unions). It is proposed that members of these professional groups are not necessarily rewarded through financial gain, but rather through the meeting of their cultural, social and psychological needs (Leigh, 2013). The concept of social closure prompts another contemplative question to consider whether Aboriginal child protection caseworkers believe that their professional group and organisations are supporting their cultural, social and psychological needs distinct to their role. Razack (1998) acknowledges the need to raise how Black people are often perceived from one facet of their identity. It is often viewed that one's 'Blackness' can eclipse the acknowledgement and value of the other aspects which form an individual's identity.

2.6.2 Cultural competence

It is beneficial to acknowledge the term 'cultural competence', often utilised to describe a way of working differently with Aboriginal or multicultural clients in a range of multidisciplinary fields, particularly community services. It has been raised within the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC) tool (2015) that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and agencies often question this term because of the implied assumption that anyone could become 'competent' in a culture that is not their own.

Within this thesis, ascertaining the needs of a broader group of Aboriginal child protection workers will thus only likely be an indication of general and overarching needs and issues, as opposed to detailing the unique and specific needs of individuals. This identifies the need for cultural competence to be understood in a more meaningful way, which the SNAICC resource (2015) highlights is not about reaching a particular standard of knowledge or practice that can be ticked off as competent. Rather, it is about the continuous journey of cross-cultural learning that occurs through genuine relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

2.7 Identifying cultural dangers for Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers

There is evidence for the unique challenges faced by Aboriginal child protection staff members who work with Aboriginal children, families and communities in the context of non – government agencies (Aitchison, 2013; Zon et al., 2010). Claire Aitchison (2013) outlines key power inequities and issues that create cultural dangers for Aboriginal child protection caseworkers. The examples of cultural dangers are outlined below, as they are concerns relevant to this thesis for further analysis. Specifically, Aitchison (2013) suggests that past trauma and current constraints impact child protection work with Aboriginal families and communities. Below noted are some of the key challenges and power inequities identified by Aitchison (2013), in relation to the context of

how transgenerational trauma experienced by Aboriginal people impacts upon statutory child protection today:

- The contentious nature of child protection work, given the history of the Stolen Generation. There is a point of contention which can arise, given that the agency itself was first established by White Anglo Settlers and their role in creating and actioning legislation that lead to the removal and genocide of Aboriginal children from their families, is in and of itself culturally unsafe.
- The significant role and responsibility that Aboriginal child protection staff have to shift and change the negative community perspectives and viewpoints around the function and role of child protection practice and systems.
- The possible perspectives of their own communities perceiving the Aboriginal staff members as collaborators or colluding with the state to destroy the connections of their culture, families and communities. This raises the issue of Aboriginal staff not only having to respond to the expectations of their employers, however in addition being required to respond to the expectations from Aboriginal families and communities, particularly in seeking context or judgments around decision-making rationale of the agency.
- There is contention which can arise from the assumptions regarding whether an Aboriginal client may prefer an Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworker. Some Aboriginal clients may prefer an Aboriginal-identified caseworker, as they may be able to better relate culturally. There may, however, be some Aboriginal clients that prefer a non-Aboriginal-identified staff member. Some Aboriginal clients may feel that there may not be as much objectivity in casework or may fear that their confidentiality may be breached by their personal information being shared with others in their community by having an Aboriginal-identified caseworker.

In summary, Aitchinson (2013) raises significant implications for Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers, in the challenges they face in navigating the various expectations and roles they have both as employees of the organisation and then out in the community.

The Family is Culture report (Davis, 2019) and Aitchinson (2013) further raises the issue that the proportion of Aboriginal-identified child protection staff is far lower than the high numbers of Aboriginal families engaged within the statutory child protection system and the high numbers of Aboriginal children in statutory care. Some staff identified feelings of being outnumbered, and for some, feeling like the tokenistic Aboriginal staff member. Aboriginal staff members are possibly identifying here that they are not being truly professionally valued for what they can bring in terms of experience, expertise and cultural and community insight (Aitchison, 2013).

The issue is, thus, highlighted regarding the misuse or overuse of Aboriginal staff members when working with Aboriginal clients or communities. It may not always be culturally appropriate to consult with Aboriginal staff merely because they are available, as opposed to considering which staff are most suitable in the context of the situation. The need to seek insight from participants is prompted within this research to better understand how they perceive that the agency system and professionals value their input and role in decision making.

There are furthermore, other cultural inequities that create power imbalances for Aboriginal-identified child protection staff, which will be considered in this research. An example of the inequities includes possible educational disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff (Aitchison, 2013). Alice Springs child protection services have engaged in initiatives which aim to reduce the separation and divide in qualifications of Aboriginal-identified staff, particularly through engagement of caseworkers to external social work courses specifically accessible to Aboriginal people. Another program which had been developed by NSW DCJ as the Aboriginal Community Services Career Pathway strategy, which committed operational Aboriginal managers to a minimum

targeted conversion of qualifications to additionally reduce any actual or perceived disparity in skillset, knowledge and credentials.

There is a point of contention raised by Aitchinson (2013) regarding perceptions that many Aboriginal child protection caseworkers have not attended university and in turn have been hired on the premise of their cultural insight and expertise working with Aboriginal people, culture and communities. It is further acknowledged that although most Aboriginal caseworkers' knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture had been acquired informally and through personal experience prior to their employment with the child protection agency, this was not always necessarily valued and acknowledged by the agency.

The cultural inequities noted above illustrate the disparities in the formal education between Aboriginal-identified and non-Aboriginal CP casework staff. However, this moreover highlights that it is imperative that the child protection systems, processes and professionals value Aboriginal-identified caseworkers' input in decision making. It would be relevant to this research to better understand how Aboriginal-identified caseworkers perceive that their cultural knowledge, insight and expertise can be better applied, acknowledged, valued and supported in child protection work.

In summary, it is understood that some of the key cultural dangers for Aboriginal-identified caseworkers include: a) the challenges of past trauma due to the Stolen Generations and colonial practices; b) the need for Aboriginal-identified caseworkers to navigate various roles individually/ personally, professionally and within their community; c) the assumptions which exist around the role of Aboriginal-identified caseworkers both by colleagues, other professionals and clients; d) the disproportionate numbers of Aboriginal-identified staff to the number of Aboriginal clients engaged to the service and the impact upon service delivery; e) the disparities in formal education between Aboriginal-identified and non-Aboriginal child protection caseworkers; and e) the contention around Aboriginal consultation processes as part of decision making.

2.8 Conclusion:

The concepts outlined in this chapter are foundational for informing the framework of this study and will ensure the appropriate theoretical lens and approach. The experiences, perspectives and recommendations shared by participants of the research are valuable for evoking thoughts and considerations for child protection practice. Whilst this may be captured in a resource tool for non-Aboriginal-identified staff to reflect and guide cultural support strategies to Aboriginal-identified caseworkers, it would not be a resource to be used in isolation, nor appropriate as a tick-a-box tool, but rather be a guide to instigate cultural practice considerations, opportunities, approaches and reflections, inviting courageous conversations between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal-identified staff.

In summary, an understanding of the terms cultural competence, cultural safety, decolonisation, anti-racist and Critical Race theory and Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) are concepts which have been explored in the context of the child protection field. It is the aim of the thesis that these concepts would be better understood from the perspective of Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers. It is understood that it is imperative to develop insight from Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers around the implication of trauma when addressing the challenges and supports within their professional role as part of decolonising the welfare system.

The key theoretical concepts which have been drawn upon as the focus of the thesis are: 1) Anti Racist theory, 2) Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) in the context of trauma and 3) Decolonising welfare. Anti-Racist theory explores the cultural constructs, experiences of racism, societal views which will be considered in this thesis. Aboriginal wellbeing is a valuable concept in understanding Aboriginal conceptualisation of 'personhood', by having social life that provides a framework for social, psychological and economic security. Aboriginal wellbeing explores

opportunities to consider in this thesis: a) healing from trauma; b) spiritual recovery; and c) increased social and emotional wellness for Aboriginal-identified caseworkers.

Decolonising approaches ensure that there is a review of past colonial practices and errors made by previous governments, in creating healing from the trauma of transgenerational trauma for Aboriginal people. This thesis will ensure that one of the key fundamentals of a decolonising approach are upheld by hearing the perspectives of Aboriginal people as part of reviewing the statutory child protection system.

It has been identified that some of the cultural inequities and issues that can create cultural dangers and challenges for Aboriginal-identified statutory child protection workers include the misuse of Aboriginal caseworkers within their role and as part of consultation processes, the lack of value for the experience, insight or expertise of Aboriginal caseworkers, educational disparities, and the impact of historic trauma from colonialism by both Aboriginal caseworkers and the Aboriginal communities and families with whom they work.

Some of the current constraints and cultural dangers which impact the work of Aboriginal-identified caseworkers in their role include assumptions around their role as an Aboriginal-identified caseworker by colleagues and the agency, the ongoing impact of trauma and current implications of colonial-led government welfare systems, the disproportionate number of Aboriginal staff to Aboriginal clients engaged to the child protection system, and the challenge of 'anti-essentialism' for Aboriginal staff who have to navigate various roles.

Having reviewed the relevant frameworks and surrounding literature, the following chapter operationalises these concepts and describes their application in this thesis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research question and design

This study relies on the lived experiences and insights shared by the participants to understand and answer the primary research question: “How can we understand the experiences and better support the challenges of Aboriginal-identified statutory child protection caseworkers in New South Wales?” The research design was underpinned by Critical Race Theory and decolonisation frameworks, viewing the participants as the experts of their own experience.

The research design was primarily qualitative as this approach focusses on the socially constructed nature of reality, it is relational, and considers the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Creswell, 2006). This research sought answers to questions that seek to understand how social experiences for Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers are created and given meaning.

One of the significant theoretical approaches utilised within the research was Decolonising methodology. From the viewpoint of this perspective there is acknowledgement of the struggle and tension which exists between the competing interests of white colonial practice of conducting research and that of the colonised people within history. There needs to be the understanding of the gravity of Aboriginal peoples’ exclusion in the research process and the impact that this has in turn created feelings of resentment and animosity towards research processes (Wilson, 2008, p. 15)

The research attempts to value the Indigenous perspective as part of learning information from an Indigenous paradigm, by hearing directly from Aboriginal peoples regarding their views, experiences and perspective around change (Walter, 2010, p. 21). The most appropriate methods of collecting data for this particular research are outlined below. The approach described by Denzin and Lincoln (2012), has attempted to guide the approach of the research and researcher, by ensuring that we shift from white paradigms and be conscious

to shift from methodological subjectivity to enable a deep understanding of alternate realities and perspectives. Their approach outlines the process of considering subjectivity, post modernism, the politicisation of the purposes of qualitative research, relativism from a pragmatic and realist perspective. These considerations of the approach were used in the thesis in the following way, by questioning the current perspective by centring the source of knowledge from the voice of the Aboriginal participants rather than the framework of the organisations politicised lens.

Inductive analysis was utilised through the immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and inter-relationships; begins by exploring, then confirming findings, guided by analytical principles rather than rules (Merriam, 1995). The transcripts were thoroughly read, and confirmed back to participants to ensure that views were accurately captured. Once all data was collated, key themes were able to be developed from patterns which emerged from the information gathered. From these key themes there was the ability to create overarching categories for the themes.

The conceptual framework was led by the theoretical approaches to research, already discussed earlier in chapter 2, in addition to the exploration of extended relevant research which formed the foundations and lens for exploration and consideration within the research.

3.2 Participants, population and sample

A total of 33 participants completed either interviews (by phone or face-to-face) or via survey questionnaire responses. There were 28 participants who engaged in an online survey questionnaire and the other 5 participants who engaged in either in-person or phone call interviews. According to the DCJ FACSIAR team, there is a total of 2100 caseworkers in NSW (at the time of writing). Of these, 10% are Aboriginal caseworkers, meaning approximately 210 of the caseworkers are Aboriginal. At the time that the researcher conducted the interviews and contacted each Community Service Centre to ascertain the number of Aboriginal staff it was understood that the

total number of Aboriginal staff who could be accounted for at that time, noting that there are normal staff fluctuations that impact employee numbers, was not at full capacity, meaning there were a significant number of roles that were unfilled. This sample of participants at the time of conducting the research constituted 18% of the total Aboriginal staff employed across the state, according to figures on employment of Aboriginal caseworkers provided by NSW DCJ. The intended sample size was a minimum of 30 participants, preferably from a broad range of localities spread across NSW, to ensure that there are diverse perspectives from a range of Aboriginal caseworkers with varying experience, perspectives and geographic locations, and this plan was achieved.

The specific location of participants is not provided, to support anonymity of the participants, but the broader localities where participants have come from are noted below. The reason for reporting by district rather than office is that some offices may only have one or two Aboriginal-identified staff members in their local Community Service Centre and this could potentially allow readers to be able to deduce identities of participants. From the total of 33 participants who engaged in the study and completed either an online survey / questionnaire or phone / face-to-face interview, were from the following districts: Central Coast district, Hunter New England district, Illawarra Shoalhaven District, Mid North Coast District, Nepean Blue Mountains district, Northern NSW District, Northern Sydney District, Sydney District, Western NSW district, and Western Sydney District. From the participants who engaged in the research, the following districts were not included: Far West district, Hunter New England District, Murrumbidgee District, South Eastern Sydney District, South Western Sydney District, and Southern NSW District.

Potential participants expressed concerns around cultural safety. Some of the prospective participants who made enquiries and participated within the interviews were particularly concerned around the motives of the researcher and department. However, when the researcher's motivation to create change and better support Aboriginal colleagues as a non- Aboriginal practitioner was detailed and the role of the department as providing support but not directing the research was

described along with the measures taken for protecting confidentiality, there appeared to be some lessened worries.

There was a total of 7 prospective Aboriginal practitioners who expressed interest in interviews. Two withdrew their interest to participate due to their immense concern that the department may be able to find out or ascertain their identity, which could potentially impact upon their supervisory relationship or impact upon their employment. All but one interviewee expressed concern and a level of fear regarding potential retribution for their contributions and input. All interviewed participants were reluctant to be filmed and did not agree to being filmed, however two participants agreed to being audio recorded to support accuracy of data collection.

Confidentiality is of the utmost importance in this research. Interview participants requested not to be identified and expressed immense fears of any potential retribution for their participation or possible negative implications / ramifications to their employment. It was, therefore, imperative for all participants not to be identifiable within the research and anonymity essential practice in recording. The interviewees asked that they are not labelled or numbered in anyway, as this could potentially lead the reader or agency to be able to deduce the participant's identity.

The possibility of the utilisation of pseudonyms was considered by the researcher. However, some of the participants did not want a fictitious name to influence the reader's perception of the viewpoints shared, e.g. the potential bias of association with a particular gender. One participant expressed the view that names have significance and meaning culturally, so can diminish the conversations by not accurately reflecting this in the research. So, while not a standardised research practice of reporting data, a decision was made to reference direct quotes as being views expressed by 'a participant' which would be broader, and the highest level of confidentiality upheld.

3.3 Procedure

To ensure that the study was culturally appropriate, relevant and valid, a number of strategies and accountability measures were implemented. These included oversight by Aboriginal PhD supervisors, consultation with experts in statutory child protection including the involvement of Aboriginal peoples with child protection, consultation with Aboriginal DCJ colleagues and the formation of an Aboriginal reference group that oversaw the research.

3.3.1 Consultations prior to the commencement of the research project:

The researcher's initial primary doctoral supervisor was Aboriginal scholar Dr Victoria Grieves, who provided significant input into the study design. Dr Grieves is an Aboriginal Warraimaay woman from mid-north coast NSW and a historian. Dr Grieves reviewed and provided extensive advice in relation to the ethics approval application, research methods development and research considerations in terms of cultural sensitivity and appropriateness, from her background in Aboriginal studies, with specific expertise around Aboriginal wellbeing.

The project was initially designed in discussion with experts in the area of statutory child protection and the involvement of Aboriginal peoples in child protection. Karen Menzies, who significantly contributed to the 'Bringing them Home' report, was initially consulted on the research concept and prospective aims, whereby her views were discussed regarding whether the research was thought to be appropriate or a valuable study to pursue by a non-Aboriginal person, and if it was culturally relevant and appropriate as an area of inquiry. She was supportive of the research. Dr Marilyn McHughes from University of New South Wales (UNSW) was consulted around the value of the research and what aspects to consider. Dr McHughes recommended ensuring an Aboriginal consultation panel for accountability of the research and also ensuring participants have an opportunity to review transcripts or notes from their interviews. She also recommended that there be an Aboriginal consultation panel to be developed to ensure that there was appropriate cultural governance and representation of the Aboriginal practitioners/ participants view-points. A Senior

Aboriginal caseworker/ acting manager provided recommendations of support around the benefits of the research to Aboriginal staff working within Department of Communities and Justice. This colleague suggested consulting with the lands council for community members who may be part of the Aboriginal consultation panel.

The researcher then consulted with local Aboriginal colleagues within a land council in NSW. Due to confidentiality, their names are not provided here. The researcher was advised that each community in which the research will be conducted (via interviews and surveys) should be approached to address communication protocols for each Country, prior to engaging staff in the interview process, and this recommendation was carried out. In addition, the concept of reciprocity as identified by Martin (2016) and has addressed equal trades conducted by nearby communities. Therefore in the context of this research, a suggestion of offering lunch and beverages at the external Aboriginal panel consultation meetings held at the end of study and providing a small thank you gift/ card was recommended. This was actioned by the researcher.

3.3.2 *Aboriginal Ethics approval*

Following the collection of this feedback, the ethics application for this project was submitted to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). The research ethics application underwent rigorous review through the AITSIS ethics approval board. The research project was reviewed with changes requested by the AITSIS board to finetune the procedure, process and accountability factors twice prior to the final approval being obtained. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies ethics review board approved the project (Ethics #EO295-20210831). Oversight by an Aboriginal panel was approved as part of the project design, created of various Aboriginal community members and stakeholders, further detailed in the next subheading. The research was also approved by the University of Sydney Ethics Committee.

The Western District Aboriginal Reference Group was consulted within DCJ. This group expressed finding the research area valuable, however recommended that rather than going to each

district Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG) meeting that the research be presented at the state ARG instead. The research project was then presented on two occasions at state ARG level.

On the first occasion when the researcher presented at the state ARG, there were positive comments around the value of the research. There were some recommendations made to the researcher by one of the participants who raised the concern that there was not at that time a university Aboriginal supervisor the currently in place, given that the previous supervisor Dr Victoria Grieves was no longer supervising the research process, given she had changed roles and was no longer employed by the University of Sydney. The second concern was in relation to the department pursuing research without consultation with the Aboriginal staff within DCJ and it being led by a non-Aboriginal person. This was clarified by the information provided regarding the research being conducted by the University of Sydney, although in partnership with DCJ, was not developed or created internally as a DCJ-led project. An explanation was further provided around the Aboriginal consultation process and plans for an Aboriginal consultation panel as part of the AIATSIS ethics approval by the researcher and Chairperson at the time.

The researcher rectified the issue raised by continuing to seek engagement of an Aboriginal supervisor. Two new Aboriginal supervisors, Dr Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes (Kamilaroi/ Gamilaraay woman and currently an academic at the University of Melbourne) and Dr Mareese Terare (Bundjalung & Goenpul woman and academic from the University of Sydney). The update around the research progression, advising the recommendations made by the state ARG and how they were actioned, the information around the commencement of recruitment, were provided back to the NSW state Aboriginal reference group within DCJ.

3.3.3 Consultations with Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

There were consultations made through the FACSIR (Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research) unit within each stage of the research. These consultations were particularly focused on coordinating the research information sessions for all Aboriginal staff who

may be interested in participating or have queries in relation to the research. FACSIAR were consulted about a summary of findings from the research provided to the state ARG. The FACSIAR requested consultations from Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes and the Office of the Senior Practitioner to review the draft prompt tool (see Appendix 5). Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes provided one round of reviews. The Office of the Senior Practitioner provided two rounds of reviews.

3.3.4 Supervisory team

The researcher's former doctoral supervisor, Dr Victoria Grieves, offered significant guidance to the researcher/ chief investigator. Dr Grieves is an Aboriginal person (Warrimaay from mid-north coast NSW) and historian, who has reviewed and provided extensive advice in relation to the ethics approval application, research methods development and research considerations in terms of cultural sensitivity and appropriateness, from her academic background in Aboriginal studies, with specific expertise around Aboriginal wellbeing.

The researcher's current supervisory team consisted of: Dr Amy Conley Wright, Dr Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes, and Dr Mareese Terare.

Professor Amy Conley Wright has extensive experience in leading research regarding child protection and out-of-home care systems, including being chief investigator for research projects such as ARC Linkage projects Fostering Lifelong Connections and Upholding the right to cultural connections for children in care, evaluation of the DCJ Family Group Conferencing program and Family Connect and Support program, and other international collaborative research influencing child and family services.

