



An Indigenous-governed, Co-designed Approach to Improving Cultural Safety in Mental Health Services

Prof. Helen Milroy, Dr Shraddha Kashyap, Dr Jemma Collova



Introduction

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived and thrived in Australia for over 60,000 years
- Historical and continuing impacts of colonisation on mental health contribute to the gap in outcomes ¹
- Colonisation also occurred in research > so to improve outcomes, we must first embed cultural safety into research ²

Cultural safety in mental health services

- Cultural safety in mental health services is different to other health services
- Culture shapes understandings and experiences of mental health, the decision to seek help with any issues, and diagnoses

Aims:

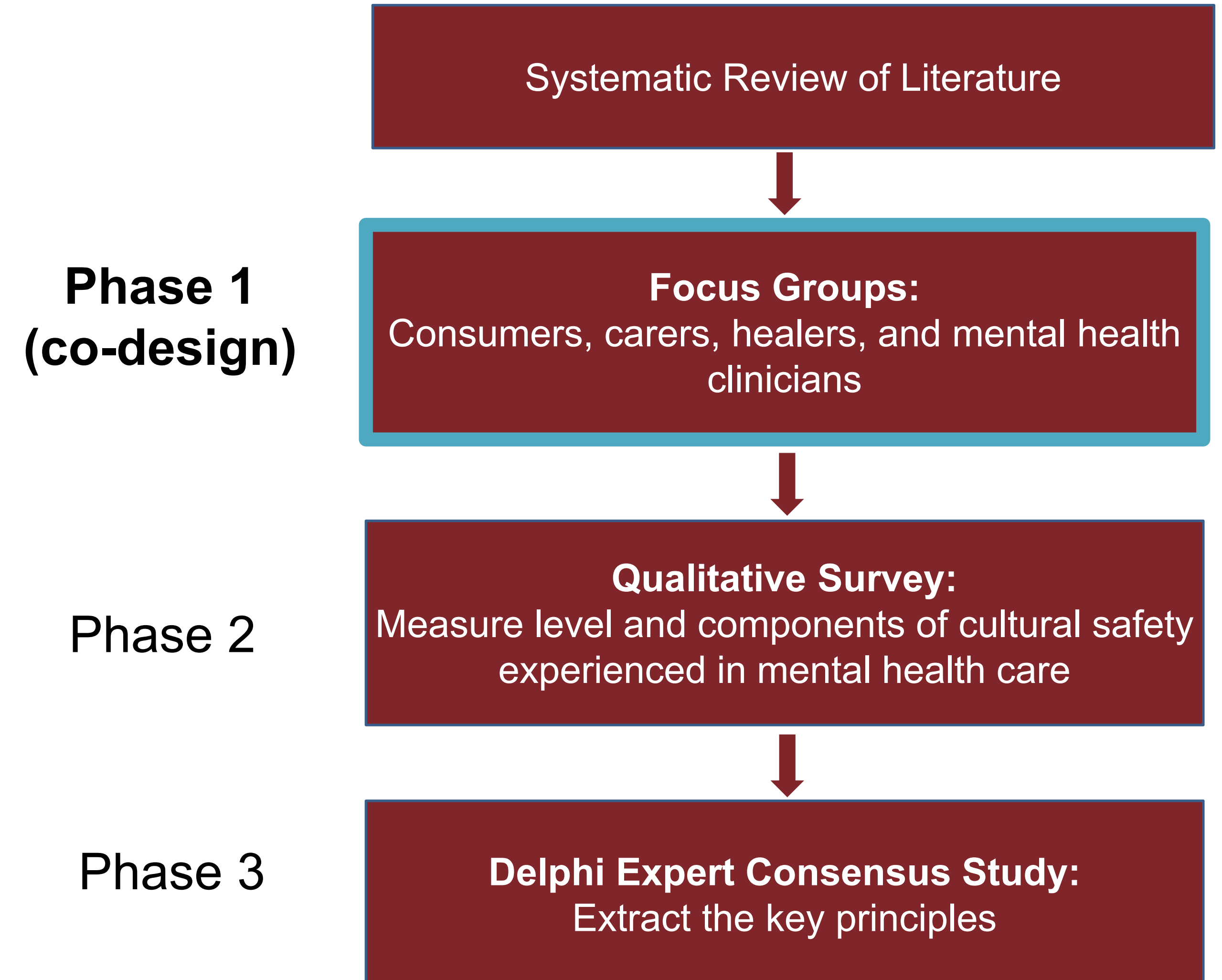
1. Identify the key characteristics of a culturally safe mental health service through a co-design approach
2. Embed cultural safety into research methodologies, and understand what this looks like

Methodological approach:

- Indigenous-led and governed research program ³
- Training for non-Indigenous staff (Cultural awareness, Cultural Exchange Program, ongoing)
- Aboriginal participatory action research ⁴, **co-design** and **ongoing community involvement** throughout all stages of the research process

Co-design phase

Method



Results: Co-design Phase 1

- **Question:** What are culturally sensitive and clear ways of asking people about cultural safety in mental health services?
 - Create a safe space and build relationships (e.g., provide questions before, small groups are safer, clear avenue for feedback)
 - Interviewer needs to work in a trauma-informed way, let participants know they don't need to answer all questions
 - It should be about sharing
 - Allow for responses to be shared through culturally relevant ways (e.g., art, stories)

Conclusions

This process allows for sharing of knowledges not otherwise possible

For example, when working with Cultural Healers to understand cultural safety....

