

Alcohol and other drugs (AOD) addiction among Indigenous Australians: a literature review

Dr Bernard W S Fan and Dr Brian Steels

Keywords: *Indigenous Australians, Alcohol, Substance Use, culture, value*

Abstract

This literature review aims to explore the development of treatment models for alcohol and other drugs (AOD) addiction for Indigenous Australians. A main finding of this study is that there is a lack of treatment models for Indigenous/First Nations Australians suffering with AOD issues. Most Indigenous models are, in fact, research or service models. This paper suggests switching focus from enhancing engagement of Indigenous clients to working on an effective therapeutic model to help Indigenous clients recover from their AOD problems.

Introduction

In 2024, accidental drug-induced fatalities were the second-highest cause of death according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people recording a rate almost four times higher than that of non-Indigenous people (ABS, 2024). The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Health Survey reported that between 2022 and 2023, around 34 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and above exceeded recommended safe guidelines by consuming more than 10 standard drinks per week and/or consuming 5 or more standard drinks on at least 12 days in the last 12 months. The proportion of Aboriginal people who exceeded the guideline was nearly concurrent for those living in non-remote areas (34 per cent) and remote areas (35 per cent) (ABS, 2024). The figure is also double the rate reported in 2015 (ABS, 2015). Among the substances used, alcohol ranked the highest (93 per cent) in contributing to community problems such as mental health and domestic violence, followed by cannabis (77 per cent), inhalants (47 per cent), petrol (31 per cent), and amphetamines (29 per cent). There was a concern about the widespread use of cannabis and amphetamines by young Indigenous Australians (Putt & Delahunty, 2021). The National ATSI Health Survey indicated that Indigenous Australians were overwhelmed by the high levels of substance abuse and related issues. It is also reported that alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems are higher in rural areas compared to metropolitan areas, and rural communities have a higher need for AOD health services (Wallace et al., 2025).

Indigenous researchers have conclusively shown that colonisation, the forced removal of children from families, assimilation and acculturation to Australian mainstream values, oppression, dispossession, and exclusion contribute to feelings of anger, self-hatred, despair, hopelessness, and powerlessness (Hewlett et al., 2023). These feelings and narratives often lead to negative cycles affecting the self, family, community, and culture of many Indigenous people, who may then further resort to substance abuse to numb their feelings and to escape their painful memories (Hewlett et al., 2023). In turn, AOD dependencies exacerbate the problems that bring domestic violence to the surface, thus leading to the vicious cycle, which once more leads to feelings of anger, hopelessness, helplessness, and attributes to the intergenerational trauma. Moreover, alcohol use may contribute to disconnection from their local and deeply held culture (Amanda et al., 2023).

Most of the models explaining the development of the AOD problem among Indigenous Australians focus on the historical impact of colonisation and oppression (Hewlett et al., 2023). Research into interventions for substance use among Indigenous youths in the United States showed integration of cultural components in treatment was important for recovery (Liddell & Burnette 2017). However, the US review also noted a knowledge gap pertaining to culturally-informed substance abuse interventions for Indigenous people. Not surprisingly, knowledge and evidence about the development of addiction and its treatment for Indigenous Australians are also lacking. To explore and begin to close this knowledge gap, a literature review was conducted.

To direct the scope of the literature review, four questions were posed:

1. What historical and cultural context is relevant to AOD issues among Indigenous Australians today?
2. What therapeutic models of alcohol and other drugs (AOD) among Indigenous Australians are available in Australia to date?
3. What is the developmental pathway of AOD problems among Indigenous Australians?
4. What cultural elements or concepts are available for the treatment of AOD problems in Indigenous Australians?

Method

This literature review aims to explore the development of AOD issues and the vulnerability of Indigenous Australians. The review included published papers on the development and maintenance of addiction, theoretical models of addiction, and empirical studies to test those hypothetical models. The

Corresponding Author: Dr Bernard W S Fan and Dr Brian Steels

Email: bernard-fan@hotmail.com

Email: brian.steels@me.com

Australian Counselling Research Journal ISSN: 1832-1135

systematic review followed the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009). A systematic search using the OVID database (PsycINFO) was conducted for the period 2000-2025. Three additional online databases, including Google Scholar and ResearchGate, were also used. The following search terms were used: "Alcohol and Other Drugs" OR "AOD" OR "substance addiction" AND "healing" OR "treatment" OR "recovery" OR "quit" OR "abstinence" OR "lapse" OR "relapse" AND "Indigenous Australians" OR "Aboriginal". Further searches were undertaken using Indigenous-specific journals such as the *Journal of Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet*. Additional references were retrieved after searching the reference lists of the retrieved papers.