Dr Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes, previously employed by the University of Sydney, and now currently employed by the University of Melbourne, is a Kamilaroi/ Gamilaraay woman, who has specialty expertise in Indigenous Knowledges, drawing upon psychology, sociology and criminology studies. Sheelagh Daniel-Mayes' research spans across multidisciplinary areas, with a particular lens

upon ethical, indigenous ecology and inclusion studies particularly advocacy for vulnerable, marginalised and those living with disabilities.

Dr Mareese Terare, from the University of Sydney, has 20 years teaching experience, specialising in Aboriginal healing frameworks, interpersonal trauma, counselling, social justice, children's rights and human rights.

3.4 Study recruitment

Participants were recruited through a DCJ internal email, drafted and arranged through FACSIAR, which was distributed and sent out through the head office District Coordination Unit from their 'District Coordination' inbox. The District Coordination Unit sent the invitation email to each individual district's coordination/admin teams who then forwarded it out to staff in their area. The first preliminary email provided information and context about the research project and invited all the relevant Aboriginal-identified Caseworkers employed by NSW Department of Communities and Justice to participate in an information session about the study.

Two online information sessions were offered to department staff coordinated by the FACSIAR unit, which was available to all Aboriginal DCJ staff to share information about the research and provide information about how staff can participate and engage in the research.

The FACSIAR team in DCJ further circulated the survey link and invitation for face-to-face interviews to all relevant Aboriginal caseworkers in DCJ departments such as JCPR (Joint Child protection Response Program) Helpline, CFDU Aboriginal outcomes and all other casework teams. The survey link and opportunity to engage in face-to-face interview invitations was sent out three times via email to each district and then distributed to all Aboriginal-identified casework staff.

The potential participants were self-identifying and self-nominated within NSW DCJ. The inclusion criteria for persons who were intending to participate in the research were as follows:

- Child protection caseworker staff who identify as Aboriginal and employed as a caseworker by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, within child protection, out-of-home care, Joint Child Protection Response Program (JCPRP), and helpline teams across NSW
- The staff member/ participant must not be a direct supervisee of the researcher or currently work in the same DCJ office (Lithgow and Blue Mountains CSC departmental offices) to be eligible for the interview component
- The staff member/ participant must not currently be engaged in any other research which could potentially be a conflict of interest

Potential participants were asked to send in their expression of interest to an email address created for the project, which enabled the researcher to identify the participant cohort. All persons emailed, including participants, were blind copied into emails, to protect privacy and ensure confidentiality.

In response to their emails, and following the information sessions, potential participants were sent a participant information sheet to provide further written information about the project and what their participation would entail. Please see 'Appendix 2', which includes the 'Participant information and informed consent sheet'. Participants were asked to sign and return a consent form by email should they wish to participate in the research project.

The consent form was made available within the questionnaire survey prior to participants being able to proceed with completion. In the survey, there was a question to indicate whether the participant would like to be contacted for an additional or alternate option of face-to-face or telephone interview.

As all staff members were self-selecting to participate, and participation was offered and made available to all DCJ Aboriginal child protection caseworkers; this protected from the risk of coercion. Participants were advised that their involvement was purely voluntary and that they would

not suffer any repercussions for their involvement, honest feedback or information provided as part of the process. There was only one clause around the need to report should there be any danger or risk identified to the participant or others in accordance with normal mandatory reporting procedures, within face-to-face or phone interviews.

3.5 Method for obtaining data and collection

The research was designed to hear directly from the participants – Aboriginal child protection caseworkers, who were currently employed by the Department of Communities and Justice. Their perspectives and views were sought through online surveys as well as face-to-face interviews. It is important that the methodology centres the voices of Aboriginal people, given the concern that most Western research paradigms exclude Indigenous voices. This is considered to be one way in which control is exerted over the production of knowledge (Muller, 2014).

Two forms of data collection were utilised. The primary mode for collecting this information was through the participants completing an online survey, managed through Sydney University Qualtrics program. Participants were then provided with an opportunity to engage in a face-to-face or phone interviews, which will expand upon the questions noted within the survey. Aboriginal elders within the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and the researcher's initial supervisor Dr Victoria Grieves suggested that a culturally appropriate method would ensure that Aboriginal experiences and perceptions were not only to be reflected within a written questionnaire/survey, but that there would additionally be other modes of obtaining information to hear directly from the Aboriginal people's voices.

The researcher conducted narrative interviewing, considering the learnings and knowledge from 'Yarning' approaches. The concept of Yarning was recommended within consultations with Aboriginal elders in the Wiradjuri country, Aboriginal child protection colleagues, Dr Victoria Grieves

and Dr. Marilyn McHugh, who has engaged in significant Aboriginal-specific research. However, given the cultural position of researcher, it must be emphasised that the researcher did not practice 'Yarning' but rather drew upon learnings for the conduct of narrative interviews.

'Yarning' is expressed to be the Aboriginal knowledge process used to communicate their perspectives and experiences and has been a way of sharing these generation to generation. 'Yarning' is one of the methods identified by Martin (2016) "which purposefully brings together a number of topics in a number of layers – or threads – for a particular purpose" (p. 50). Smith (1999) adds and extends on this understanding of yarning as another form of decolonising methodologies as it upholds Aboriginal people's dignity and strength by providing the opportunity and the encouragement for Aboriginal practitioners to talk about their experiences. As a result, authority is given to their voice – acknowledging the Aboriginal people as 'knowers and doers'. Although the researcher did not engage in this practice as a non- Aboriginal person, the development of knowledge and awareness was an important part of maintaining a culturally appropriate lens regarding communication.

The survey was intended to focus on understanding the support needs for Aboriginal-identified caseworkers. The survey design was prepared in collaboration with the Aboriginal cultural consultation panel, in terms of reviewing questions for cultural appropriateness, cultural safety and relevance. A related set of open-ended questions were developed as a semi-structured interview guide to provide an alternate option to participate, which was deemed culturally appropriate by the project advisors. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Although Decolonising approaches urge researchers to value the relationship with research participants and to commit to their empowerment as knowledge co-producers. Ideally interviews via face to face or phone would have been the preferred mode of hearing the stories and experiences of all the Aboriginal participants. It was advised by the Aboriginal consultation panel the importance of having the mixed mode of obtaining Aboriginal participant views, given the following

considerations which could impact engagement including: broad distance of locality range across NSW, the support around anonymity which could support more freedom of expression, the time constraints perceived in engaging in the surveys which could be conducted at the flexibility of the participant.

Whilst there may have been implications of possible limitations attributed to the themes and agenda being set by the researcher, this was attempted to be mitigated to keep the survey questions broad and open ended enough to attempt to better understand the key areas of practitioner experience and support within the agency. These survey and interview questions aligned to the key literature review areas identified as needing to be understood and the particular focus of the research, and was rigorously reviewed by the Aboriginal consultation panel, university Aboriginal supervisors and also reviewed by AITSIS ethics board.

The initial questions for the survey and interviews were initially reviewed by the supervisory team and the Aboriginal consultation panel. The panel advised that the concept of 'Yarning' needed to be considered in the way the questions had been structured. The consultation panel advised that the interview questions should be significantly reduced and be adapted to allow for more free-flowing conversation, which better aligns with Aboriginal methods of communication that is more culturally appropriate. The advice provided further raised titling the interview prompts as interview/ Yarning prompts so that it formed a less clinical and structured way of inviting discussion and way of conducting the interview. The interview questions/ yarning prompts were also reviewed by AITSIS and reduced further in the quantity and length of each question and to allow more free-flowing, open-ended engagement. The questionnaire and interview guide were also reviewed and validated through the cultural advisory panel and was then piloted with a small number of DCJ colleagues, to ensure the relevance and to refine questions and resolve any system issues with the Qualtrics feedback survey software used. Please see 'Appendix 3' for the final 'Survey questions' and see 'Appendix 4' for the interview guide.

Participants were invited to either complete the written survey or engage in a telephone or face-to-face interview. Based on advice from the supervisory team, the interview transcriptions for any face-to-face or phone interviews were provided back to participants to review, to ensure that their perceptions and views were accurately captured and allow Aboriginal practitioners to revise if they so wished. Participant names and any potentially identifying details were removed from the transcripts and the final thesis write-up, for confidentiality. Participants were free to withdraw at any time without any repercussions, which was noted on the consent form and participant information sheet. It was additionally decided to not use any pseudonyms to ensure further anonymity, which most participants preferred, so that the direct quotes included in the research would not enable the reader to deduce participant identity.

3.6 Data analysis

The findings have been captured and presented in this thesis report which identifies key themes, and the perspectives shared by participants. The approach and steps undertaken to conduct the thematic analysis is detailed.

Given the qualitative approach for the research, thematic analysis was conducted in the way described by Clarke and Braun (2017). The themes were organised by building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up. As I went through the surveys, I went back and forth between the themes and the database until I was able to establish a comprehensive set of themes. Alston and Bowles's (1998) argument that qualitative data analysis "occurs simultaneously with data collection" (p. 193), is consistent with the process which I undertook within this method of qualitative analysis. At the end of each interview, I reviewed and sought out common themes and phrasing which allowed me to identify emerging trends early on. Once the participants had approved their interview transcripts, I merged and collated into the identified themes from the survey results to ascertain the key findings.

Initial and subsequent coding was utilised to develop overarching or umbrella themes, which was then refined into more specific umbrella themes and then subthemes within the final collation of analysis. Some of the themes which emerged flowed from the sections which formed the structure of the surveys and interviews. However, no prior themes had been developed until after the analysis and examination of data. Some of the themes which had flowed from the surveys were developed in consultation with the Aboriginal cultural consultation panel. There were 4 main umbrella themes identified: 1) Exploration of cultural safety and inclusion, 2) Experience of racism, 3) Training and career development opportunities, and 4) Management supervision and organisational constructs supporting Aboriginal caseworkers. Then, further analysis was conducted to develop and identify subthemes within these overarching themes.

3.7 Guarding against bias

The findings presented within chapter 4 of this thesis capture and encompass the voices and clear perspectives of the research participants. The integrity of the participants' views regarding their worries, fears, successes, strengths, challenges identified and suggestions on how to create change were all communicated in the collated findings, ensuring none were withheld within the process. The interviewed participants were provided with an opportunity to review the transcribed recordings and verbatim notes to ensure that they could make any necessary amendments or changes, to ensure that they were satisfied with the accuracy of the recorded notes and that these were reflective of their perspectives.

The design for the current study was to hear the participants' story and experiences in their own words, with an opportunity to tell their story. The basis of this approach to the research was in line with the decolonising theory, which acknowledges that the shared stories for marginalised or oppressed groups have the opportunity to reclaim their knowledge and experience. This is considered in light of the dominant groups who can be perceived as having taken over or interpreted

prevalent frameworks of knowing, particularly in relation to Aboriginal peoples lived experience and knowledge filtered within a white research paradigm (D'Cruz & Jones, 2004).

Another form of ensuring accountability of bias was established through the external Aboriginal Cultural consultation panel and university supervisors, who were consulted around appropriate process and strategies for collecting and then analysing the data and further advice sought regarding next steps, communication and further interactions with participants. The cultural advisory panel provided advice around the most appropriate methods for gathering, collating and presenting the information / data obtained in the research. The cultural advisory panel furthermore advised how to best approach the interview techniques, input and review of the survey questions and interview/yarning prompts for interviews conducted with the participants. The cultural advisory panel also gave support to the researcher during the stages of providing feedback and updating information back to the participants to ensure cultural sensitivity and safety by the chief researcher, to ensure the process undertaken, upheld the outmost respect and value of participants.

The cultural advisory panel suggested that the researcher ensure that the participants make a final review of transcripts of the interviews, for the researcher to explain to the participants how the information would be presented in the thesis- e.g., themes or direct quotes by them- seeking clarity about any comments that they made that may have been omitted or reworded. The importance of consultation both internally and externally with the research process is raised by Bergen and Labonte (2020) as an important practice as a means of ensuring accountability measures for bias.

The direct quotations used within this thesis were transcribed verbatim from the written notes from participant interviews. I removed superfluous words such as 'um,' 'yeah' and 'like' from the transcripts to enhance ease of reading. The removal of these words in no way changed the content of the participants' narratives.

3.8 Limitations

This research is subject to limitations. The ability for Aboriginal practitioners / participants to freely and openly share information within the research may have been influenced by some of the participants' possible fear of social or organisational implications and ramifications of speaking up and sharing their views regarding racism specifically, which can impact the reliability of the research. It had even become evident within this current research that some of the Aboriginal practitioners who made enquiries about engaging in the research expressed their fear and reluctance in participating given their fears of retribution by the organisation. Some of the Aboriginal practitioners shared that they were worried about the agenda of the organisation in facilitating this research and the integrity of the department to actually utilise the information to improve outcomes for Aboriginal practitioners.

Some of the prospective participants were concerned and queried whether there might be negative implications as an employee of the organisation and if there might be any negative impacts upon their role should supervisors or organisational staff ascertain their identity as a result of participating. This expressed fear or worry about the ramifications of their possible contribution and free expression to voice their views, in and of itself, highlights both an inequality which still exists and is experienced or perceived by Aboriginal practitioners today.

There is additionally, the question regarding generalisability of the research. These specific findings, whilst likely somewhat transferable to other statutory and non government child protection organisations, are still specifically uncovering information relating to DCJ in NSW. There were also limitations regarding the formatting of the questions within the survey, which provided some limits to the specificity of the questions given that within the cultural governance process there was advice by the Cultural advisory panel which led to the significant reduction and simplification of questions developed and utilised in the survey to ensure that it was more

accessible, user friendly, invited more open ended and free narrative responses and supports increased possible completion given time limitations for participants.

There was the possible limitation regarding viability of the research in terms of the organisation being able to promote the research, and support staff in creating designated spaces for Aboriginal practitioners to participate, whilst providing autonomy. The reach and accessibility to promote participation could have been better achieved through methods of organisational tracking and monitoring, however, this may have been experienced as coercion rather than ensuring self determination to participate and anonymity which is integral for staff to feel safe to participate.

There were also limitations given that coding and themes were developed manually by researcher rather than with the use of a software package. The software package was not utilised for pragmatic reasons, given the small number of interviews and open-ended responses. It was, therefore, a straightforward process of analysing and developing themes of the data in the context of the underpinning theoretical lens and key areas being reviewed within the research.

3.9 Conclusion

In summary, the research was designed to hear directly from the participants – Aboriginal child protection caseworkers, who were currently employed by the Department of Communities and Justice. Their perspectives and views were sought through online surveys as well as face-to-face interviews. The methodology for the study was centred on hearing the voices of Aboriginal people/practitioners and ensured a layer of accountability to ensure that these perspectives were appropriately captured, reflected and presented.

The following chapter reports on the views and communicated perspectives of the participants, through the findings of the surveys and interviews conducted.

Chapter 4: Research results and discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the research focus aimed at identifying the experiences of Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers working within the NSW government statutory child protection welfare agency (Department of Communities and Justice). The purpose is developing an understanding about how they can be supported in their role. This chapter presents themes that emerged from survey responses and interviews, and further delves into an analysis and discussion of these themes from the lens of the theoretical framework. Discussion of how the findings relate to current research is integrated into the presentation of findings.

4.2 Key themes

4.2.1 Exploration of cultural safety and inclusion

In relation to cultural safety and inclusion, four sub-themes emerged. The first theme identified was lack of understanding and support by non-Aboriginal colleagues regarding their cultural well-being, which undermined cultural safety and inclusion. The second theme identified the gaps observed in translating the recommendations made from research and reviews conducted to practice improvements, change and implementation. The third theme identified the unique experiences of Aboriginal practitioners in child protection which impacts upon cultural safety and inclusion in the workplace/ role, and has three sub themes. The fourth theme identified a lack of opportunities for Aboriginal practitioners to share good practices, which could increase understanding of non-Aboriginal colleagues and help Aboriginal staff become more connected to each other within the department, and has three sub themes.

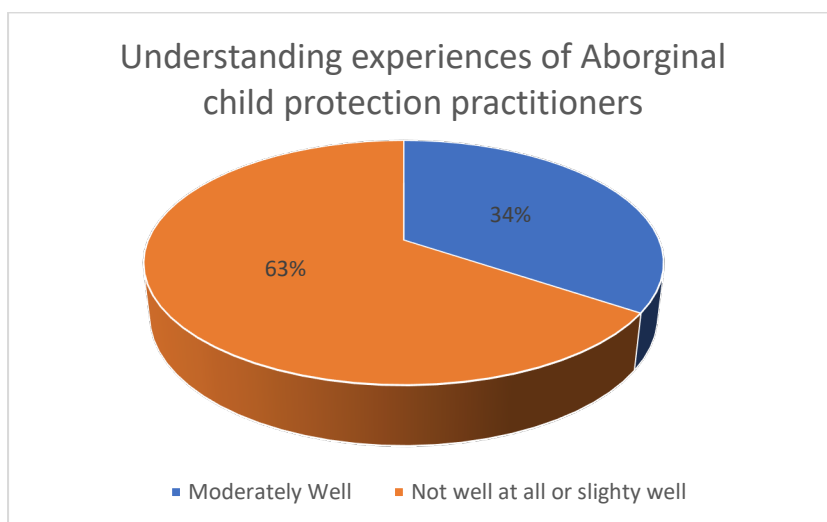
4.2.2 Lack of understanding by non-Aboriginal colleagues

More than half of the total participants responded that there was a fundamental view that there is a lack of understanding by non-Aboriginal child protection staff of what the experiences of

Aboriginal people are and what Aboriginal practitioners in statutory child protection work face today. There were 33% of participants from the survey and interview responses who thought that the non-Aboriginal child protection staff understood 'moderately well' what the experiences of Aboriginal people are and what Aboriginal practitioners in statutory child protection work face today, and the impacts of generational trauma and impacts of past colonial practices upon Aboriginal peoples today. Another 63% of participants from the survey and interview responses thought that the non-Aboriginal child protection staff understood what the experiences of Aboriginal people are and what Aboriginal practitioners in statutory child protection work face today, and the impacts of generational trauma and impacts of past colonial practices upon Aboriginal peoples today either 'not well at all' or only 'slightly well'.

Figure 1

Perceived understanding of experiences of Aboriginal people and practitioners by non-Aboriginal staff



Some participants acknowledged in their comments within the surveys and interviews that the department was attempting to develop cultural understanding and insights around the historic trauma and impacts of colonisation upon Aboriginal peoples, however, the department needed to extend this insight to the impacts specifically upon child protection work and how this applies to welfare practices today.

A participant shared the view:

“You can see how much the department is trying to teach staff about what damage the government has caused to our people. But they also need to understand what it means for us now. How can we hear from Aboriginal people, our families, our communities, and our staff more, how can we hear what we need today?”

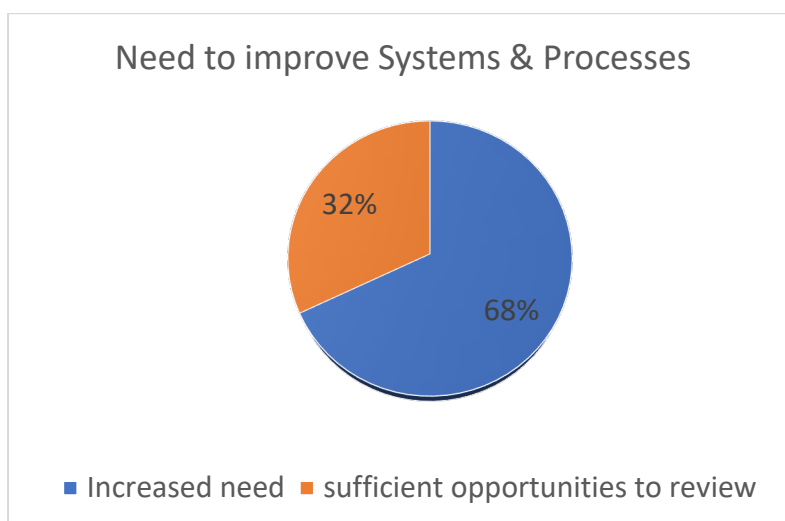
The viewpoint speaks to the need for the further development of cultural inclusion within statutory practices. It is evident that there is a need for increased research to understand strategies for hearing Aboriginal clients’ experiences. There are already methods and systems in place within the department which enables the review of practices impacting Aboriginal clients in place such as:

- Aboriginal consultation processes available to support casework practice
- Aboriginal consultation panels, for significant decision-making impacting Aboriginal children and families (particularly around permanency decisions)
- Reviews conducted regarding Aboriginal outcomes e.g., the Family Is Culture (FIC) review
- Winangay assessment (assessment tool designed to specifically assess Aboriginal carers) for prospective Aboriginal kinship and foster carers
- Aboriginal reference group consultations or cultural information sharing, raising culturally relevant issues impacting Aboriginal staff and reviewing processes and practices impacting Aboriginal clients.