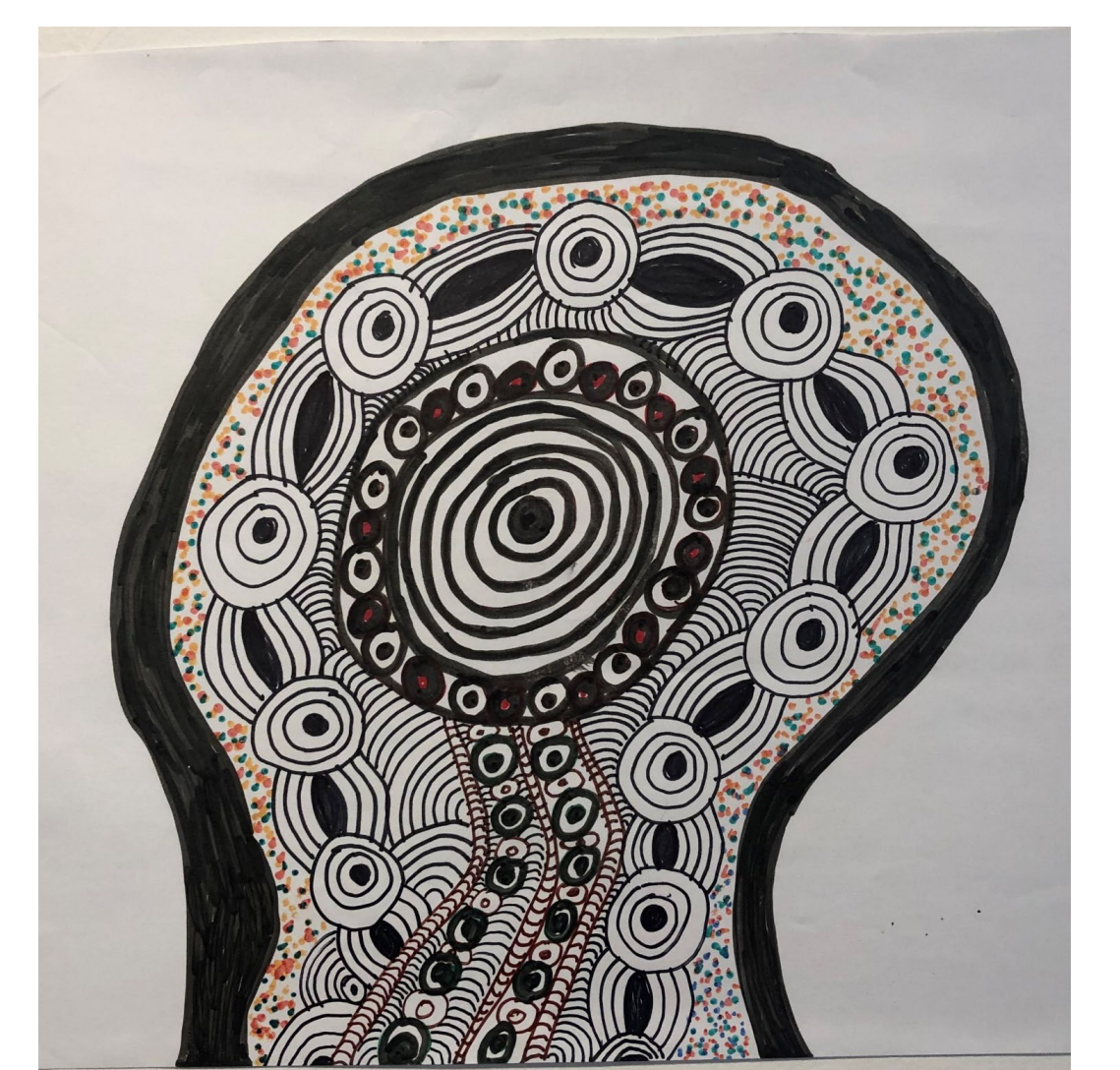
Top figure:

- There is no fast track to cultural safety
- Past: people have problems – Healers sitting with people
- Present: people trying to navigate difficulties and find a path
- Future: people all coming together to talk about it, moving on. Coming together moving forward. This is the spirit of “malpara malpara”. Working together as friends and ongoing, moving forward on a journey

Bottom figure:

- Rubbish thoughts (coloured) have been cleaned out by Cultural Healers
- Cultural Healers doing their work, and they are providing protection (black and white)

For outcomes of any research project to be meaningful, the process of conducting research needs to be culturally safe. This co-design phase allowed for a culturally safe research environment, and sharing of cultural knowledges, demonstrating the importance of culturally safe research processes⁵.



References

- ¹Dudgeon, Rickwood, Garvey, Gridley. (2014). A history of Indigenous psychology. In: Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice.
- ²Australian Psychological Society (2016). The APS Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ³The Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing Project: <https://timhwb.org.au/>.
- ⁴Dudgeon, Bray, Darlaston-Jones, Walker (2020). Aboriginal participatory action research: an Indigenous research methodology strengthening decolonisation and social and emotional wellbeing. Lowitja Institute; 2020. ⁵Milroy, Kashyap., Collova, Mitchell, Derry, Alexi,.. & Dudgeon (2022). Co-designing research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers of mental health services, mental health workers, elders and cultural healers. Australian Journal of Rural Health