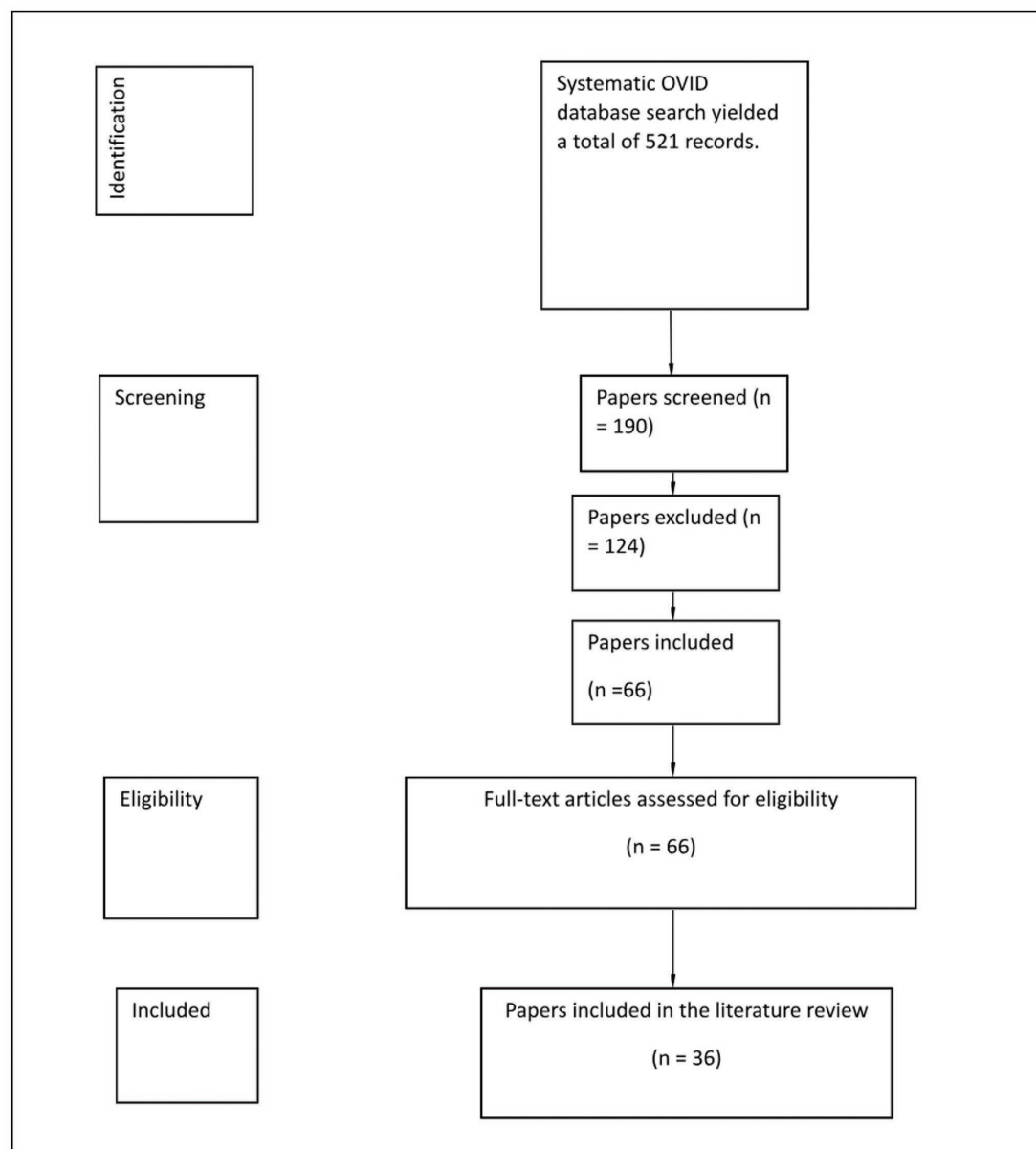
Studies in this review met the following criteria: (a) written in English; (b) published in a peer-reviewed journal; (c) study of human subjects. There is no restriction on the geography of the study published. Papers were excluded for the following criteria: (a) not published in English; (b) opinion papers; (c) they were neither journal articles nor dissertations; (d) they reported