It is, however, evident that the majority of participants (68%) from interviews and surveys agreed that there is an increased need to have more systems and processes to better understand the viewpoints of Aboriginal staff views regarding identified needs, thoughts, and opportunity to review processes, practice or systems in place which impact upon Aboriginal clients or Aboriginal practitioners.

Figure 2

Identification of the need to have increased systems and processes to better understand Aboriginal practitioners' views regarding practice, policy, systems and culturally specific needs



Further findings showed that 68% of total participants additionally thought that the department should be supporting increased opportunities for Aboriginal practitioners to contribute or review policy and practices relevant to Aboriginal practice, caseworkers or clients. The remaining 32% of other participants expressed views relating to there being sufficient or evidence of opportunities to contribute, provide feedback and review policy and practices relevant to Aboriginal outcomes, the extent to what degree the department is able to do this would require further investigation. This

aligns with the strong argument supporting the decolonisation of research processes, through shifting from a White paradigm to ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard, as a way of influencing knowledge and change (Coram, 2011; Prior, 2007).

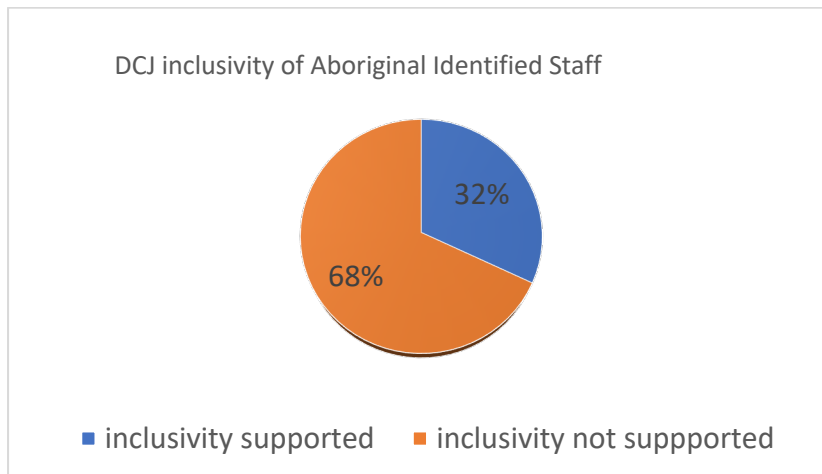
The identified need in the research findings, for non-Aboriginal practitioners to gain further insight into the experiences and understanding of Aboriginal history and impacts upon child protection today aligns with the approach of decolonisation (Oates, 2018). This finding speaks to the importance of the agency attempting to reframe and contest the current societal narrative by genuinely acknowledge the trauma inflicted by the government within the processes, systems, and education implemented by the agency.

4.2.3 *Gaps between recommendations and actions within reviews and research*

It was found that 32% of the total participants from surveys and interviews had expressed that DCJ supported Aboriginal-identified staff in sharing their cultural insight, perspectives, experience and knowledge 'most of the time' and that this contributed to cultural safety and inclusivity. There was, however, an expressed frustration by some of the participants who thought that although there were avenues to share their views within reviews, that the feedback, viewpoints were not often translated into actions or changes to system, process, or practice within the department. This too raises the possible question and tension regarding what avenues the department may be utilising to obtain this feedback and information from Aboriginal practitioners and how the outcomes of such reviews are being released and shared to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal departmental practitioners.

Figure 3

The participant views regarding DCJ supporting Aboriginal inclusivity in hearing their professional and cultural views, insights, experience and expertise



Consideration needs to be made as to ways that the department can ensure that the collated views, recommendations, and suggestions made by Aboriginal practitioners within research or reviews conducted internally and externally are more visible and accessible to others within the agency. This can be one way in which Aboriginal people's self-determination can be upheld and their voices heard, including the positive and negative experiences and in turn could assist in identifying if change is required. Ensuring the release of such reviews conducted both internally and externally, is moreover an important measure for ensuring the accountability of the department to action change to any of the recommendations and suggestions made, and in turn not leaving Aboriginal practitioners feeling and experiencing that the system is not improving or culturally supportive of responsive to needs of Aboriginal peoples.

A participant shared...

"I feel like there are so many reviews conducted by our agency, we give feedback time and time again but nothing much changes"

4.2.4 Unique experiences of Aboriginal staff in child protection

There were other expressed needs raised for non-Aboriginal caseworkers and managers to develop further insight into what the experiences are like for Aboriginal caseworkers, and some of the tensions which exist both individually in their personal lives as well as professionally within their role as an Aboriginal child protection caseworker.

A participant expressed:

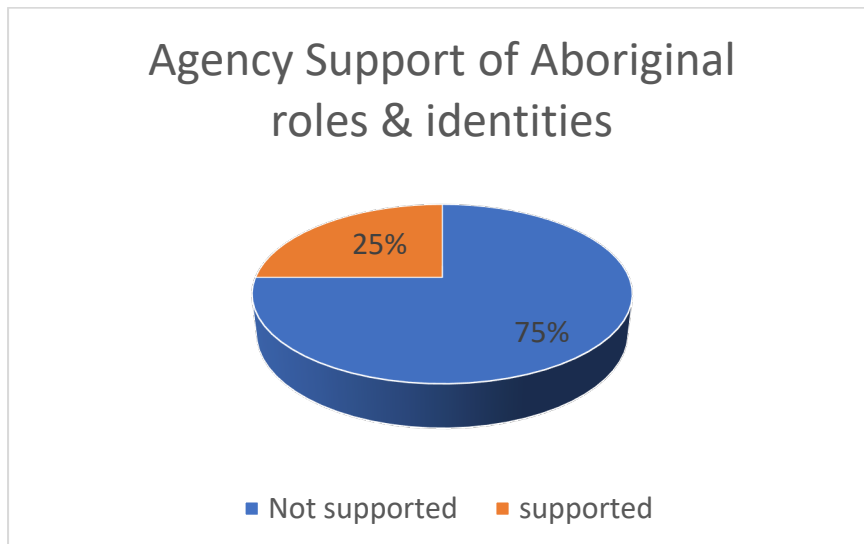
“[It is important] to ensure Non-Aboriginal managers are aware of the dynamics that Aboriginal caseworkers face in the organisation, community and their own families”

In the research of Oates (2011), she refers to the lack of awareness and recognition by non-Aboriginal practitioners of the extent of racism, isolation, and oppression of Aboriginal practitioners in statutory child protection agencies, which is an example of the White and social privilege that exists for non-Aboriginal practitioners, which needs to be further changed within welfare systems.

It was expressed by 75% of participants that they felt that they weren't supported by the agency to balance the varying roles/ identities that you may need to juggle as part of your Aboriginal identity and culture, e.g. family role, caseworker role, community member, professional cultural leader or consultant. In the writing of Delgado and Stefanic (2012), the challenge for Aboriginal human services practitioners in navigating the overlapping identities is addressed, and highlighted as an area which requires acknowledgement and support within organisations.

Figure 4

The support of the agency to balance Aboriginal practitioners varying roles and identities within their role



One participant said:

“Coming into this department as an Aboriginal person can be very scary, some of your friends and family don’t even know you’re working for the department. Then once they do know some of them judge you, they kind of see you like a traitor. But all you want to do is make a difference for our own people.”

Some of the participants shared in the interviews and the free text of the surveys, that they felt that the pressure experienced by Aboriginal caseworkers/ practitioners is different to that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Some of the participants referred to the challenges they faced as a result of the expectations of other non-Aboriginal colleagues within DCJ.

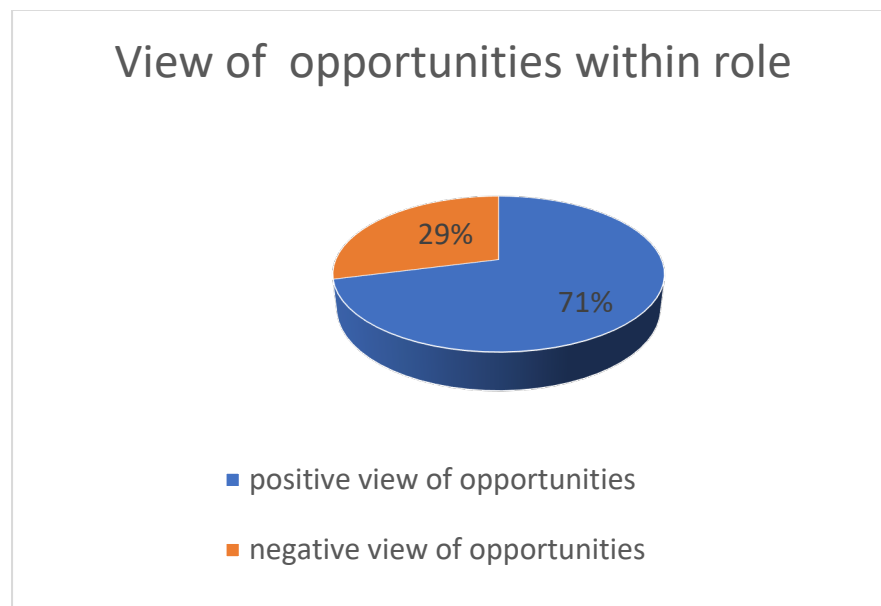
Some of the expectations which may exist with regards to the viewpoints of non-Aboriginal colleagues perceptions or misconceptions around what Aboriginal practitioners’ roles, skillsets or insights should look like within the organisation. Many participants expressed feeling like there were

not clear enough boundaries or workplace expectations established by the department regarding the parameters of their role specifically as an Aboriginal caseworker.

It was found that 71% of participants felt that one of the significant positive experiences specific within their role as an Aboriginal practitioner was ‘the opportunity to build connection with Aboriginal children, families and Communities’.

Figure 5

The perception of Aboriginal practitioners’ opportunities within their role



One participant shared an example of one of the positive opportunities in their role:

“Giving families the opportunity to work with someone that may have had similar experiences and have an understanding of the harm that the department has caused and knowing that they won’t be judged because of their situation.”

The need to provide spaces to review the viewpoints and recommendations within the processes and systems is an imperative part of decolonisation of the welfare system, through not only hearing Aboriginal people's voices but further translating these views to practice and policy changes, so the agency moves away from tokenism (Libesman, 2007).

4.2.5 The importance of sharing good practice

There were several participants who shared within interviews and suggestions made within the surveys that there was a need for collaborative opportunities to share cultural learnings and insights directly from Aboriginal community members and internal DCJ Aboriginal practitioners together with their non-Aboriginal practitioners/ colleagues in forums, conferences and shared publications.

There were recommendations made by participants such as the implementation of practice forums and conferences where good news stories around Aboriginal children and families, positive outcomes and how those outcomes were achieved in terms of practice learnings could be shared with all DCJ practitioners. There were other suggestions made around sharing insights directly from Aboriginal practitioners, and an acknowledgement of Aboriginal practitioners' good work and positive outcomes in such public forums to also provide further cultural insights and learnings.

A participant said:

"There needs to be opportunities to attend more conferences, meetings or gatherings specifically for Aboriginal staff, whereby the successes of the work of Aboriginal caseworkers can be acknowledged and celebrated."

It was further recommended from some of the participants that the department should increase the sharing of good news stories which are relevant to Aboriginal staff, or client outcomes through publications. Whilst the Office of the Senior Practitioners have a publication, video and forum which highlights good outcomes and practice within the 'Shining a light on good practice', it is

suggested that there be other localized forums and information sharing methods which also could provide more frequent opportunities to invite the sharing of positive practice and outcomes for Aboriginal families and practitioners within DCJ.

One participant shared the following suggestion:

“Notification of the specific good outcomes stories can be shared in some kind of publication or other written forum/ communication to all DCJ staff.”

Some suggested ideas for distributing these good news stories through email, internal newsletters within the department and then other external publications (e.g. in the media), in academic journals, or departmental publications accessible to other agencies and the public. 86% of participants expressed an observed need for the department to provide increased opportunities for Aboriginal practitioners to collaborate with other Aboriginal practitioners internally and externally, e.g., increasing localised opportunities.

Figure 6

Need for increased collaboration opportunities for Aboriginal Practitioners



A participant shared:

“When I first started I was the only Aboriginal staff member around in the office, I felt very alone. It was hard to speak up about cultural things, and I found my perspective was very different to others.”

There were suggestions from some participants made around opportunities for Aboriginal practitioners to connect with other Aboriginal practitioners including:

- Supervisors connecting Aboriginal caseworkers to other Aboriginal staff or Aboriginal teams who are connected to the state and district Aboriginal reference groups, who can send any relevant cultural information or invitation to meetings or events specifically for Aboriginal staff
- to consider connecting new Aboriginal staff to an Aboriginal colleague mentor or buddy who is also Aboriginal and checks in regularly with the Aboriginal practitioner
- Access to cultural supervision for leaders/practitioners
- Opportunities for Aboriginal staff to connect with other Aboriginal professionals within culturally specific training or conferences
- Opportunities offered and supported for Aboriginal staff to connect with other Aboriginal professionals and elders within the community as part of supporting their role as an Aboriginal caseworker.

In addition to the recommendations for increasing avenues for inclusion and shared learning amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff, it was additionally suggested from some participants that there be further opportunities for Aboriginal staff to have more input and contribution to the review and development of policies and procedures. It is understood that the DCJ has internal processes for cultural review of practices, procedures and policies, however, it may be beneficial for the department to consider a variety of ways / methods for seeking and obtaining the feedback of

Aboriginal practitioners as part of the development, implementation, evaluation and review processes. In the research of Libesman and Gray (2023), it highlights the need for collaboration of statutory child protection agencies with culturally relevant services to support improve the disparity of supports available for Aboriginal children and families. This can also be extended as a consideration for Aboriginal practitioners who as suggested through increased collaboration with other Aboriginal and culturally relevant services can also improve shared learning, professional networking, collaboration and supports for statutory child protection Aboriginal practitioners.

A participant shared:

“In order to increase cultural safety for staff there should be joint shared opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff within the department to connect. It is critical, opportunities are provided to contribute to the development and review of policies and practices as they pertain to Aboriginal caseworkers or Aboriginal clients supported by the agency.”

This identified need aligns with the decolonising methodologies, as a way of shifting white constructs within child protection systems, so that we can influence, change and shape policy and practice to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

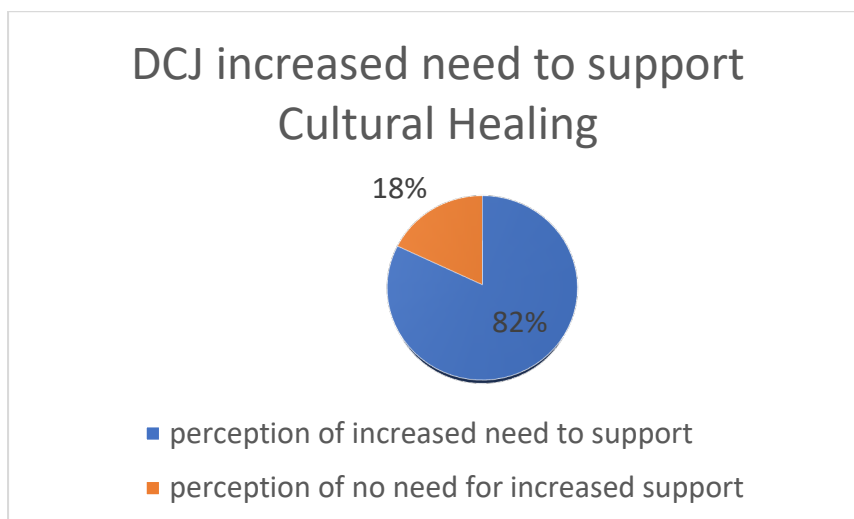
4.2.6 Lack of support for cultural wellbeing

It was found that 82% of participants shared the view that DCJ does not support cultural healing. There was a suggestion made by a participant that cultural supervision could provide an opportunity for healing and recovery. However, it is evident that there needs to be further research in this area to understand what cultural supervision and supports may look like and would entail in order to bring cultural healing for Aboriginal child protection staff. Some of the participants provided additional context around their perceptions with regards to the challenges or blockages to the agency being able to better support cultural healing.

Some of the challenges currently identified included the view that overarching caseloads for all DCJ caseworkers are too high to enable the strengths-based relationship repair required to support cultural healing. Some participants expressed the impact of the attitudes within some districts management hierarchies are also not supportive of cultural healing due to lack of value for Aboriginal practitioners' skills and input as significant contributing factors within the child protection work/practice.

Figure 7

Perceptions of DCJ not supporting cultural healing and the need to increase support



Grieves (2009) highlights that the domains of cultural wellbeing need to be inclusive not only of the social, emotional, psychological, physical domains but additionally of the spiritual domains. This holistic view regarding an Aboriginal person and communities' wellbeing is furthermore, considered as their sense of 'personhood', which factors the interconnections between spiritual, cultural, emotional, physical, behavioural, social and even economic factors, influencing wellbeing (Haswell et al., 2013).

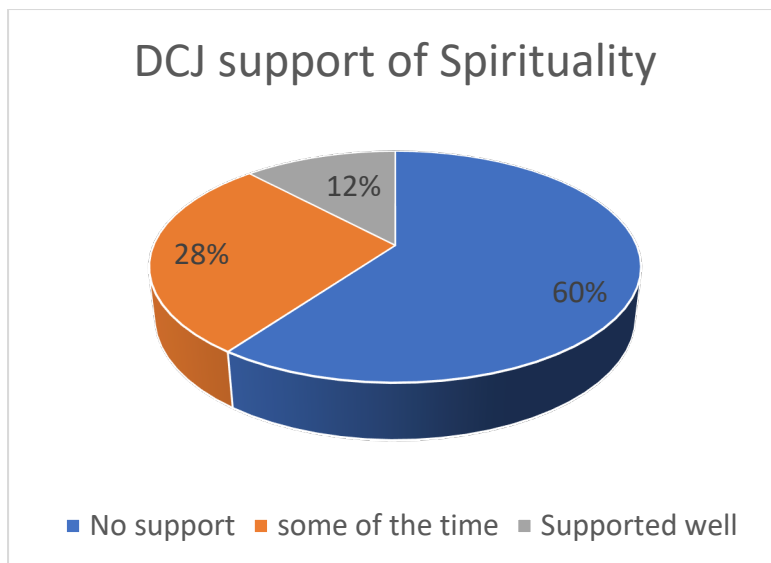
It was found that 60% of participants also felt that DCJ did not support their spirituality and sense of personhood within their role and identity as an Aboriginal practitioner. The remaining 28% thought that DCJ supported their spirituality some of the time, and the remaining percentage thought that DCJ supported their spirituality well.

Some of the comments from participants whom had positive experiences of having their spirituality supported by the agency shared that this was attributed to by aspects such as management attempting to support important family and cultural events that the Aboriginal practitioner had to attend and making an effort to hear when the work does not align with their personal cultural values, or when cultural or ethical pain may be present, and accommodations made to accommodating allocations which may be a conflict of interest.

It is also understood that DCJ already have resources and processes available which can support elements of spirituality. These resources include the Minnesota model utilized in Group supervision, the cultural consultation cards, principles of the DCJ Practice Framework and family finding approach. There is, however, opportunity to further expand this within assessment tools and practitioner supervision tools.

Figure 8

The views regarding DCJ's support of Aboriginal practitioners' spirituality



The aspects of personhood and spirituality that the department needs to consider in terms of cultural support and inclusion are the aspects identified by Grieves (2009) such as “connectedness to Aboriginal society, family, kin, the natural world, which are found within Aboriginal Spirituality, the blueprint for culture” (p. 49).

There were other suggestions made by some of the participants that would assist Aboriginal practitioners to be better supported in terms of their spirituality and sense of personhood:

- Increasing opportunities to connect with Aboriginal colleagues internally and externally to the agency
- Respecting, understanding and valuing cultural practices such as sorry business, taking time to go back on country and travelling to see family at important times of the year
- Having opportunities for the agency to hear from and value the input from local community and Aboriginal Elders
- Respecting and valuing Aboriginal practitioners’ insights to culture and approach to practice

A participant shared an example of how meaningful it was within their role to have a connection to Aboriginal peoples, additionally as a form of bringing purpose and healing, which highlights a need for the department to understand what brings Aboriginal practitioners the sense of value, purpose, meaning and what continues to provide motivation within their role.

The participant shared:

“A positive thing is the opportunity to build connection with Aboriginal children, families and communities”

Some of the participants expressed a sense of cultural inclusion when supported and provided with the opportunity to connect with Aboriginal peoples, not only with clients, but furthermore, professionally internally and externally to the agency. There is an understanding for many Aboriginal practitioners who enter the department that one of their motivations for pursuing the role is to make a difference to the outcomes for Aboriginal peoples, so when it is felt or perceived that this motivation is not respected or valued by non-Aboriginal practitioners or the agency, it can additionally create hindrances to cultural healing.

From the lens of the Aboriginal wellbeing approach, the findings offer an opportunity for the agency to look more inclusively regarding the overarching need to support Aboriginal practitioners holistically. Holistic support underpins the interconnection between not only physical, psychological, emotional but, in addition, spiritual wellbeing and safety for Aboriginal practitioners (Grieves, 2009).

4.3 Experiences of Racism

In relation to better understanding Aboriginal practitioners' experiences of racism, there were four sub-themes which emerged. Aboriginal practitioners expressed concerns regarding the experiences of racism as a current issue still existing in today's society as a direct result of transgenerational trauma caused by government policies and past child protection practice. There was an exploration of what the presence of racism looks like in child protection practice today and

some areas that may require further review within the statutory child protection system. Internal challenges for Aboriginal practitioners from the viewpoint of lateral violence furthermore emerged, which also delved into understanding what some of the overarching perspectives of Aboriginal practitioners were in relation to racism within statutory child protection.

4.3.1 Racism as a current issue in today's society and presence in child protection practice

99% of the participants expressed that they believed racism to still be in existence within the department today, however, 59% of participants thought the agency attempts to reduce racism and attempts to engage in anti-oppressive, dignity driven practice for families and clients. It was evident that there is a need to further conduct research to enable an understanding of what the specific experiences of racism are within the agency today.

Figure 9

The perception of racism still being in existence within DCJ currently

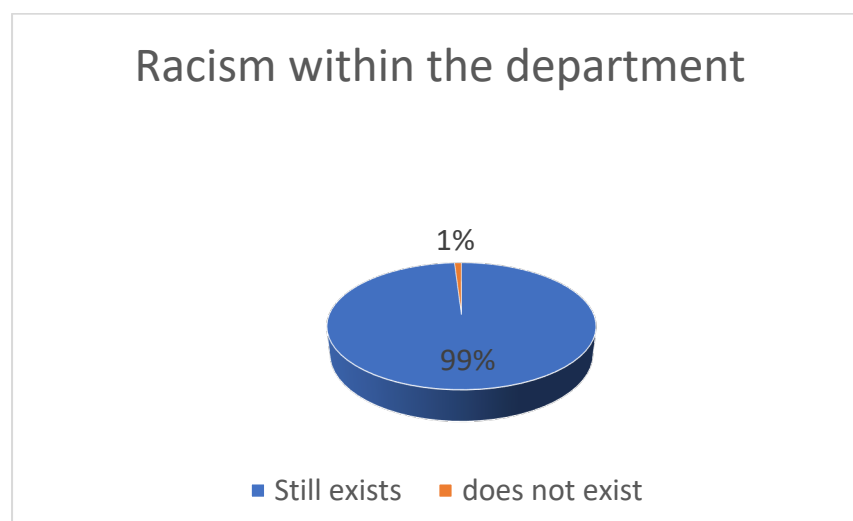
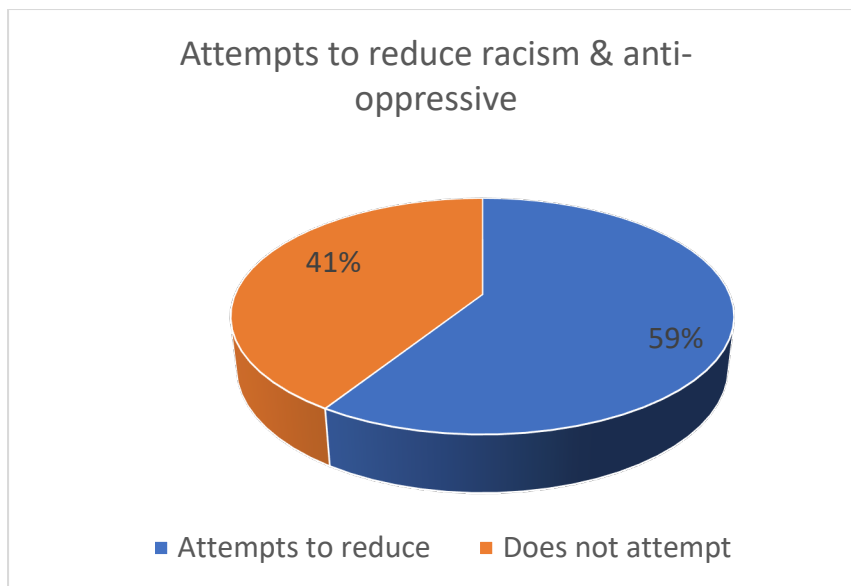


Figure 10

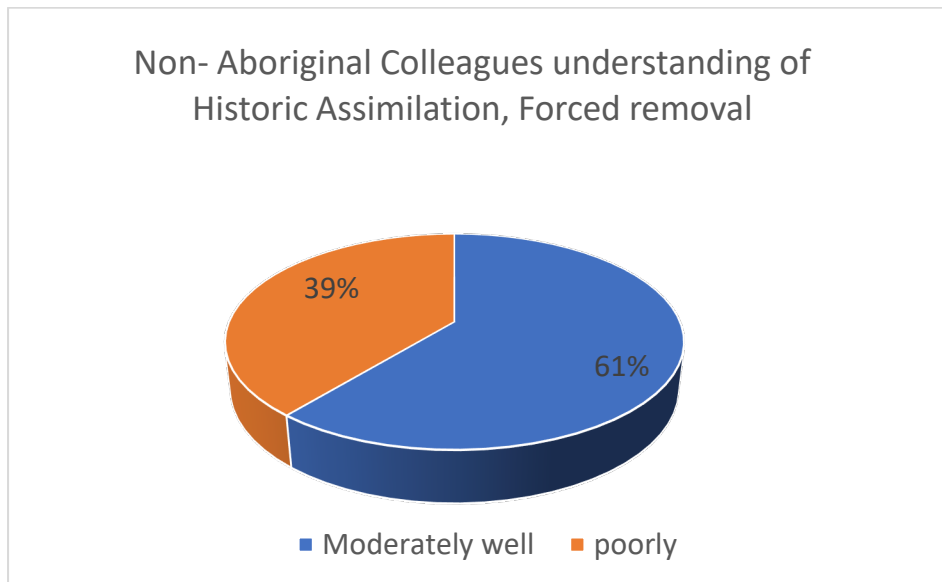
The perceptions regarding DCJ's attempts at reducing racism and oppression



There have been suggestions made in other relevant research that for many Aboriginal/ First Nations peoples, that the experiences of trauma-based issues which are currently faced by Aboriginal communities in today's society is as a result of the policies of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities (Atkinson, 2002; Haskell & Randall, 2009). It was found that 61% of the participants within the current research thought that non-Aboriginal colleagues understood historic assimilation and forced removal policies, practices and the errors of past colonial practices moderately well, which reduces a notion that there is a lack of understanding of the traumatic history of Aboriginal people and the impacts caused from White invasion and government.

Figure 11

Participants views regarding Non-Aboriginal practitioners' understanding of historic assimilation and forced removal policies, colonial practices and errors, and trauma caused by government



There were concerns raised by a participant regarding the ability of the department in keeping the issues currently facing Aboriginal peoples and communities today at the forefront of ongoing knowledge, in-service training and information provided to ongoing staff employed by DCJ, even though the practitioners may be social work qualified or inducted/ trained by the agency. This opens exploration of a possible need for the department to better translate the impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal peoples in today's society, and to better review inherent racism which exists within the current processes, systems and workplace culture of the organisation. One of the possible strategies could be to ensure more stringent recruitment processes and strategies to better filter child protection practitioners who may pose a risk in relation to perpetuating attitudinal racism within the organisation.

This strategy, however, may be problematic within the recruitment process once areas for development/ needs are identified for the potential casework practitioner. The identified needs identified requiring some form of support, coaching, training or supervision, may be difficult to follow up, if the recruitment team of the department does not adequately relay to the practitioner's assigned managers, or that there is not the appropriate resources to provide the necessary follow up support. The department needs to consider how to better create awareness and knowledge of racism within the organisation either through ongoing culturally appropriate in-service training, provision of research/ information or other information sharing platforms e.g., resources, guides, conferences, publications.

There was a suggestion made by another participant as a means of supporting non-Aboriginal practitioners to gain insight and understanding of Aboriginal people's experience through the following practice:

"Having non-Aboriginal staff active in the community or at least participating in some events each year to hear the stories and meet the community."

4.3.2 Concerns about current practices

There was the viewpoint shared by some of the participants within the interviews and comments within the surveys, that there is an inherent form of racism evident by the distribution and allocation of Aboriginal families within caseloads. It was raised that it was experienced that Aboriginal families are often automatically allocated or appointed to Aboriginal caseworkers, with little consultation. This, additionally, presents ingrained cultural and systemic racism when it is assumed that Aboriginal families and clients may only want to work with Aboriginal practitioners.

The other aspect of concern evident is the tokenism of practice in assuming that Aboriginal child protection caseworkers or practitioners are the only caseworkers appropriately suited to working with an Aboriginal family, and a lack of consideration or consultation around whether an Aboriginal practitioner feels that it is appropriate, or whether they feel comfortable to work with a

particular Aboriginal client. There is a need to consider both the views of the Aboriginal clients and the views of the potential Aboriginal caseworkers/ practitioners when making decisions around allocation of clients within child protection casework.

A participant shared:

"I have been given the opportunity to share my thoughts around this but when I voice that 'an Aboriginal caseworker should not be the default for a family', management have felt offended by this. I believe an Aboriginal caseworker should go out to a family, ask if they would prefer an Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal caseworker and provide the family with that person so they have some control and feel comfortable"

This raises the importance of not only consulting with Aboriginal colleagues who might be considered for allocation of an Aboriginal family/child to work with, but also the need to offer Aboriginal families the opportunity to choose whether they would like to work with an Aboriginal caseworker or a non-Aboriginal caseworker. This consideration is important, given that many Aboriginal communities are small and Aboriginal families may find it intimidating, threatening or a risk that their confidential information may become known by other Aboriginal community members as a result of working with an Aboriginal caseworker within the department.

This practice additionally identified the lack of consideration to the cultural differences which exist within Aboriginal cultures and practices wherein various Aboriginal nations and tribes historically have been fractured and cannot co-exist with each other. Therefore, the lack of consultation can possibly be perceived as perpetuating experiences of White colonial practice within the current welfare system (Van Krieken, 2003).

It could be hypothesised that this could lead to re-traumatisation of Aboriginal practitioners if they are being forced to work with Aboriginal peoples that are historically not meant to conjugate

with each other. There may, however, be instances whereby an Aboriginal family may feel that working with an Aboriginal caseworker is preferable. It could be easier for an Aboriginal client to build trust or rapport, or it may be more relatable, or less confronting, or less psychologically distressing to work with an Aboriginal caseworker or practitioner.

A few of the participants made comments within the interviews and free text sections of the surveys regarding some of the internal practices impacting upon identity and culture for Aboriginal peoples as a point of contention and what they would regard as a form of racism. An example of the practices of the agency considered as a form of racism and perpetuation of colonial practice provided by one participant is the process of de-identifying persons from being titled/considered 'Aboriginal' in the departmental administrative data system called 'Child Story', utilised for storing, documenting and recording client information.

One participant shared:

"I am not in support of DCJ as an agency de-identifying children and families. I think instead we need to look at why families might be identifying as Aboriginal when they are not."

This was raised as an area of significant cultural contention and point of ethical pain/discomfort for some of the participants, and furthermore, possibly impacted by the following considerations:

- The Stolen Generations has left many Aboriginal peoples unable to appropriately track and prove their Aboriginal culture, history and heritage. It is further perpetuating systemic racism by Aboriginal people having to continually prove their Aboriginality.
- The concern that some of the systems which exist to test and ascertain Aboriginal heritage may be flawed and rely on a white colonised systems and recording the accounts of the history of their people.

- The three main processes for determining whether to de-identify a person on the child story system include: 1) obtaining inconclusive or confirmed findings of not being Aboriginal through a 'Link Up' referral or 'Crown Solicitors Office referral', 2) this finding is then supported by an internal departmental Aboriginal consultation recommendation/ finding to then progress a de-identification, 3) endorsement from the agency Executive District Director to progress de-identification on the system.
- The responsibility of the select Aboriginal child protection casework staff within cultural consultation teams can also still be subjective depending on the Aboriginal staff member conducting the consultation/ review of Aboriginality. This subjectivity can be impacted by the Aboriginal consultant's own local knowledge, experiences, and perspectives.
- The practice of de-identification can further perpetuate further factions within Aboriginal peoples' own differing cultures.
- Decisions around de-identification can also perpetuate forms of lateral violence if the accountability of the consultation process is not upheld, for example ensuring objectivity, rigorous investigation and review process is conducted.

An interview participant contributed the following perspectives in relation to marking/ recording someone on the Child Story administrative data recording system of NSW DCJ:

"I just don't think that it is our role in DCJ to decide whether someone is Aboriginal or not, and if the Link Up comes up with an inconclusive result that shouldn't automatically be perceived as that person is not Aboriginal. If it is an outcome that clearly states through the genealogy search that they aren't Aboriginal – then that is different."

4.3.3 Experiences of lateral violence

There was concern regarding the experiences of Aboriginal caseworkers regarding 'lateral violence', which considers not only the experiences of bullying and harassment experienced from non-Aboriginal colleagues in a workplace but additionally, the experiences of bullying and

harassment perpetuated by other Aboriginal colleagues. This concern was raised within the open-ended interviews conducted, as opposed to information gathered in the surveys.

One participant shared:

"I previously had other staff members think that their views are more important around culture because they are more prominent or more regarded by the community. Sometimes, having other Aboriginal colleagues not view you as black enough. It's so hard to come up against that, especially when one staff member spreads that viewpoint to others"

This raises the concern by some Aboriginal practitioners that the internal politics amongst Aboriginal staff within the department can be stressful or lead to some worry or discouragement within their role. There is evidence from research conducted by Flick (1995) who refers to the impacts of workplace bullying having a disproportionate effect on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in the health field. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples working in the area of health, who had greater levels of workplace stress and bullying experiences directly correlated to lower staff retention rates, higher levels of burnout, absenteeism, and chronic illness.

The consideration of not only bullying from general colleagues but also the extent of bullying from fellow Aboriginal colleagues, adds an additional layer of complexity or possible distress for Aboriginal practitioners, given the question raised regarding alliances and allies within the working space. It is recommended that there be further research conducted to better understand the experiences of lateral violence, the impacts and what supports could be put in place would be beneficial to assist improve the experience for Aboriginal practitioners within the department.

One participant shared:

"I don't really notice a lot of racism towards Aboriginal staff from non- Aboriginal staff within the department, but I have found some of the politics between Aboriginal staff internally stressful at times. This is why I often would prefer not to attend the Aboriginal reference

groups, as they can be very contentious. I feel it would be more helpful to just connect on a smaller scale with other Aboriginal staff.”

Some may argue that the issue of internal factions could furthermore, be contributed by the pre-existing issues which have arisen from assimilation policies removing the natural laws and order which were pre-existing between and amongst family groups, nations and lands within Australia which were in many instances already destroyed and fractured by the separation and dislocation of Aboriginal peoples (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011). Lateral violence can be experienced by staff within the wider community and with the clients that they work with – who may have judgement around Aboriginal staff members engaging in child protection work (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011)

Some participants suggested that there are some strategies that they employ such as choosing to work in a locality out of their own community even if that means further travel, requesting wherever possible to work in certain teams which will prevent any compromising of their own ethical and moral values (e.g. not working in child protection teams where removals may need to be actioned), or identifying conflicts of interest and negotiating allocated families with management.

One of the participants shared:

“I guess I’m lucky as I have never worked in my own community, I have relocated to another area, so I don’t have to work with people I know. I think this has helped me in being able to maintain my professional role, not having to deal with issues of conflicts of interest like some of the other Aboriginal caseworkers.”

4.3.4 Perspectives on racism

There were overarching perspectives shared by participants, which demonstrated a significant theme contributing towards experiences of racism. Many Aboriginal practitioners expressed feeling that their cultural views are mostly disregarded and undervalued by the department in relation to decision making or practice considerations. There were some staff who expressed that they felt that their views were only regarded as valuable were they to align with a particular agenda or outcome that the casework team was seeking already.

There was clear feedback by the majority of participants within the free text survey questions and interview responses that spoke to the desire for Aboriginal practitioners not to be marginalised or treated differently to non-Aboriginal people. It was suggested by some of the participants that culturally inclusive and sensitive practice could be better achieved by the mere perception and action of respecting Aboriginal people's experience, a desire to know and understand what life is like from their view and be curious as to how they can better walk alongside and work with Aboriginal peoples and communities.

A participant shared:

"Let new staff know that Aboriginal people just want to be treated the same, no less, no more. Also just be curious about the community, listen to their stories, ask what is important to that person and their community."

There were practitioners who had expressed the experience of not only feeling marginalised but additionally feel that they were dismissed or judged for having differing viewpoints and perspectives, given their cultural lens and insights when making suggestions around culturally

inclusive practice. There was some shared worry and fear regarding the possible retribution for vocalising these varied viewpoints and cultural insights.

In the paralleled research of Oates (2018), a similar finding was made regarding the poor attitudinal culture being observed and experienced by the participants. This included the physical and/or emotional threat posed to Aboriginal practitioners by non-Aboriginal colleagues and the expressed fear of retribution for challenging processes or systems regarding cultural practice or considerations.

A participant shared:

“Whilst I have never directly been on the receiving end of racism and power imbalances - I have seen it and heard about it occurring within numerous departments.”

Another staff member shared:

“I’ve seen that the more vocal you are about what you think needs to change in the department, the more you get treated differently. I’ve had some of my Aboriginal colleagues get pushed out by other managers and workers because they’re like a square peg in a round hole. Once those strong workers go, it makes the rest of us fearful to speak up”

There appears to be a lack of research specifically regarding the fear of retribution and bullying of Aboriginal caseworkers. There is reference by Hunt and colleagues (2016) about the issue of bullying and the fear of retribution experienced amongst generalist child protection practitioners. It would be beneficial to better understand through further research the specific impacts of bullying

and the fear of retribution specifically related to the cultural implications for Aboriginal-identified statutory child protection caseworkers.

The ways in which the agency supports the cultural healing and recovery from trauma can additionally, be extended to the Aboriginal practitioners employed. The ability of the agency to hear the voices of Aboriginal practitioners has the ability to change attitudes, beliefs, processes, and practices which forms part of Aboriginal practitioners' wellbeing (Herman, 2001).

4.4 Training and career development opportunities

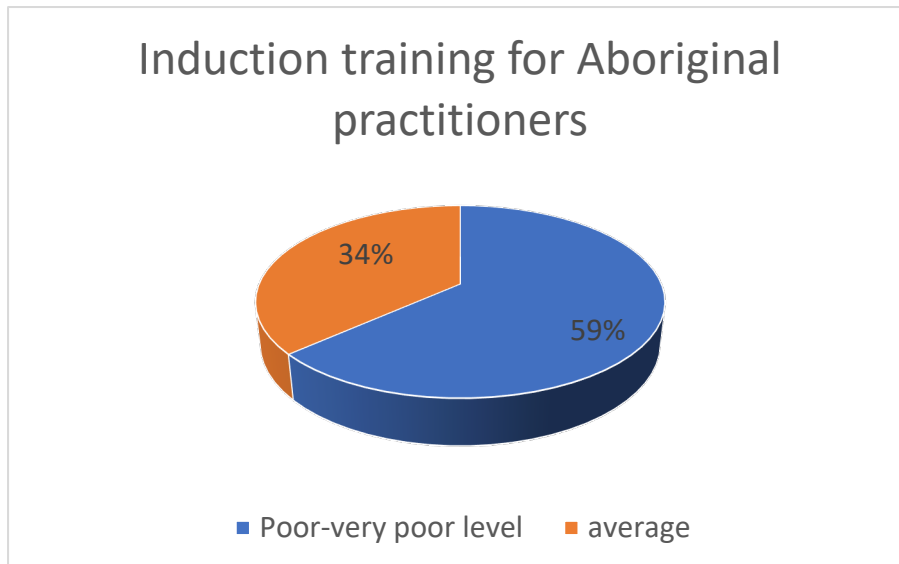
In relation to training and career development opportunities, there were three sub themes which emerged. The first theme identified was how Aboriginal practitioners viewed the support, induction and career pathways processes. This included the views regarding the opportunities within the agency as a means of building cultural awareness for child protection practitioners and then also understanding the views regarding career pathways specifically for Aboriginal practitioners. The second theme identified was the limitations of current cultural training. The third theme identified suggestions of alternative practice to improve cultural training.