subjects of mental illness and addiction were not the primary focus. The search process commenced with the title of the articles to first scan the relevant papers, followed by reading the abstract to select the relevant studies, before reading the full text.

Results

The search using the OVID database strategy yielded 521 records for initial screening. Titles and abstracts were assessed for eligibility and relevance by the author. The number of articles was reduced to 190 after the initial screening. After inclusion/exclusion criteria were applied, a total of 66 articles were found relevant to the current literature review. Additional articles were found from a manual search. A total of 36 articles were reported in this literature review. The search process is shown in Figure 1. The result of the literature review is reported below.

Figure 1. Summary of literature search.



In this literature review, the author has reviewed papers relating to working with Indigenous Australians. Multiple terms encompass Indigenous peoples in Australia, including Aboriginal people, Indigenous Australians, and the most recent term, “First Nations” people in Australia. The term “First Nations” people was first used to describe Indigenous Americans. In this paper, the word “Indigenous Australians” is used.

Indigenous Australian Culture

Only in the last 25 years have more Indigenous scholars and psychologists, such as Dudgeon et al. (2014), Dudgeon & Bray (2019), and Westerman (2021), begun to present Indigenous Australian (also known as Aboriginal Australian) culture systematically. Their work has helped both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to understand Indigenous culture as well as Indigenous clients' ways of thinking.

Many Indigenous scholars, psychologists, and other practitioners have emphasised the importance of cultural appropriateness in providing services for Indigenous Australians in a culturally sensitive and respectful way. Cultural appropriateness can improve substance abuse prevention and treatment intervention through adapting language, culture and context that is compatible with the client's cultural patterns and values (Burlew et al., 2013).

Kinship structure and collective value

For Indigenous Australians, governance of a country is based on complex laws which regulate relationships to country, family, community, culture and spirituality. These laws are passed down through generations and kinship systems (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019). The concept of “Self” is surrounded by family, community, non-Indigenous society and ecological system (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Indigenous kinship is founded on a connection to the land (Dudgeon & Bray, 2019). For this reason, the issues and difficulties of Indigenous clients are not just confined to their self-experience and condition.

There are approximately 500 different tribal groups and 123 Indigenous languages in use in Australia (NILR 2020). Despite a range of diversity in tribal groups and languages, Indigenous people present a broad perspective and interpret their experience from a collective, kin, and language group point of view instead of an individual perspective. This is generally not understood from a Western cultural context or ideology focused on individualism. At the very core of Aboriginal social structure is kinship: the basic principles for organising individuals into social groups, categories, and genealogies. The general kinship structure consists of three classifications: biological kin or consanguineal kin (blood kin), affinal kin (related through marriage), and classified kin (one has earned a particular role and stature within the family) (Dudgeon et al., 2014). This kinship structure defines each role and status in their family and clan structure. Indigenous Australians' role and status in kinship provide a guide for approved behaviour. Maintaining family relationships and community connections is vital for Indigenous Australians (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Indigenous women have also maintained strong leadership roles and have kept families and communities intact (Dudgeon & Bray 2018). Since there are diverse tribal groups, not all Indigenous communities are alike and practitioners should be mindful of local and regional differences in language, culture and views.

Environmental value

For Indigenous Australians, western societies hold egoistic values and materialism. Unlike western values,

Indigenous Australians hold “biospheric values” and eco-centric values to achieve sustainability which are holistic and non-materialistic. They view environmental values as human values that guide communities' understanding of how the natural world should be viewed and treated by humans (Gratani, et al., 2016). Indigenous environmental values are part of their culture which influence their beliefs and norms of their behaviour. Behaviours will be more likely to be undertaken by individuals if they hold values that support them. Within these holistic values, all components of the ecological and human system are interconnected. While stories vary across the country, a period known as the “Dreamtime” or “Dreaming” represents many of the foundational aspects of Aboriginal knowledge, when animals, places and humans were created and named. Language names were traditionally given to children by the elders. Names are associated with a personal totem, which promotes a specific connection of the individual with the environment and therefore a sense of identity (Gratani, et al., 2016).

Connection

Connection is an important concept in Indigenous Australian culture, where the world is interconnected and operates in a web of life with all nature (Ringland, 2019). Indigenous Australians believe there is an Indigenous system of “law” connecting every aspect of life across time, space, and place (Langton & Corn, 2023) that enables them to survive and thrive in Australia. For this reason, connection to Country is an important determinant of mental health and well-being, and can be seen by referring to the land as “my mother's” or “my father's country” or as “our country” (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Those who are away from their birth country for an extended period may experience grief, loss, and depression due to their weakened spiritual link with the country. Returning home enables Indigenous families to gather, yarn, and reconnect with their spirit and, for many, their totem. Moreover, this multifaceted connection also includes a person's traditional role, significant storylines, and sacred art. For Indigenous Australians, connection with the environment is a source of mental health and well-being. Frequent visits to Country, and living on or close to Country represent the opportunities to reconnect and to affirm their identity (Gratani, et al., 2016). A study reported that Indigenous Australians living in remote areas had a higher mean for the cultural attachment variable (Dockery 2010). This suggests that Indigenous Australians living in remote countryside have a stronger cultural attachment and a stronger connection with their country.

Spirit

Traditionally, most Indigenous authors emphasised the negative impact of long-term oppression brought about by forced colonisation and institutional racism, which caused enormous loss of spirit among Indigenous Australians (Dudgeon et al., 2014). This loss of “spirit” and associated grief is also linked to the disconnection of the country and the underlying issues of substance abuse and domestic violence.

It is, however, important for mental health professionals to understand the definition of spirit. People may believe in “the Great Spirit”, or a more localised name for a significant being, a creative totem, or the beings of “the Dreaming”. This spirit has a connection with the universe (Pattel-Gray, 2014). Besides this perspective of a Greater Being, the Spirit can also be understood from a psychological and physiological approach. It can be seen as a loss of volitional control in their substance use and abusive behaviours. On the other hand, long-term substance abuse can lead to poor physical and mental health, such as memory loss and drug-induced psychosis, which also represent the loss of

spirit for many Indigenous people. Therefore, loss of spirit can be understood from religious, psychological, and physiological perspectives, and helps us to understand the AOD problem.

AOD Research and Treatment Models

Given the knowledge gap in the understanding of the development of AOD problems among Indigenous Australians, this review also explored those model types that are presently being used as a springboard to future development of a better module, which will hopefully optimise outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Indigenous Research Models

Several research models have been designed to explore and understand Indigenous cultures in the context of AOD (Sharmil et al., 2021). Indigenous researchers also felt the tension and antagonism in their experience of doing Indigenous research within academia (Absolon, 2022). Firstly, Indigenous research which prioritises culturally safe protocols can clash with objective paradigms of Western methodologies. Secondly, Indigenous scholars may also face barriers in mainstream publishing. This mistrust resulted in Indigenous Australians' antagonism to Western research paradigms. Gradually, Indigenous researchers pursued their stance to re-theorise and to enact their Indigenous research agendas (Absolon, 2022). Consequently, they wanted to develop their own culturally safe and culturally respectful Indigenous research methods, which incorporated notions of connectivity, trust, integrity, and treating people fairly.