4.4.1 Support, induction and career pathways

The majority of participants had feelings that they did not fully understand what the casework role would entail upon their commencement and how they might navigate this within their identity as an Aboriginal person. The findings revealed that 59% of participants thought that their induction and training in order to understand their role specifically as an Aboriginal practitioner and further insight to Aboriginal culture and trauma was at a poor- very poor level. There were a further 34% of participant who thought it was of an average level.

Figure 12:

The perception regarding the quality of induction process and training for Aboriginal practitioners



A participant commented on their concern for their non-Aboriginal casework colleagues, observing that many of their non-Aboriginal colleagues appeared to be anxious about working with Aboriginal families, not feeling adequately equipped or supported to appropriately engage with Aboriginal children and families.

A participant shared:

“Many of the young caseworkers (non-Aboriginal) are fearful of dealing with Aboriginal communities. I feel that more emphasis should be placed on ‘normalising’ relations with Aboriginal people, after all, we are all caseworkers. Need not to place any extra guilt on new DCJ (non-Aboriginal) caseworkers.”

This viewpoint raises further questions around how the department prepares and portrays the role of child protection caseworkers within the agency in working with Aboriginal children, families and communities. This does prompt the need to further understand where perceptions of Aboriginal clients may be stemming from and may require the department to review how they may be instilling racial profiling either within the training, practice, workplace attitudes or culture. Oates (2018) addresses in her research that Aboriginal practitioners often have to contend with and navigate the perceptions from other colleagues or community members that because they are working in a 'professional' capacity that they are immune to the cultural issues or trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples.

This example suggests that there are experiences of tokenism within the systems and processes of statutory child protection agencies, whereby Aboriginal child protection caseworkers may be expected to carry the additional responsibility and pressure of being considered the experts of culturally appropriate practice at times when it is convenient to the agency and its practitioners. It urges consideration around how the department may be able to better support a cohesive partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal caseworkers, which views responsibility as being shared and non-Aboriginal caseworkers as allies to engaging work with Aboriginal peoples.

There was the view that the initial introductory training was pitched towards non-Aboriginal caseworkers. Some of the participants shared that they would have appreciated separate targeted training specifically preparing Aboriginal caseworkers for the specific issues and challenges which they may experience within their role, so that they can feel better prepared for what to expect and more equipped to successfully engage / perform in their role. This finding is also supported in the research of Newton (2012), who identifies the need to better equip and prepare Aboriginal staff for the traumatizing and retraumatizing context, which is applicable to statutory child protection practitioners.

A participant shared:

"I feel like the training is very broad and more relevant for my non-Indigenous colleagues as Aboriginal caseworkers face a whole realm of different problems when working in the department."

Participants shared that they felt that perceptions of their role as an Aboriginal caseworker was not as highly valued or regarded, because they might not have the same educational qualifications or academic background as their non- Aboriginal counterparts. Some participants felt that they were significantly disadvantaged from fulfilling their role, because of not having the same educational or written skills as their non-Aboriginal counterparts/colleagues.

It was evident that a few of the participants were seeking further ways to enable opportunities to increase their skills and education to feel better prepared and supported to conduct their role as a child protection caseworker.

One participant shared:

"I would love to have more chances to connect with other Aboriginal staff and to have more training available to me. Not sure what training, maybe for leadership and topics that help me in my role."

Some participants still felt experiences of racism even when they believed that their knowledge, experience and qualifications were equivalent to their non-Aboriginal colleagues. Some participants had expressed that they did not feel as valued or that their perspectives were not as appreciated as their non-Aboriginal colleagues.

There was a suggestion from a practitioner that the department could develop a career pathway for Aboriginal caseworkers which could assist Aboriginal caseworkers to understand the expectations of their 'identified' Aboriginal role more clearly, and what other roles or career development may be available or that they may aspire and work towards.

In addition to a career pathway, some of the participants suggested and recommended a variety of specialised roles and teams within the department, such as a specific Aboriginal learning and development team, Aboriginal-identified casework specialist positions, and increased Aboriginal specific project teams and roles.

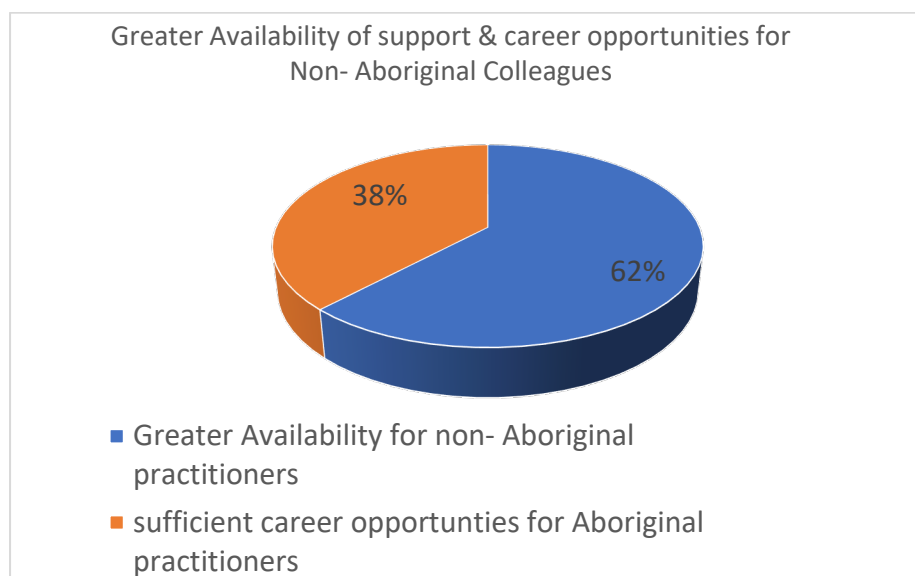
A participant suggested to include within this career pathway:

“A careers or training mentor that we can consult with – could be an Aboriginal careers advisor- which supports supervision with managers.”

The majority of participants did not believe that there was equity in relation to the career opportunities and support available to Aboriginal-identified casework staff in comparison to non-Aboriginal casework staff within DCJ. Some of the suggested reasons provided in the participant responses as to what some of the challenges or barriers might be for Aboriginal caseworkers in accessing career and development opportunities included siloed work structures and increased caseloads impacting their ability to participate in any opportunities, as well as perceived or existing educational disadvantages. It was found that 62% of participants also thought that there was greater availability of supports and career opportunities for non-Aboriginal staff in comparison to Aboriginal practitioners.

Figure 13

Participants perceptions regarding greater availability of support and career opportunities for non-Aboriginal practitioners



From the viewpoint of decolonisation, it can be considered that the suggestions regarding improved career pathways, mentorship and training for Aboriginal practitioners as a means of leveling out the inequities which exist for Aboriginal peoples. With such opportunities for learning, development and career advancement, this can support not only moving away from the exploitative ways that Aboriginal peoples were incorporated into the workforce but support creating cultural change, independence and self-determination for Aboriginal practitioners in today's society (Kidd, 2008).

There is an updated legislative requirement in section 12A Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young Persons Principle into the Care Act in 2023 which requires decision makers to apply the five elements of the SNAICC guidance in decision making practice for matters involving Aboriginal children and young people under that Act (SNAICC, 2018). This demonstrates

DCJ's efforts to support systemic change for Aboriginal peoples, however, could benefit from incorporation of this knowledge within ongoing training for all practitioners.

4.4.2 Limitations of current cultural training

The participants shared that there was cultural training made available to all staff upon induction and in less frequency of in-service training that considered culture within it. Upon further exploration, the participants viewed that the training did not adequately prepare either non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal caseworkers for the complexities of working with Aboriginal peoples and communities.

A participant shared:

"It is very basic information about culture covered in our induction training, and doesn't equip staff for how to develop trusting relationships with Aboriginal families, and doesn't give enough insight into the suffering and trauma Aboriginal people have experienced."

There were perspectives shared around the limitations of meaningful and culturally appropriate training and the inaccuracies of some of the training conducted when delving into the cultural aspects within specific in-service training topics.

One participant shared:

"There is none really (culturally appropriate training) and what is in place is very generic and at times not right."

Another participant commented:

"I feel as though it (cultural training available) is a simple tick and flick exercise as everyone is time poor and not enough done in CDP."

Some participants expressed that it would have been beneficial for non-Aboriginal staff to develop a further understanding of the grief, loss and trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples, as

well as insights into what impact this might have upon the families they will be engaging with in today's society. They mentioned the need to better understand and consider how this may translate to presenting behaviours they encounter and experience and possible responses of Aboriginal children and their families they will be working with. Participants suggested that it would also be relevant to include appropriate practical strategies and practice specifically for working with Aboriginal families.

A participant shared:

"There is not much training available for non-Aboriginal staff in understanding what this looks like in practice in DCJ"

Many participants expressed views that the induction training was inadequate in preparing for the complexities of working not only with Aboriginal people and communities but for the complexities of child protection work and the role itself within the department.

A participant shared:

"In CDP (the caseworker development program) it was more focused on past traumas the department has caused and not how to engage Aboriginal people or how best to work alongside our communities today."

This is supported by the view that government agencies need to hear and acknowledge the experiences of Aboriginal people individually and draw the interconnection between past and present trauma (Muller, 2014). This reiterates that storytelling and the sharing of this knowledge is imperative in supporting the emotional wellbeing and healing of Aboriginal people.

4.4.3 Alternative strategies to improve cultural training

There were suggestions made by participants around the need to engage staff with local cultural knowledge, who may be able to impart and share their insights, knowledge and experience within the delivery of culturally relevant training.

Participants shared the following viewpoints:

“The agency needs to access staff that are on the ground and in their CSC [Community Service Centre].”

“I feel that consultation with Aboriginal caseworkers is very subjective to the department’s views of what’s important to us. We talk about client-led practice when we work with Aboriginal families, but where is the acknowledgement of Aboriginal staff’s views around cultural engagement and practice?”

Participants referred to the need for the department to provide more cultural practice workshops or training as in-service after the induction training provided at the beginning of their employment. It was further raised, that there is value in conducting such training jointly with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal caseworkers as a way of promoting shared and collaborative learning.

A participant shared:

“I believe in order to improve dignity-driven practice and empowerment of Aboriginal staff is to provide joint training opportunities to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff members allowing for all staff to collaborate in a culturally appropriate way to enhance knowledge within the department and to enhance team building and collaboration opportunities.”

A participant referred to the value of increasing the opportunities for internal caseworkers to be trained and supported to become trainers in the culturally appropriate carers assessment program – ‘Winangay’, a training specifically designed to assess Aboriginal people to become kinship/ foster carers.

There were insights shared around the need for the department to prioritise training opportunities from Aboriginal community members, in particular Aboriginal Elders. It was suggested that the time and effort taken by Aboriginal people providing training should be remunerated accordingly and proportionally. There was reference made to the remuneration and increased acknowledgement of

Aboriginal people requested to present as special guest speakers or provide cultural information, performances or resources to the department, particularly for significant events like conferences, local Naidoc and Sorry Day events.

One participant shared:

“Training to be provided by Aboriginal elders from local community. DCJ to pay Aboriginal Elders for the sharing of cultural knowledge.”

Another participant suggested the need for cultural training to be conducted primarily by Aboriginal staff as a means of being more culturally appropriate and inclusive, highlighting the need to consider specifically how the training is conducted relevant to the various localities, nations and tribes.

Another participant shared:

“The department is trying hard to work better with Aboriginal children and families and improve the outcomes. It would be great if there was cultural training run by Aboriginal people or elders from each community – so that it is relevant.”

There was discussion generated in some of the interviews conducted regarding what the most effective types of training may look like for Aboriginal caseworkers/ practitioners and the predominant theme of exploring learning outside of a White colonised framework, which may be more culturally appropriate.

One participant shared:

“Are training packages, either in person or online the only way that learning needs to take place? What about the shared learning through lived experiences, or workshops that offer an opportunity to connect and collaborate on key issues and challenges? We need something

that is going to support people to feel more confident in their role, prepared for what they are facing in this tough work, and to feel more confident and resilient to keep going.”

This aligns with the perspectives and findings of Oates (2018), who addresses the need to consider alternate ways of thinking about the up-skilling of non-Indigenous child protection workers, which is not solely reliant on formalised training packages. The need for innovation and engaging in different modes of learning and training were also highlighted within the discussions with participants.

The participants noted there is a need to consider both differing ways of looking at training for non-Aboriginal caseworkers and more culturally responsive training for Aboriginal caseworkers. This in turn can impact and produce improved outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, which could improve the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the care of the state or engaged to the statutory welfare system. There was a resounding theme evident from the shared responses that it was important for Aboriginal practitioners to have the opportunity to share their views, and for those views to be valued. This is also extended to having further opportunities to collaborate and share ideas mutually in consultation with other colleagues, professionals and interagency partners, a concept raised in the writings of Nikolova and colleagues (2017).

A participant shared:

“I like that my supervisor is so supportive of me in my role and encourages all of the team and Aboriginal staff to share their ideas of ways to work with families and the community. My supervisor encourages us to partner with other agencies and gives us a chance to include them in consultations about families.”

Several participants referred to the suggestion of increased opportunities to attend collaborative forums as an opportunity for skills development and shared learning experiences. It was additionally suggested that within these forums and other modes of communication (eg email newsletters) and internal and external publications that aspects such as good news stories are shared, noting what practice skills and steps were taken to achieve those results/outcomes. A few of the participants proposed the implementation of practice conferences specifically developed/ held for Aboriginal staff, and further in-service learning opportunities targeted specifically to Aboriginal practitioners, which would ideally address what areas of support Aboriginal practitioners are seeking and feel they would benefit from.

One of the participants referred to the desire for the further development of training relevant to conducting safety and risk assessments to ensure that all practitioners are appropriately considering these assessments and conducting them from a culturally appropriate lens. This recommendation was made based upon the concern raised around how culturally appropriate and effective the current assessment tools, processes and systems are. Part of de-colonising the welfare system provides opportunities for the practice, processes and systems to address the issues of racism, identified within the research as being evident within career, training and learning opportunities available and awarded to Aboriginal practitioners.

This is consistent with the findings of Munro (1999), who raises the issue of the assessments conducted and the correlation between children entering the statutory welfare system being impacted directly by the relationship the practitioner had with that particular family and the lens / perspectives they have developed of that particular family and parent.

There is another further aspect of the concept of decolonisation that highlights the need of hearing the voices of Aboriginal peoples to affect change (Libesman, 2007). This is furthermore, a relevant consideration to the findings, whereby the voices of Aboriginal peoples should be

considered in the development, review and delivery of DCJ training, resources, systems, policies and processes.

4.5 Management supervision and organisational constructs supporting Aboriginal caseworkers

In relation to the management supervision and organisational constructs supporting Aboriginal caseworkers, there were three subthemes which emerged. The first is consideration of cultural inclusion. The second is the challenges and supports within supervision between managers and Aboriginal practitioners. The third was discussion of how DCJ managers can better build trust in the supervisory relationship with Aboriginal practitioners.

4.5.1 Cultural inclusion within supervision:

Some of the participants within the interviews and survey free text boxes expressed a need for further cultural inclusion and consideration within supports and supervision provided by management and the department as a whole. In the research of Oates (2018), it was raised that there were significant differences in the support and supervision needs of Indigenous child protection workers compared to those of non-Indigenous workers.

To better understand how to address the impacts Aboriginal caseworkers being employed by the same system that caused the trauma of Aboriginal peoples as a direct result of child protection practice within colonisation and its past policies, it is necessary to hear directly from Aboriginal caseworkers regarding their experiences and support needs in various forums, including supervision.

There is research that the provision and quality of supervision provided to child protection practitioners significantly contributes to child protection staff retention and satisfaction, including reducing the effects of vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and other mental health and wellbeing concerns (Hunt et al, 2016). This in turn places further insight into how this may be extended to

Aboriginal practitioners with regards to the additional layers of trauma which they must navigate given the specific pain, trauma and impacts of colonisation and government practices of removal, cultural displacement and disconnection.

It was raised by participants that a starting point to establishing more culturally inclusive practice and support would be to commence with the approach in which non-Aboriginal colleagues and managers take with Aboriginal staff, including their attitudinal and behavioural responses.

A participant shared that an *“open consultative respectful approach with Aboriginal workers”* would be helpful as a strategy for better supporting Aboriginal practitioners.

Reflection on experiences is highlighted as an overarching need for generalist child protection practitioners in Manthorpe and colleagues (2015), who reported on their study of supervision and newly qualified child protection practitioners. They found that line managers believed the core function of supervision to be the oversight of case management. Other functions such as “reflection, personal development, training and encouragement” were viewed by line managers to be “optional extras” (Manthorpe et al., 2015, p. 60). This highlights the importance of not only considering the operational and practice needs for Aboriginal caseworkers, but also the consideration of their emotional support needs and consultation within supervision.

4.5.2 Building trust in the supervisory relationship

A participant shared that the quality of the supervisory relationship really impacted the Aboriginal practitioner’s ability to share and seek support when and if needed. This mutuality in the relationship, trust and transparency is highlighted by Davys et al. (2021). The Australian Association of Social Work (AASW) notes the importance of the professional supervision space broadly being the interactive dialogue between the supervisor and supervisee, which allows the space for reflection, learning and critique which holds practitioners accountable to professional and organisational standards, competencies, policies and procedures (Davys et al., 2021).

Whilst this research highlights some conversation starters which can be utilised within the space of supervision for managers of Aboriginal casework practitioners, there is evidence of the need for further review of the current supervisory system and process in place for supporting Aboriginal practitioners.

As previously outlined, the experiences of participants in this research were consistent with studies by Hunt and colleagues (2016) and Littlechild (2005), who found that child protection practitioners were reticent to disclose wellbeing issues to line supervisors as they feared an unfavorable response. The lack of understanding demonstrated by supervisors and line managers regarding the support needs of practitioners who are experiencing traumatic stress related symptoms and acknowledgement in the literature that exposure to traumatic stress is an occupational hazard (Levy & Poertner, 2014; Lonne et al., 2008; Munro, 2010; Wise, 2017).

This particular occupational hazard faced by Aboriginal practitioners leaves the question as to what supervisors may still further struggle to understand. These factors can include additional specific contextual issues which Aboriginal practitioners face pertaining to transgenerational trauma, current trauma from working with Aboriginal communities and peoples, and vicarious trauma as a possible trigger to an Aboriginal practitioner's own trauma.

These findings are consistent with the findings of this current research, noting that the pressure that Aboriginal practitioners face to withhold disclosures regarding their wellbeing issues are potentially greater than their non- Aboriginal counterparts, given the additional fear of organisational retribution by their peers/ colleagues, managers or the department, also impacted by the experiences of racism. This highlights the need to provide safe spaces within supervision for Aboriginal practitioners, to share their insights, concerns, positive and negative experiences, which values the attributing factors which are unique to Aboriginal practitioners.

There was an example shared by a participant within the research regarding the benefits of having a manager provide opportunities to discuss more than case issues and context but additionally a space to explore further cultural considerations or implications noted below

The participant shared:

"I like that my manager talks through my caseload and tries to understand any challenges culturally around working with a particular family and is respectful about any identified conflict of interest which might pop up."

Within the space of supervision provided by managers for Aboriginal practitioners, there is an inherent opportunity to better support Aboriginal practitioners' sense of personhood and spirituality also. Opportunities to explore an Aboriginal practitioners' sense of personhood and spirituality could be incorporated as areas for exploration and discussion within the individual supervision meeting and informal check-ins provided by their managers.

It was suggested that even a strategy as simple as the organisation and managers supporting Aboriginal practitioners to engage in significant cultural practices and events would demonstrate the department's commitment to supporting Aboriginal peoples healing, and the value of the department on the aspects of culture and personhood which are significant to Aboriginal people including practitioners. This would move towards anti-oppressive practice to be implemented, in consideration of the damage and disconnection from land, culture, language, ceremony and spirituality which was a result of colonisation and the removal and separation of Aboriginal children and families (Sherwood, 2013).

It was evident in the findings that through the lens of Anti-racist and Critical race theory that practices such as supervision can form a foundation of support which provide Aboriginal practitioners to have a space to be heard in relation to any experiences of racism, discrimination and oppression within their experiences within their role as part of the agency. Consultative agency

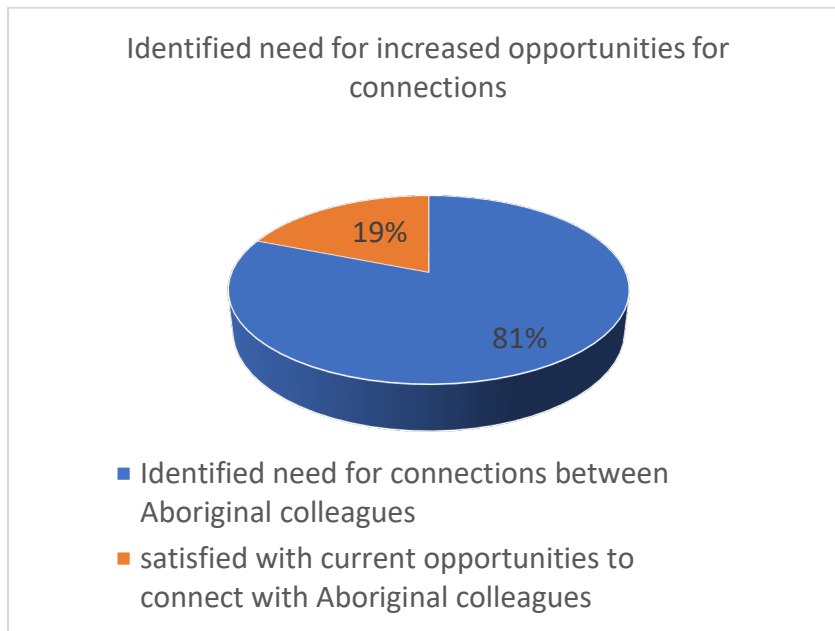
support systems, reviews and trust developed in the supervisory relationships also provide an opportunity to identify more promptly any oppressive practices and systems and ensure that the important cultural considerations are put to the forefront in a more considered way, which according to Dei and Calliste (2000) can shift power and long-standing systemic racism and discrimination towards vulnerable communities.

4.5.3 *Challenges of supervision*

Some of the participants expressed within the interviews and free text of the surveys their view that there was a disproportionate number of Aboriginal practitioners and Aboriginal managers employed, being significantly less to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. 81% of participants shared that there was an identified need for increased opportunities for connections between Aboriginal colleagues/ staff within the department to be established and continuing to be supported by the agency.

Figure 14

Perceptions of Aboriginal practitioners' expressed need to increase the opportunities for connections with Aboriginal colleagues internally



One participant shared:

“There needs to be more supports for Aboriginal caseworkers, support from other Aboriginal caseworkers and managers that can understand your experiences and the challenges you face. This can happen through supervision with other Aboriginal managers, or Aboriginal caseworkers locally in planned local meetings and catch ups outside of the Aboriginal Reference Group [ARG] as the ARG can feel very formal and impersonal- hard to get to know people.”

It was also recommended that where external supervision by Aboriginal managers was not available that opportunities to discuss, debrief and share around the colonial challenges or impacts of the work being conducted by Aboriginal practitioners is provided within supervision with non-Aboriginal managers also.

One participant shared:

“talking with a non-Aboriginal manager in supervision around the specific challenges you face as an Aboriginal caseworker would be helpful”

There was a significant theme evident within the majority of the participants’ free text responses in the survey and interview responses. They expressed the need of Aboriginal practitioners to be valued by colleagues, management and the department as a whole as an important aspect within their role as an Aboriginal practitioner. This highlights the importance of the department to ensure that marginalised voices and acknowledge the views and action recommended changes made by Aboriginal practitioners, which embeds an opportunity for Aboriginal practitioners to not continue to feel devalued or silenced by mainstream Eurocentric practices and systems (Prior, 2007).

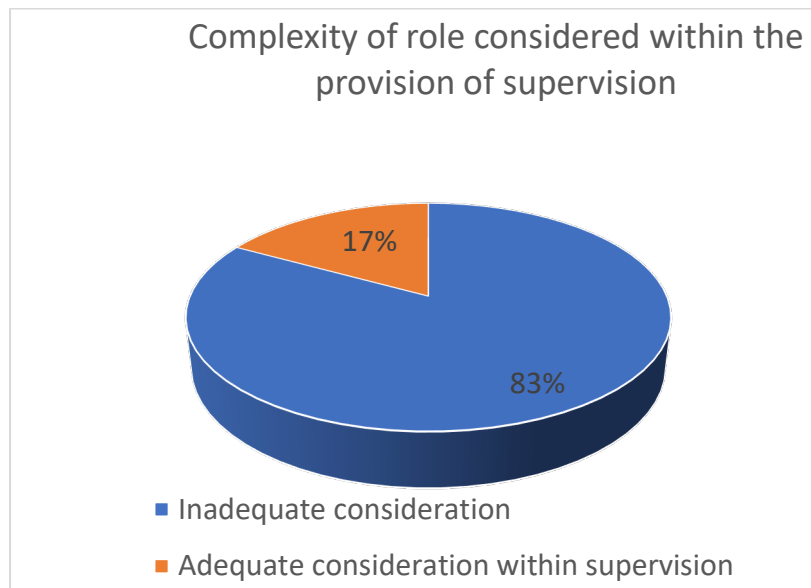
One participant shared:

“Support would look like: For the staff to respect and value your views as an Aboriginal person, to ensure that Aboriginal staff that are appointed to management positions also have the right attitude about creating change in the system.”

It was found that 83% of participants did not feel that there was adequate consideration to the unique role of Aboriginal practitioners within the provision of supervision. The value placed by the participants upon the acknowledgement and consideration of the various culturally specific roles impacting upon Aboriginal practitioners’ workloads was also raised an important consideration as an aspect of support.

Figure 15

The perception of DCJ's need to consider the unique role of Aboriginal practitioners within supervision



One participant shared:

"I feel like there is so much extra work that Aboriginal staff take on, the formal and informal consultations, the community role and pressures that we also have to juggle. I think that needs to be factored into the hours that we work – eg a reduced workload. It needs to be valued by higher up, as a way of showing the importance of changing how we are perceived by Aboriginal communities and how families experience our departments. If they really want to see the numbers of children coming into care reduce then they need to allow us to work differently with our people."

Some practitioners raised the concern around the caseloads, noting that the ability to conduct quality casework is directly impacted by the caseload allocation. It was expressed that if the desire of the agency is to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal children and families, that there needs to be the support by the agency for caseworkers to engage in quality casework that allows the time to build rapport and trust in the relationships with Aboriginal families which supports to create

change. The suggestion made was to have reduced caseload to enable this quality work to take place.

It was evident from the participant responses that there was quite a disparity among the type of supervision received by Aboriginal child protection caseworkers/ practitioners from their various managers. A participant shared an example of their manager having a great understanding of the issues that Aboriginal people face in today's society and great insight regarding cultural inclusion and sensitivity, which was thought to be attributed to the significant amount of time that particular manager had spent within various Aboriginal communities. The participant did express a marked difference to the other managers surrounding and above that particular manager and expressed the observation that the majority of other managers really did not have the same level of inclusive cultural practice or awareness.

Another participant shared:

"I feel that the support is ok from my manager, but there have been times when I have worked with managers who have no clue or understanding about what it's like for me (as an Aboriginal caseworker)."

4.5.4 Supports regarding supervision

Some of the participants shared that there was a need to support managers, who are providing supervision and support to Aboriginal practitioners with some kind of tool or strategies to create more consistency in the supervision provided.

One participant shared:

"I guess how they could do that is to better train and equip Aboriginal managers – give all Aboriginal -staff caseworkers and managers better supports, people to talk to. Something culturally specific to consult with – like Employee Assistance Programs (EAPS) but specifically for Aboriginal staff."

The recommendation from a few participants was for DCJ to consider contracting an additional service/agency to provide culturally responsive and specific emotional, psychological, counselling support, in addition to the Aboriginal counsellors/ psychologists available through the current Employee Assistance program (EAPS). It can, however, be noted that DCJ does already have Aboriginal-specific supports currently available within its EAPS services. It may be of benefit to the department regarding how they may want to ensure that the appropriate information is distributed to Aboriginal-identified staff on what this service looks like and what it can uniquely provide to Aboriginal practitioners, particularly during the induction or commencement of employment with DCJ.

The literature provides recognition of the stresses managed by child protection workers and a renewed emphasis by agencies on supporting practitioners through quality reflective professional supervision, but that there is minimal training made available for supervisors on how to implement this (Hunt et al, 2016). There was some agreement in the literature regarding the lack of training afforded to supervisors who manage workers in trauma-laden environments (Hunt et al, 2016). Krakouer (2023) supports the view that child welfare competency-based training programs must address vicarious trauma for Aboriginal people. Hobfoll (2007) outlined a five-point model used when working with people who have been exposed to traumatic events. The model aims to: promote a sense of safety, calming, a sense of self and collective efficacy, connectedness, and hope.

4.6 Conclusion

The research findings were able to be categorised into four overarching themes, which then further delved into subthemes. The overarching themes included: the exploration of cultural safety and inclusion, the experiences of racism, training and career development opportunities, and management supervision and organisational constructs supporting Aboriginal practitioners.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

In relation to the main findings of the research, a range of recommendations formed from the suggestions from the research participants are provided. Analysis is presented of what practices or systems could potentially be implemented within DCJ based upon the needs and strengths also identified.

5.1 Cultural safety and inclusion

Within the exploration of **cultural safety and inclusion**, there was a predominant finding that identified that there needed to be more insight required by non-Aboriginal practitioners, in order to better understand the experiences and job role expectations for Aboriginal practitioners. It was also identified that the experiences and challenges of Aboriginal practitioners in child protection work are markedly and uniquely different to that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts/ practitioners. There were suggestions made that by increasing opportunities for Aboriginal practitioners to share their experiences would also in turn support inclusion through shared learning.

Opportunities whereby Aboriginal practitioners can share good practice stories specifically for Aboriginal peoples can not only increase awareness and connection, but also provide opportunities to improve the child protection system, including the experiences and supports for Aboriginal practitioners engaged in this work. It was raised that meaningful inclusion of Aboriginal practitioners would entail the translation of Aboriginal practitioners' views and suggestions evidenced by whole agency change which are tangible and visible systemic, policy and practice change. This finding is also supported by the research of Libesman & Gray (2023), who acknowledge that Aboriginal people's resistance includes advocacy for systemic change. In particular, this is advocacy to hold the child protection agency accountable to not only engage in the ritual patterns of review but also extend to the follow through of enacting system change which upholds the voices and self-determination of Aboriginal peoples. There were also examples provided around the

strengths of some practitioners' positive experiences of inclusion by being encouraged to participate more regarding decision making and consultation being the key variable in differing experiences.

The related practice recommendations in relation to this overarching theme is as follows:

- To increase systems and processes to better understand the viewpoints of Aboriginal staff, their views regarding their needs, thoughts, and opportunity to review processes, practice or systems in place which impact upon Aboriginal clients or Aboriginal practitioners.
- To increase accountability measures for distribution of Aboriginal specific reviews regarding research, practice, and policy to all DCJ staff.
- To ensure dissemination of research and reviews conducted specifically impacting Aboriginal staff, communities, clients through staff emails, information accessible on the DCJ intranet or internal systems and formal presentations in training or forums
- To provide collaborative opportunities to share cultural learnings and insights directly from Aboriginal community members and internal DCJ Aboriginal practitioners together with their non-Aboriginal practitioners in forums, conferences and shared publications.
- To create practice forums and conferences where good news stories around Aboriginal children and families and the positive outcomes and how those outcomes were achieved in terms of practice learnings could be shared with all DCJ practitioners. There was also suggestions made around sharing insights directly from Aboriginal practitioners, and an acknowledgement of Aboriginal practitioners good work and positive outcomes in such public forums to additionally provide further cultural insights and learnings.
- To publicise good news stories through email, internal newsletters within the department and then also other external publications e.g. in the media, or in academic journals, or departmental publications accessible to other agencies and the public

- To offer opportunities and support for Aboriginal staff to connect with other Aboriginal professionals and Elders within the community as part of supporting their role as an Aboriginal caseworker.
- To build in inclusion and consultation with Aboriginal practitioners as part of the decision-making process regarding the allocation of Aboriginal families/ clients within their caseload.
- To undergo further work around building partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners, to further explore the understanding of working as allies in the shared field.
- To provide more varied opportunities for Aboriginal staff to connect with other Aboriginal practitioners within the department.
- To increase opportunities to attend collaborative forums as an opportunity for skills development and shared learning experiences. It was also suggested that within these forums and other modes of communication (e.g., email newsletters, internal and external publications) that aspects such as good news stories are shared, noting what practice skills and steps were taken to achieve those results/outcomes.
- To ensure Aboriginal practitioners have opportunities to collaborate with other Aboriginal practitioners outside of the ARG process, which might be more personable and interactive alternative form of Aboriginal practitioners connecting.
- To establish grouping of localities that provide regular opportunities for Aboriginal staff to connect with each other and seek support in light of the varied impact of their role, outside of the district and state ARG.
- To create opportunities for Aboriginal staff to connect with other Aboriginal professionals within culturally specific training or conferences.

5.2 Experiences of racism

In relation to better understanding Aboriginal practitioners' **experiences of racism**, there was a predominant view that racism is still a current issue existing in today's society and within the child protection field today for Aboriginal practitioners and inherently within the child protection system. There was an acknowledgement of the many attempts by the department to create increased cultural safety and reduce racism, however, there continued to be a need to adapt and further make improvements. There were aspects regarding the implications of lateral violence that some Aboriginal practitioners also observed or experienced, and the lack of mechanisms to comfortably or safely seek support or report such iniquities. There were strong views regarding majority of participants feeling that their cultural views were mostly disregarded and undervalued by the department in relation to decision making or practice considerations.

There were concerns raised that the current child protection system is still predominantly a structured with the confines of a White colonial-based system, whereby examples of processes such as de-identification of Aboriginal peoples on the 'ChildStory' database (an administrative database used for entering/ recording information and data regarding clients) and the assessment models for conducting safety assessments (e.g., alternate assessments and Safety and Risk assessments - SARA) do not have inbuilt cultural considerations factored in. There was additionally the aspect of fear of retribution to speak up about cultural issues, matters or practices within the organisation. There was a significant value placed upon respecting and honoring significant cultural practices, events, and times as a way of effectively supporting Aboriginal practitioners. As highlighted in the writings of Krakouer, Tan and Parolini (2021), it was evident through the findings that DCJ needs to continue to hear directly from not only Aboriginal clients, children, families and community but also Aboriginal staff / practitioners as part of being able to address systemic racism and create meaningful practice change.

The related practice recommendations in relation to this overarching theme is as follows:

- To respect, understand and value cultural practices such as Sorry Business, taking time to go back on country and travelling to see family at important times of the year.
- To respect and value Aboriginal staff insight to culture and approach to practice.
- To ensure that DCJ offer Aboriginal families the opportunity to choose whether they would like to work with an Aboriginal caseworker or a non- Aboriginal caseworker, without the assumption around the preference and what will be in the client's best interest.
- To review the system process of de-identification of persons marked as Aboriginal on their Child Story system, in acknowledgment that this is contentious and a point of ethical pain for some Aboriginal practitioners.
- To create opportunities for Aboriginal practitioners to connect and collaborate at Aboriginal interagency meetings, in-service training internally and externally to DCJ.
- To have clear processes and systems for being able to report and seek support for experiences of bullying and lateral violence experienced by Aboriginal practitioners.
- To acknowledge and better support child protection practitioners understanding of not only past trauma but how this relates to present trauma.
- To refine and develop protocols/ systems which can be supported in policy regarding the procedures, expectations and parameters of cultural consultation. This should clearly outline the expectations for local Aboriginal-identified staff around local consultation and formal consultation which may occur within the Aboriginal consultation teams.
- To review the allocation of Aboriginal families and clients, in terms of how allocation, resources and time frames can impact upon outcomes for Aboriginal peoples.
- To enable measures for all Aboriginal practitioners to have opportunities to provide feedback in a culturally safe and inclusive way, regarding any consultative or culturally relevant processes and practices in place.
- To offer training for staff and particularly managers around understanding the various context that Aboriginal practitioners have to navigate and juggle.

- To provide opportunities to Aboriginal practitioners to share and explore the impacts of navigating and juggling the various roles they play culturally.
- To extend whole organisation change beyond statutory child protection agencies, to better communicate decolonising practice, system and process change to the partner agencies associated with child protection systems and practice.

5.3 Training and career development

In relation to the **training and career development opportunities**, the majority of participants viewed the induction and career pathways processes as requiring further clarity and clearer definition of their role specifically in relation to cultural tasks and responsibilities. Many participants identified that there was a varied understanding and expectation of what their role would entail as a caseworker working for the department, to what then was the reality experienced upon and after employment. There was the recommendation of more clearly defined roles and support within the induction process made available through training, mentorship and buddying supports. The majority of participants additionally did not believe that there was equity in relation to the career opportunities and support available to Aboriginal-identified casework staff. Some of the inequities which were identified by participants included inequities in terms of education and professional qualifications providing a disadvantage to career advancement. Another inequity raised was the lack of access to information and support from the organisation to build DCJ Aboriginal practitioners' awareness of job / career opportunities and culturally appropriate mentorship to help guide and support career development and possible pathways.

There were a range of suggestions supporting training, mentorship, expansion of much needed Aboriginal specific/ identified specialist and managerial roles appointed within the departmental structure, educational and career pathways, all which could increase the opportunities for career growth within the department for Aboriginal practitioners.

There were significant themes regarding the limitations of culturally appropriate training for non-Aboriginal practitioners and the need for specifically targeted training to support Aboriginal practitioners regarding issues which may provide support within their role. There were suggestions made regarding the alternate methods and forms of training to be considered outside of the formal constructs already in place, and the need to consider the learnings from local elders and community members in terms of gaining relevant culturally appropriate insights.

In better addressing culturally inclusive training and career pathways in partnership with external networks in the community and networked agencies/ services, this will also support the opportunity to decolonise the welfare system beyond the statutory agency itself, as highlighted as an essential decolonisation strategy by Krakouer (2023).

The practice recommendations to in relation to this overarching theme are as follows:

- To remunerate the time and effort provided by Aboriginal people providing training. There was also reference to the remuneration and increased acknowledgement of Aboriginal people requested to present as special guest speakers or provide cultural information, performances or resources to the department, particularly for significant events like conferences, local Naidoc and Sorry Day events.
- To provide training and forums more readily available for DCJ practitioners to develop a better understanding of the impacts of colonisation for Aboriginal peoples in today's society.
- To put in place processes to detect and address inherent racism which exists within the current processes, systems and workplace culture of the organisation.
- To dedicate more resources and training for non-Aboriginal practitioners to build knowledge of how to work more inclusively, communicate and develop cultural sensitivity and curiosity with Aboriginal peoples, communities and staff. This training should additionally be provided within the induction process upon commencement of a non-Aboriginal child protection services practitioner.

- To provide in-service and induction training to further develop practitioners' understanding of the grief, loss and trauma experienced by Aboriginal peoples, as well as insights into what impact this might have upon the families they will be engaging with in today's society.
- To provide more comprehensive induction training for Aboriginal practitioners that assist to prepare for the complexities of working not only with Aboriginal people and communities but also for the complexities of child protection work and what the role itself entails within the department.
- To provide separate targeted induction and in-service training to prepare and support Aboriginal caseworkers for the specific issues and challenges which they may experience within their role, so that they can feel better prepared and equipped to successfully engage / perform their role.
- To develop a career pathway for Aboriginal caseworkers that could assist Aboriginal caseworkers to understand the expectations of their 'identified' Aboriginal role more clearly, and what other roles or career development might be available , that Aboriginal practitioners may aspire and work towards.
- To provide a career or training mentor with whom Aboriginal practitioners can specifically consult with – as an example this could be an Aboriginal-identified careers advisor who also supports supervision with managers.
- To create a variety of specialised roles and teams within the department, such as a specific Aboriginal learning and development teams, increased Aboriginal-identified casework specialist positions and increased Aboriginal specific project teams and roles to ensure increased cultural consultation, accountability and inclusivity.
- To Implement a rigorous review of Aboriginal-specific training developed regarding cultural practice within child protection systems
- To provide pathways for educational development and increase the opportunity for access to educational supports, including connection and engagement to qualifications that would

support to equalise educational disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practitioners.

- To support reducing any skill or educational disadvantage which may impact on how Aboriginal practitioners perform / conduct their role. This could be through the implementation of additional skills workshops or training available in-person or online.
- To provide more leadership-based training for Aboriginal practitioners aspiring to enter management / leadership roles.
- To engage Community Services Centres (CSCs) and local practitioners with local cultural knowledge, Aboriginal specific services, community members, elders and interagency professionals who may be able to impart and share their insights, knowledge and experience within the delivery of culturally relevant training.
- To engage Aboriginal elders from local communities to provide paid trainings for the sharing of cultural knowledge.
- To acknowledge the need for innovation and engaging in different modes of learning and training, that is not only reliant on formal training packages.
- To implement practice conferences specifically developed and held for Aboriginal staff, and further in service-learning opportunities targeted specifically to Aboriginal practitioners, which would ideally address areas of support Aboriginal practitioners which are seeking and feel they would benefit from.
- To develop additional training, adaptations to the assessment tools and resources relevant to conducting safety and risk assessments to ensure that all practitioners are appropriately considering these assessments and conducting them from a culturally appropriate lens. This recommendation was made based upon the concern raised that the current assessment tools, processes and systems are not necessarily culturally appropriate and effective.

5.4 Management supervision and organisational constructs

In relation to the **Management supervision and organisational constructs** supporting Aboriginal caseworkers within the department, there were views raised around the feelings of isolation for some Aboriginal practitioners upon employment and within their role. Participants identified the need for further connection and having opportunities to connect with other Aboriginal practitioners and have additional opportunities to seek counsel and support outside of their direct line manager as an important strategy. Forums for support outside of the Aboriginal Reference Group (whether that be district or state) were additionally suggested to increase connections and support for Aboriginal practitioners. Examples would include: buddying, mentorship, local internal and external Aboriginal practitioner forums and gatherings, Aboriginal-based counselling service differing to the Employee Assistance Program (EAPS), which not only has Aboriginal counsellors and psychologist, but rather an entirely Aboriginal-based service.

The importance of building trust in supervisory relationships was furthermore, identified, noting the challenges of working within the constructs of what can still be perceived as child protection system born from White colonial-based past practice. It was identified that in order to improve the experience for Aboriginal practitioners within supervision it is imperative for supervisors to have a better understanding of their experiences and complexities they face not only with clients, workload, and community but more so in terms of their sense of personhood, social, emotional, psychological, spirituality, as part of supporting wellbeing (Grieves, 2009). This correlates to the identified need of child welfare agencies to review past welfare practice to ensure that racist approaches and trauma inflicting practice is not perpetuated within current systems and (Newton, 2021).

The value of engaging in courageous conversations (Daniel-Mayes, 2020) is a principle suggested to benefit the support to Aboriginal practitioners between colleagues and supervisors. A significant theme identified the need for increased consultation with Aboriginal practitioners around

allocation of Aboriginal families to caseloads, not only for conflicts of interest around cultural fit in allocation but in addition to workload considerations to their additional cultural tasks / responsibilities, which may need to be considered and factored into workload or allocation decision making.

The related practice recommendations to be implemented in relation to this overarching theme is as follows:

- For supervisors to connect Aboriginal caseworkers to other Aboriginal staff or Aboriginal teams who are connected to the state and district Aboriginal reference groups, who can send any relevant cultural information or invitation to meetings or events specifically for Aboriginal staff.
- To consider connecting new Aboriginal staff to an Aboriginal colleague as a mentor or buddy program who is also Aboriginal and checks in regularly upon first being employed and entering their role.
- To provide access to cultural supervision for leaders and practitioners.
- To provide an opportunity to discuss any learning and development goals, training and career planning.
- To have a space to share feedback to the manager around management support, processes and systems in relation to culturally inconclusive support.
- To provide a space for reflection and discussion of any recent engagement in cultural experiences, events, milestones, experiences or consultations.
- To acknowledge and consider possible accommodations to the allocation of work, and requests to work outside of certain localities or communities or not to work with certain families due to the possible cultural impact or impact of the conflict of interest to their personal life or wellbeing.

- To ensure that managers are aware and explore within supervision the need to support engagement of Aboriginal practitioners with other Aboriginal partner agencies, Aboriginal community events and other internal Aboriginal practitioners within the department.
- To review the caseloads of Aboriginal practitioners in light of additional responsibilities such as interagency liaison, local and external consultations, community engagement.
- To develop a supervision resource guide for managers who are providing formal supervision to Aboriginal casework practitioners.
- To provide culturally inclusive training to managers of Aboriginal casework practitioners to build better skills and understanding of culturally inclusive management support and guidance on how to conduct formal supervision with aboriginal casework practitioners.
- To consider reducing the overarching caseworker caseload, to increase the possibility of being able to engage in culturally appropriate practice, that supports the time required to engage in meaningful relationship-based casework practice with children and families.
- To provide better training on how to support and conduct supervision for practitioners who work in trauma-laden work environments.
- To enable non-Aboriginal managers to gain a better understanding through the provision of research, training and online information, regarding the impacts for Aboriginal practitioners in terms of the current work in light of transgenerational trauma, consideration of vicarious trauma, conflicts of interest within the community or with family regarding case allocation, and better insight into the various points of challenge or contention that Aboriginal practitioners may have to face or encounter.
- To support managers to provide a space within formal supervision conducted for Aboriginal practitioners to have the opportunity to express and explore their feelings about the role, and various roles that they are currently juggling within DCJ and any impacts upon this within their personal lives outside of employment with DCJ.

- To train managers to provide a space within formal supervision conducted for Aboriginal practitioners to share any challenges experienced within allocated cases and work with clients, community, agencies or other practitioners, which impacts upon culture or creates cultural tension.
- For managers to provide a space within formal supervision conducted for Aboriginal practitioners to have an opportunity to raise any worries or concerns they have around experiences of prejudice or racism within the scope of their work role by clients, community or other practitioners / professionals.
- For managers to provide a space within formal supervision conducted for Aboriginal practitioners for opportunities to explore an Aboriginal practitioner's sense of personhood and spirituality as areas for exploration and discussion.
- To consider contracting an additional service or agency to provide culturally responsive and specific emotional, psychological, counselling support, in addition to the Aboriginal counsellors/ psychologists available through the current Employee Assistance program (EAPS), noting that DCJ does currently have Aboriginal-specific supports available within its EAPS services.
- To factor and consider within the review of work allocation, capacity and workload planning processes the impact of additional culturally specific work tasks that may need to ensure appropriate adaptations are made to work-load accordingly. Informal cultural work tasks to be considered in workload allocation could include: cultural community networking or interagency meetings; local commitment to Aboriginal planning and agency meetings; informal consultations; formal invitations for consultations; additional secondary support to non-Aboriginal practitioners as part of support to engage an Aboriginal person or family; and assisting in conducting Winangay carer assessments.
- To support Aboriginal practitioners to engage in significant cultural practices and events, demonstrating the department's commitment to supporting Aboriginal peoples' healing.

- To provide a range of Aboriginal-identified managers and mentors with whom Aboriginal practitioners can be connected to or have the contacts available to reach out for additional cultural support should that be required.

5.5 Future research

This research has not only created new knowledge in terms of better understanding the experiences and support needs of Statutory Aboriginal child protection practitioners, but has also been able to form the basis for understanding areas of further exploration and future research which may be beneficial. It is evident through the findings of the research that there is a need for further research to be conducted to explore how the experiences of Aboriginal statutory child protection staff relate to staff retention rates, burn out, absenteeism and the correlation to workplace stress or bullying experiences for Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers, given the current research did not have specific data around these correlations.

This research can be useful for DCJ and other statutory child protection organisations in supporting engagement in rigorous thinking about how best to develop policy, professional structures and practices for Aboriginal practitioners and clients, the need for which has been documented by Newton et.al (2024). This can be built upon from the premise of having heard from and continuing to hear directly from Aboriginal peoples and practitioners to better guide research principles, policy, practice and resources to better serve Aboriginal peoples engaged with these systems.

Building on this study, recommendations for future research are as follows:

- To engage in research aimed at better understanding the experiences of racism for Aboriginal practitioners.
- To conduct further reviews and/or research on the wellbeing of Aboriginal practitioners and further understand experiences of lateral violence, bullying, and fear of retribution within the organisation.

- To ascertain the staff retention rates, burn out, absenteeism and the correlation to workplace stress or bullying experiences for Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworkers, given the current research did not have this specific data.
- To conduct a review or research aimed at understanding the system and processes which exist with regards to formal professional supervision of Aboriginal casework practitioners provided by management.
- To further understand how systemic racism can be addressed beyond the child welfare agency, but to the broader network of services and agencies within society connected to the child welfare system (eg mandatory reports, government and non government agencies)

5.6 Supervision tool / prompt guide & next steps

The 'supervision tool/ prompt' in Appendix 5 has been developed and is proposed to be incorporated or adapted by the NSW DCJ in conjunction with the Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes Unit, to potentially be utilised by non-Aboriginal managers who are providing supervision to Aboriginal practitioners. The prompt questions can be utilised to engage in curious discussions and courageous conversations (Daniels-Mayes, 2020) that may promote better understanding and support for Aboriginal practitioners.

In light of the areas identified within the research, for the areas for support by managers the following could also be further explored within these supervision meetings with Aboriginal practitioners:

- To raise and discuss what have been some of the challenges and successes have been within their role.
- To discuss what challenges and successes may have been recently experienced impacting cultural values.

- To utilise the key approach of courageous conversations when discussing challenging or confronting issues, to enable Aboriginal practitioners the opportunity to deconstruct the narrative of racism and ethnic inequity.
- To utilise the following strategies in courageous conversations identified by Singleton (2016) including: 1) Stay engaged and involved in the dialogue; 2) Experience the discomfort and commit to bringing issues to the open in order to bring healing; 3) Speak your truth and be open about assumptions, stereotypes without glossing over the issues; and 4) Expect and accept and non-closure, by not rushing to find the solutions and engaging in dialogue which does not blame even with the uncertainty.
- To have an opportunity to discuss other modes of support which can be considered.
- To be able to discuss any connections with other Aboriginal practitioners and professionals internally within and outside of the department, and understand what these experiences have been like.
- To be able to provide feedback regarding any consultative or culturally relevant processes, practices in place.
- To provide an opportunity to discuss any learning and development goals, training and career planning.
- To have a space to share feedback to the manager around management support, processes and systems in relation to culturally inconclusive support.
- To reflect and discuss any recent engagement in cultural experiences, events, milestones, experiences or consultations.

5.7 Final conclusion

The research findings fit into four overarching themes, with subthemes. The overarching themes were: The exploration of cultural safety and inclusion, the experiences of racism, training

and career development opportunities and management supervision and organisational constructs supporting Aboriginal practitioners.

From the lens of critical race theory, the findings demonstrate the need of DCJ to review the practices which stemmed from White-dominated constructs, to consider what changes may be needed to reduce social oppression within the system today for both its staff and clients. It highlights the areas and ways that racism can be experienced by Aboriginal practitioners, both in obvious and less visible modes (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). Whole agency change must commence by firstly being informed and guided by the shared experiences and expertise of Aboriginal people, to support healing and change within the organization, translating to the development and review of policies, structures and practice impacting Aboriginal peoples who are engaged in such systems and institutions (Newton et.al, 2024).

The findings also support the notion that there is a need to view Aboriginal practitioners' wellbeing in terms of a holistic conception (Haswell, 2013), given that there are many aspects of wellbeing such as the interconnection between spiritual, social, emotional which are often not considered by the overarching systems and by supervisors when considering support. The lens of collective wellbeing is significant when considering the components of support which Aboriginal practitioners may bring more value and meaning. As noted by Garvey et al. (2021) it is helpful to understand the interconnection of dimensions which are informed by the voices, values and preferences of Aboriginal peoples as inspired by the concept of weaving. This concept of wellness as the interwoven connection of families, community, country, spirituality, and culture as part of identity. Whilst in other human service areas, including the Department of Health NSW, the spiritual component of wellbeing has been considered and captured in Aboriginal support frameworks, in the context of statutory OOHHC this is a new area of exploration and application in support considerations. This is a vital part of culture for consideration, particularly in better understanding the experiences of intersectionality for Aboriginal practitioners.

The aspects which support this sense of connectedness for Aboriginal practitioners as part of promoting wellbeing, role satisfaction and staff retention that have been highlighted in the research include: to celebrate successes, to be valued/ acknowledged for their contributions and efforts to practice and positive outcomes, to connect with Aboriginal professionals internally and externally, to learn from the knowledge and insights of Aboriginal elders and community members, to have opportunities to share and explore the challenges of the multiple roles they might be holding, and to be supported to connect with community and culture. A significant influencing component of promoting Aboriginal wellbeing needs to consider, acknowledge and address the impact of trauma in shaping the lived experience of Aboriginal people, when considering systemic and whole organizational change (Newton, 2019).

In relation to cultural safety and inclusion, it was identified that there is a lack of understanding and support by Non – Aboriginal colleagues regarding the cultural well-being and the unique role of the Aboriginal practitioners, which undermined cultural safety and inclusion. It was also identified that there were gaps in translating the recommendations made from research and reviews into practice impacting Aboriginal practitioners in Child protection work. There was a need identified for the department to provide increased opportunities for Aboriginal practitioners to share good practices.

In relation to better understanding Aboriginal practitioners' experiences of racism, it was expressed that Aboriginal practitioners felt that there were still significant issues of racism experienced within the DCJ, perpetuated in the attitudes of other practitioners, culture, practice and processes of the agency. There was insight gained regarding some of the challenges which exist for Aboriginal practitioners internally, including lateral violence and the psychological, social and emotional impacts experienced by their own family, community and clients as a result of working for DCJ.

In relation to training and career development opportunities, it was identified that there needs to be increased opportunities within the agency to build cultural awareness for child protection practitioners. Whilst it is understood that DCJ NSW are already commencing initiatives and changes to cultural learning and training development, there are recommendations to further build greater career and skillset growth through learning opportunities and career pathways specifically for Aboriginal practitioners within the department. The other significant gap identified was the limitations of current cultural training, which was also followed by the suggestion of seeking alternate modes/methods of learning and providing culturally appropriate and relevant trainers, resources, remuneration of community trainers/ facilitators and learning content for Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal practitioners. This exploration of tangible strategies expanded the knowledge that this improvements are required to build cultural safety, awareness and practice change, however, also considers how this might be in actioned.

In relation to the management supervision and organisational constructs supporting Aboriginal caseworkers, the research identified the need for further cultural consideration and inclusion of Aboriginal practitioners pertaining to decision making impacting upon Aboriginal peoples and outcomes. The need to acknowledge and create increased trust and supports within the space of supervision between Aboriginal practitioners and their managers was also identified for further development within the organisation/ DCJ. It was beneficial to hear directly from Aboriginal practitioners regarding their perceptions and experiences as a way of creating new knowledge and understanding in this area, which supports decolonising welfare systems by having Aboriginal peoples drive change.

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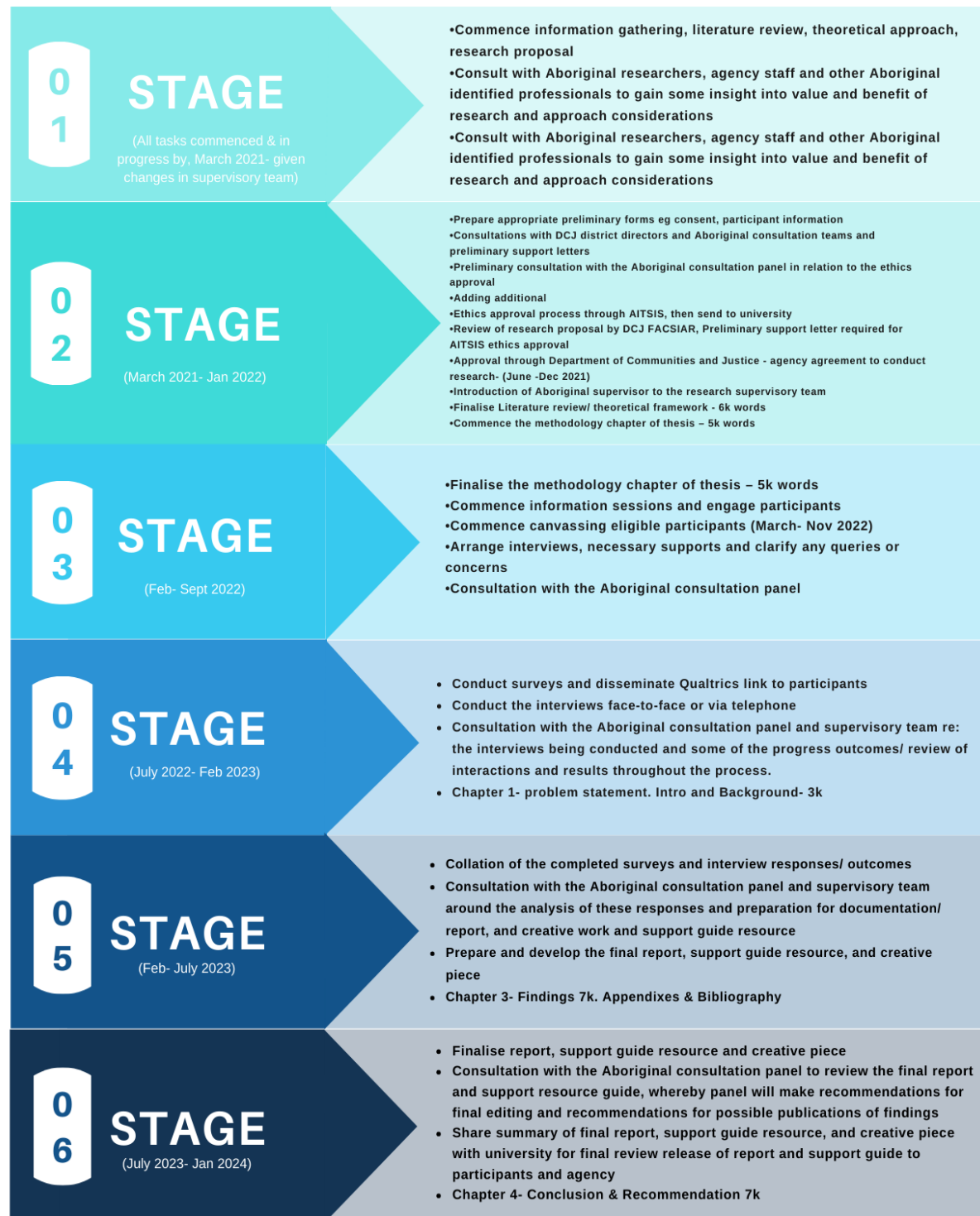
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Appendix 1: Research Flow Chart

Research Flow Chart/ Time Line

'Supporting & understanding the challenges of Aboriginal Identified Statutory Child protection Caseworkers in NSW'

Susan Carrasco



Appendix 2: Participant information and informed consent sheet



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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND INFORMED **CONSENT FORM**

Project Title: 'Supporting and understanding the challenges of Aboriginal-identified statutory

Child protection Caseworkers in NSW'

Researcher(s):

Chief investigator: Susan Carrasco- Candidate student of Doctorate in Social Science

Nadine Ehlers: Senior Lecturer of Sociology and Social Policy

Amy Conley Wright: Associate Professor of Social Work and Policy Studies. Director,

Research Centre for Children and Families

Organisation(s): The University of Sydney NSW 2006 AUSTRALIA

What is the project about?

The aims and objectives of this research project is to:

- 1) Identify the support needs of Aboriginal Child protection caseworkers who work specifically with Aboriginal families and communities.
- 2) Develop a better understanding of the social Implications and challenges faced by Aboriginal caseworkers, working with Aboriginal families and communities in the field of child protection, the impacts upon your wellbeing and how these can be addressed through support and training.
- 3) Assist the development of a resource for managers that will serve as a guide to provide strategies and question prompts to support Aboriginal child protection caseworkers
- 4) To develop a creative digital story based upon the interviews and data provided by you with your consent, for the purpose of meeting the Doctorate course criteria and to add another layer of communicating the experiences of the Aboriginal Child protection caseworkers/ practitioners.

You have been invited to participate in this study because your insight around the support needs and experiences of Aboriginal child protection caseworkers is valued to support create greater understanding in this area of practice.

This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving your consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

Why have you been invited to participate?

You have been invited to participate because of your expertise as an Aboriginal identified child protection caseworker, and because of your insight and experience in relation to the challenges and support needs of Aboriginal-identified caseworkers.

Who is involved in the project? What will the researchers do and when?

Participation and research process if you choose to be part of this study?

You will be asked to:

- Engage in the completion of a written survey online, which will ask a series of questions aimed at gaining further insight, understanding of experiences of Aboriginal child protection staff's support and training needs.
- Engage in a face to face interview option, which will further explore the same questions that form the basis of the online interview/ survey.

The face to face or telephone interview option is available as another form of interview method, ideally an extension to the survey questions, as it does not have as many structure questions set. This may be a more accessible or more comfortable mode of sharing your views and experiences. Any of the face to face or telephone interviews will be audio recorded, so as not to disturb or interrupt the flow of the conversations, which may occur if the researcher was solely reliant on note taking during the interview conversations. The audio recording will ensure the accuracy of the information presented, and is moreover considered to be a culturally appropriate way of understanding Aboriginal peoples experience and insight.

There is additionally a creative digital story available if you wish to nominate yourself to contribute to this part of the research. This creative digital story entails the opportunity to self-nominate to consent to being filmed during the face-to-face interviews. The filmed material to support a creative digital story which will also form another way of presenting an account of yours and other participants experiences, should you wish to participate. This

is not required but available as another part of sharing your valuable views and insights for further learning purposes. The filmed material will only be available to the University research team and not the DCJ, as it is only for the purpose of fulfilling the course requirements and creative digital story for the doctorate in social science course. This filmed footage will be disposed of upon completion of the research project by the university and researcher, should the participant nominate for this to occur.

Study time- The online survey is estimated to take approximately between a minimum of half an hour and approximately a maximum of an hour to complete. Should you nominate to participate in a face to face interviews, then this process may take up to one hour.

Study location: The surveys can be completed online, however, they can also nominate to engage in the survey questionnaire face to face or via telephone in addition or in place of the survey.

Optional Self-nomination for video or audio recording:

The interviews will form the basis of the creative digital story, to reflect in a cultural relevant way of communicating and sharing the experiences and perceptions of you and other participants considering the 'yarning' methodology. These interviews will be the source of content as a way of fulfilling the creative digital story (documentary style) digital story for the purpose of the research program structure of the doctorate in Social Sciences course. Participation in the creative digital story is optional and not a condition of participating in

the research project. You are advised that this creative digital story will only be utilised for the purpose of meeting the creative digital story to complete the research and will only be viewable by university supervising staff and academics responsible for marking and grading of student/ chief researcher. All recording video and audio files which have been recorded as part of forming the digital story, will be destroyed and permanently deleted once grading and marking has been conducted and obtained, which will be at the end of the research project.

I would like to audio-record or video-record this interview to make sure that I remember accurately all the information you provide, and to fulfill the requirement of the creative digital story as part of meeting of the course criteria. I will keep these recordings on a laptop which has a secure password, which will be submitted to the university as part of the research and destroyed upon completion. The only people who will have access to the audio-record or video-record will be the researcher Susan Carrasco and the university staff supervising and assessing the research.

If you consent to having your video or audio recording also released to the Department of Community Services as part of your professional development and use, please specify yes or no here:

-Yes I consent to the video or audio recording being shared with NSW DCJ

-No I do not consent

I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym may be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name.

What will happen to your information?

Confidentiality: You and the other participants will not be identified within the research data, written surveys, recording or dissemination of results. Therefore when presenting information or accounts shared by you or the other participants, I will ensure that you're not identifiable through deductive disclosure (Tolich, 2004). So that the traits of individuals or groups will not make them identifiable in the research report prepared, e.g. by not noting yours or other participant's localities, or specific CSCs, or information that others may be able to deduce the identity of yourself or other participants (Seiber, 1992). It will be broadly commented on regarding the span of localities across NSW, but will not specify the individual CSCs where you or other participants are based.

How will the research team protect information collected about you, and how will that information be shared?

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used unless you have provided explicit permission below.

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published. Although every effort will be made to protect your identity, there is a risk that you might be identifiable in publications due to the nature of the study and/or the results.

Data sharing:

Only the data that is noted in the form of the final research report are anticipated to be shared in the following forums after the completion of the research project:

-Within research articles, written journals, books or referenced in other literary works.

Can you tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study

Security and Storage:

The survey data will be stored on the secure cloud-hosted web-based platform, Qualtrics, hosted by University of Sydney.

Signed consent forms, audio and video recordings and transcripts from interviews will be stored on a secure Research Data Storage location/ a drop box established for the project on the University of Sydney's secure server and accessible solely by the named researcher and supervisor only. No hard copy physical study materials will be stored. Each of the files will only be accessible with a secure password and researchers own laptop also.

Upon completion of the project, the submitted thesis document will be retained and accessible through the university and Department of Communities and Justice, however, the deidentified research data will be disposed of directly after the submission and the thesis has been marked by the university and the research project is completed. There is no intention for the data to be made available for future re-use.

Disposal:

The video footage will be identifiable during the research as part of the research project purpose and content structure. The footage and edited creative digital story will then be deleted by the university and research student upon completion of the study and after grading of student by the university, should yourself or the other participants included in this footage nominate for this to occur. The video and audio footage will be disposed 5 years after the research has been completed, submitted, and marked by the university.

The written or paper data will be disposed of via secure shredder by university after the minimum 5 year period, requested by administrative systems, at the stipulated time, per the data storage policies of the university and the agency DCJ.

You will be provided with a copy of the final research report document, and copy of the drafted support guide resource at the end of the research project.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

Your participation in this study may involve the following risks:

- psychological risks, including risks of emotional discomfort from being asked about or discussing sensitive issues.
- You may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell the interviewer at any time if you wish to take a break or stop the interview.
- You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about. If you are uncomfortable, you are free to not answer or to skip to the next question.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – we will take steps to minimise this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

If there are any disclosures which reveal safety risks in relation to dangers of previous harm or current harm to self or others, then mandatory reporting by researcher will need to be applied.

You will be offered Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and the opportunity to have a support person who you nominate from the Department of Communities and Justice Aboriginal colleague to attend with you during any phone or face to face interviews, should you desire to have additional support.

The distress protocol is as follows:

- that you and each participant offered an opportunity to have a self-nominated support person available whilst the participant completes the survey or interviews.
- that you and each participant will ensure that there is an established understanding prior to the interviews being commenced, of how the participant will let the researcher know if

you are distressed, or would like to have a break, or cease the continuation of the interview process.

- that you and each participant will be provided the contacts for the Employee Assistance Program both noted in the survey and at the face to face interviews to ensure that you have additional modes of seeking emotional and psychological support if you are distressed and would like to further debrief around the process and participation within the research.

- there will be further follow up with you and each participant after the interview process to ensure that an additional check in around what other supports you may require, eg consultation with your managers, or the employee assistance program, or the research department with the department. You will also be queried around what you would like to be done with the information you may have provided, including partial completion of the interview, to ensure your views are respected.

Support Contacts available in case of distress:

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)- converge 1300 687 327

(convergeinternational.com.au) 24/7 counselling support and counselling available

Child wellbeing taskforce – increasing supports for child protection caseworkers

Research unit DCJ- FACSIAR@facs.nsw.gov.au

Transforming Aboriginal outcomes unit DCJ

What are the possible benefits for me or others?

You are not likely to have any direct immediate benefit from participating in this research study, other than the satisfaction of sharing your insights and views, for the hope of a valuable and meaningful contribution to research findings. The longer-term benefits include the opportunity to have the findings of the research in assisting to better understand the experiences of Aboriginal child protection caseworkers, and in turn can lead to statutory agencies developing strategies to better support Aboriginal caseworkers in your role within child protection.

The research is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Sydney, however, is aimed to bring benefit to the NSW DCJ agency in terms of being able to bring insight which can help Aboriginal caseworkers in the future, and statutory child protection agencies in Australia to further support Aboriginal casework staff. This learning may in turn impact the development and continual improvement of systems, processes, and policies being developed, through the consideration of the research findings, attributed to your invaluable insight gained through participation.

Culturally restricted information

There will be no culturally restricted information collected. Strategies in place to mitigate any unintentional culturally restricted information collected are as follows:

- Frequent reviews of the research with the Aboriginal consultation panel- at the various intervals in the research flow chart, to ensure accountability of cultural safety and inclusion in methodology and practice

- Regular supervision and oversight by Aboriginal-identified supervisor Sheelagh

Daniels-Mayes

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

You are eligible to participate in this research if you are an Aboriginal/ Torres Strait Islander Caseworker or Manager caseworker working within the Out of home care or Child protection streams within the Department of Communities and Justice agency - within the field of statutory Child protection.

You will be invited to an information session and information provided via email. Then all the relevant Aboriginal Caseworkers will be provided an opportunity to participate as there will be email correspondence circulating the survey and invitation for face-to-face interviews sent to all staff, specifically inviting all Aboriginal caseworkers an opportunity to participate.

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney or the Department of Communities and Justice NSW.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by informing the researcher by email.

You are free to stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

Submitting your completed questionnaire is an indication of your consent to participate in the study. You can withdraw your responses any time before you have submitted the questionnaire. Once you have submitted it, your responses cannot be withdrawn because you are anonymous and therefore, we will not be able to tell which one is yours.

If you decide to withdraw from the study, we will not collect any more information from you. Please let us know at the time when you withdraw, what you would like us to do with the information we have collected about you up to that point. If you wish for the information you have provided to be removed from our study records, then that will be honoured by ensuring that it is not included in the study results. You will, however, be required to inform the research team prior to the point in the research whereby the final drafted report is due to be published. The researcher will advise you via email when the final drafted report is due to be published. You will of course have had an opportunity to review your contributions prior to the final draft being reviewed.

You and any participant will also be free to withdraw at any time without any repercussions, which will also be noted on the consent form and Participant Information Sheet. There will only be the cut off time for when you can share that you no longer wish to participate or have your views or input noted in the research thesis final report/ document, only prior to being notified of press/ publication date. That is why it is imperative that you are given ample opportunities to have support people available to participants during the process, that you have opportunities available to you to review your transcribed responses and then also review the drafted thesis report prior to publication.

You can stop participating at any time and it won't change your relationship with the researcher(s) or anyone else. If you do decide to stop participating in the project, you will

need to do this before being informed that the report is being submitted for review by the university.

Contact

I know that if I am worried about the research I can contact Susan Carrasco 0435 343 551

Complaints

I know that I can complain to:

- Social & Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board, University of Sydney, Phone: 1800 793 457
- The Executive Director of Research, AIATSIS, 51 Lawson Crescent, Acton ACT 2601, (e) ethics@aiatsis.gov.au
- The Chair of the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee, AIATSIS, 51 Lawson Crescent, Acton ACT 2601, (e) ethics@aiatsis.gov.au
- If I think there has been a breach of my privacy I can write to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner, GPO Box 5218 Sydney NSW 2001 or call 1300 363 992.

Ethics Committee Clearance

The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM (CONTINUED)

Project Title: Understanding the experiences and supporting the challenges of Aboriginal-identified statutory child protection caseworkers in New South Wales

Researcher: Susan Carrasco- Candidate student of Doctorate in Social Science

Organisation(s): The university of Sydney, The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), The Department of Communities and Justice

1. I understand what this project is about	Yes ☐	No ☐
2. I voluntarily agree to my participation in this study	Yes ☐	No ☐
3. I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time	Yes ☐	No ☐
4. I understand what will happen to me during the research project as explained to me	Yes ☐	No ☐
5. I agree that the researcher(s) can interview me for the research including in a group of people (or 'focus group')	Yes ☐	No ☐
6. I consent to this interview/focus group/workshop being audio taped and/or filmed	Yes ☐	No ☐
7. I agree to photographs being taken of this interview/focus group/workshop	Yes ☐	No ☐
8. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation as explained to me	Yes ☐	No ☐
9. I understand the potential risks and possible benefits of participating in this research as explained to me	Yes ☐	No ☐
10. I understand that the results of this research may be published in a public or other forum	Yes ☐	No ☐

11. I agree that my name and other personal information will not be mentioned in the project report/ publication that comes out of this research.	Yes ☐	No ☐
12. I understand that all information gathered in this research that is confidential will be kept secure for 10 years and then disposed thereafter	Yes ☐	No ☐
13. If the researcher(s) keep(s) a record of what I said with my name on it, or which could be used to identify me, I:	☐ give permission for my information to be shared ☐ don't give permission for my information to be shared	
14. I want the researcher(s) to give me a copy of the project report that is produced as a result of this research.	Yes ☐	No ☐
15. I understand that I will retain any Intellectual Property from my personal interview recordings.	Yes ☐	No ☐
16. I understand that the researcher(s) will SHARE copyright in the project report produced as a result of this research with the The University of Sydney and The Department of Communities and Justice This means that the researcher(s) cannot reproduce the information that is in the project report in other places or for other purposes without first getting permission from The department of Communities and Justice and The University of Sydney	Yes ☐	No ☐

17. Do you wish to nominate to engage in a face to face or telephone interview to answer the survey questions?	Yes ☐	No ☐
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Signatures

Participant to complete:

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form (or someone has read it to me in language I understand) and I agree with it.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Email (to send a copy of this form): _____

Researcher to complete:

- I have described the nature of the research to the Participant and I believe that he/she understood and agreed to it.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Appendix 3: Survey Questions



SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Q1.

Part a.

How does the system and agency support Aboriginal staff with culturally specific and relevant training to support you in your role as an Aboriginal-identified caseworker?

- a) Very poor
- b) Poor
- c) Average
- d) Good
- e) excellent

Part b.

How does the system and agency support Non-Aboriginal staff with culturally specific and relevant training to support them in understanding Aboriginal culture, trauma and your role as an Aboriginal-identified caseworker?

- a) Very poor
- b) Poor
- c) Average
- d) Good
- e) Excellent

Q2.

Part A

Does the agency demonstrate and engage in social activism in relation to the rights and principles which empower you as an Aboriginal-identified caseworker? Yes or no?

Part b.

What are some ways that they could improve dignity driven and empowerment of Aboriginal-identified caseworkers?

- a) Training of non-Aboriginal caseworkers around Aboriginal history, transgenerational trauma and culturally appropriate practice

- b) Having more forums whereby you can contribute to decision making, policy and practice development specifically in relation to Aboriginal people and communities within the statutory child protection welfare system
- c) Having clearer policies and guides for working with Aboriginal people, communities and colleagues
- d) All of the above
- e) Any other suggestions, please detail here...

Q3.

Do you feel that you experience racism and power imbalances within your role as an Aboriginal caseworker from any ways noted below?

- a) Power imbalances or prejudice from other non-Aboriginal colleagues
- b) Lateral violence or prejudice from other Aboriginal colleagues
- c) Prejudice from Non-Aboriginal clients, community members or external professionals
- d) Prejudice from other Aboriginal clients, community members or external professionals
- e) Other ways, please detail here...

Q4.

What are your views on how the agency can increase cultural safety for staff and what further strategies could be recommended for implementation by the agency?

- a) More culturally relevant training for non-Aboriginal staff

- b) More culturally relevant training for Aboriginal staff
- c) Ensuring opportunities to share the issues and challenges relevant to your specific role as an Aboriginal-identified caseworker is covered in Supervision with your supervisor
- d) Ensuring opportunities to share with colleagues the issues and challenges relevant to your specific role as an Aboriginal-identified caseworker is
- e) Opportunities to contribute to the development or review of policy and practices relevant to Aboriginal-identified caseworkers or work with Aboriginal clients, supported by the agency
- f) Any other strategies, please detail here...

Q 5.

Part a.

Do you feel that your supervisor understands the culturally specific challenges and difficulties you experience as an Aboriginal child protection caseworker?

Part b.

What are some ways that could assist your supervisor in understanding these challenges better? (you may choose more than one answer)

- a) Further culturally relevant training
- b) consultation guide to support supervision discussions
- c) other recommended strategies, please detail here...

Q 6.

Part a.

Do you feel that you have opportunities to celebrate the cultural successes and positive outcomes of your work with your supervisor and colleagues? Yes or no?

Part b.

If you're answer was no, please mark any of the below noted strategies you think may be helpful in improving this:

- a) attending more forums whereby the successes of the work of Aboriginal-identified caseworkers can be recognised and celebrated with all organisational staff
- b) opportunities to attend more conferences, meetings or gatherings specifically for Aboriginal-identified staff, whereby the successes of the work of Aboriginal-identified caseworkers can be recognised and celebrated
- c) notification of the specific good outcomes stories can be shared in some kind of publication or other written forum/ communication to organisational staff
- d) any other methods/ strategies, please detail here...

Q 7.

Do you think that there are enough opportunities for collaboration and consultation with other Aboriginal staff members?

Yes or no?

If Yes, What would improve these opportunities? (please detail here)

Q8.

Are there any positive opportunities that you experience specifically in your role as Aboriginal-identified Child protection caseworker?

Q9.

Part A.

Are there any challenges that you experience specifically in your role as Aboriginal-identified Child protection caseworker?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If yes, Part B.

What might you identify as being some of the challenges of being an Aboriginal-identified child protection caseworker? (Please mark which one's apply, you may choose more than one answer)

- a) working with Aboriginal families and Communities
- b) expectations of non-Aboriginal colleagues
- c) perceptions of or conflict with other Aboriginal colleagues
- d) not feeling supported enough to do your role

e) all of the above

f) no significant challenges

g) other, please detail examples

Q 10.

Part a.

Do you feel you are supported by the agency to balance the varying roles/ identities that you may need to juggle as part of your Aboriginal culture, e.g. family role, caseworker role, community member, professional cultural leader or consultant?

Yes or no?

Part b. how could this be better supported?

Q 11.

Part a.

Does the organisation try to support cultural healing?

Yes or no?

Comments:

Part b.

What are the examples of opportunities for recovery when your role may trigger your own personal trauma, evoke emotional, social, relational and cultural conflict?

- a) Supervision with your supervisor
- b) Supervision with an Aboriginal supervisors, managers and leaders
- c) Forums to share and debrief with other Aboriginal colleagues
- d) Other suggested strategies, please detail here...

Q 12.

Part a.

Do you believe that your spirituality and sense of personhood is supported by the organisation? Yes or no?

Part b.

What can you recommend or suggest on how your spirituality could be better supported by the agency?

- a) Increased opportunities to participate in Aboriginal specific cultural events and traditions
- b) Increased opportunities to connect with other Aboriginal people, including time spent with professionals and communities

- c) Increased opportunities to participate in cultural learning and training experiences
- d) Increased opportunities to participate in cultural teaching and sharing with other Aboriginal people
- e) Any other ways you can suggest would be helpful to support you, please detail here..

Q 13.

Part a.

How well do you think non-Aboriginal colleagues understand historic assimilation policies and practices and the errors of past colonial practices?

- a) Extremely well
- b) Very well
- c) Relatively well
- d) Poorly very poorly
- e) Not at all

Q 14.

What are ways that non-Aboriginal staff can understand the historic assimilation policies and practices and the errors of past colonial practices?

- a) Through culturally relevant training at induction of all new staff which gives detailed information in relation to; the stories of the first nations people and the stolen generation, specific assimilation and removal policies and practices, the learnings of

past statutory child protection agency errors made upon Aboriginal people and the impacts upon transgenerational trauma

- b) culturally relevant Inservice training for all existing staff which gives detailed information in relation to; the stories of the first nations people and the stolen generation, specific assimilation and removal policies and practices, the learnings of past statutory child protection agency errors made upon Aboriginal people and the impacts upon transgenerational trauma
- c) modules of learning which covers the above noted information, that staff will need to be tested on to ensure knowledge and understanding of information
- d) more learning resources made available and accessible to all staff members on the intranet and soft copy resources also available also
- e) other strategies

Q 15.

Do you think the agency tries to support anti-oppressive practices, the dignity and self-determination of Aboriginal people?

Yes or No?

Please provide examples of this (detail here...)

Q 16.

Part a.

Do you think the agency tries to reduce and eliminate racist behaviour and approaches within the organisation?

Yes or no?

Part b.

If you marked no, what are some ways that you think may reduce the occurrence of racist behaviours or approaches? (you are welcome to select more than one response)

- a) More publications, notifications and research articles around racist approaches and it's impacts disseminated to staff regularly
- b) Increased training at induction and as part of in-service and staff development functions
- c) Ensuring updated information around these matters and issues are also raised regularly as agenda items in team, unit and agency planning meetings
- d) Other recommended strategies, please detail...

Q 17.

Part a.

Do you believe that there is equality in relation to the opportunities and support available to Aboriginal-identified casework staff and non-Aboriginal casework staff?

Yes or no?

Part b.

If you answered no, can you please provide examples and expand on what this inequality looks like please here...

Q 18.

How well does your agency support Aboriginal-identified staff in sharing their cultural insight, perspectives, experience and knowledge?

- a) All the time
- b) Most of the time
- c) Some of the time
- d) Rarely
- e) Never

Q 19.

How well does the organisation's systems and processes support culturally inclusive and safe service for Aboriginal-identified staff to support prevention of re-traumatisation?

- a) Extremely well
- b) Very well
- c) Relatively well
- d) Poorly very poorly
- e) Not at all

Q 20.

Does the organisation engage in anti-oppressive practices which uphold the dignity and self-determination of Aboriginal people, including its Aboriginal-identified caseworkers? Yes or no?

Appendix 4: Interview / Yarning Prompts



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

INTERVIEW / YARNING PROMPTS:

- 1) Tell me about your identity/role as an Aboriginal-identified caseworker?
- 2) Could you tell me about what is positive in your role?
- 3) Could you tell me about the challenges in your role?
- 4) This research is interested in experiences of colonisation and racism, and how the past is impacting on your role today. What are your thoughts on this?
- 5) Could you tell me about what support from the Department looks like for you? What should support look like?
- 6) What have I missed? What else should we discuss on this topic?