From this standpoint, Indigenous Australian researchers began to hypothesise what Indigenous research methods looked like. For example, Martin and Mirrabopa (2003) developed an Indigenous research methodology called *Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing*. This methodology is an Indigenous framework of knowledge transmission and research. It emphasises the interconnectedness of individuals with the world. In this methodology, there are three main constructs. Ways of Knowing refers to the process of acquiring knowledge. Ways of Being involves an understanding of one's identity, values, and sense of self related to their culture. Ways of Doing are a synthesis of both Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being, and refers to the practical application of knowledge and engaging with the world through actions and practices to express individuals' identities and roles (Martin & Mirrabopa, 2003). This research model emphasised the importance of learning Indigenous culture, such as working with and listening to Indigenous people, particularly elders. This pedagogical framework in cultural learning and research via storytelling and cultural activities also inspired Indigenous Americans and New Zealanders in their research (Siekman & Webster, 2023; Danyluk et al., 2023; Taani, 2022).

This research model influenced Indigenous researchers and Aboriginal controlled organisations to conduct qualitative research to interview Indigenous clients, families, elders, and workers to design their own Indigenous cultural AOD treatment model thereafter. For instance, one of the Ways of Knowing, Being, and Doing research conducted in AOD was a study on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) by Hewlett and her colleagues (2023). This study integrated both Indigenous strengths-based and healing-informed approaches, and a Western biomedicine therapeutic approach in supporting Indigenous families with a lived experience of FASD (Hewlett et al., 2023).

Another research method taken from Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the *Dadirri-Ganma Model*, as designed by Sharmil et al. (2021). This research model emphasized the importance of consultation through yarning, deep listening

(*Dadirri*), and two-way sharing (*Ganma*) with senior elders and the Indigenous community (Sharmil et al., 2021).

Indigenous pedagogical methodology provided an important research approach for Indigenous Australian researchers to conduct qualitative studies, via interviews and yarning, with Indigenous Australians to explore their perspective to design a culturally appropriate service and to generate culturally responsive policy (Dale et al., 2021; Purcell-Khodr et al., 2022; Cox et al., 2023; Fono et al., 2025). On the other hand, there was also a limitation of this Indigenous pedagogical research in so much as it lacked large-scale quantitative data sets to yield an evidence base to support meaningful policy and treatment models for Indigenous Australians (Craven et al., 2016).

Service Models

Beyond research, the lack of engagement by Indigenous people in mental health services is still the main challenge faced by most services and practitioners, including both Aboriginal community-controlled (ACC) organisations and mainstream services. Many non-Indigenous services remain confronted by the lack of practical information on therapeutic interventions among Indigenous Australians. To improve services for Indigenous Australians, Fono et al. (2025) emphasised consulting Indigenous communities and building a strong relationship with them in service design.

Two significant AOD service models for Indigenous Australians are the residential model and the community-based model. For example, Shakeshaft et al. (2018) studied six Indigenous residential rehabilitation services to evaluate their assessment tools, to define their core treatment and organisational components to build a standardised assessment tool, to develop a standardised logic model, and to design an evaluation framework to evaluate the costs and benefits of Indigenous residential rehabilitation services in NSW (Shakeshaft et al., 2018). The main purpose of Shakeshaft's study was to evaluate residential rehabilitation services and articulate a standardised residential rehabilitation program/service model for Indigenous Australians. Their study indicated that there was no standardised assessment, standardised treatment components, standardised service framework, or evaluation in residential rehabilitation. This lack of standardisation was interpreted to indicate a lack of understanding of the pathways of AOD development among Indigenous Australians.

By contrast, Krakouer et al. (2022) conducted a systematic literature review on the community-based model of AOD support for Indigenous Australians over the past two decades. The review reported that important components of AOD support for Indigenous Australians included cultural safety, Indigenous Australian workers, inclusion of family and kin, outreach, and group support. It also suggested focusing on holistic psychosocial support, increased local community participation and engagement, the need for increased funding, and having Indigenous Australians in the management/governance of Aboriginal-controlled organisations (ACO, Krakouer et al. 2022).

However, the Aboriginal-mainstream partnership service model in running AOD services for Indigenous Australians has also found challenges; centrally, the difference in how stakeholders view the origin of addiction. The ACO staff focused more on the history of Australian colonisation, while mainstream service staff emphasised the present addiction behaviour of clients. The mainstream staff felt uncomfortable with the ACO staff being stuck in the negative experience of colonisation history and used the history of the Stolen Generation to explain the clients' addiction behaviour. While ACO staff held the perspective that the trauma of being stolen from families contributed to the continued use of substances among Indigenous Australians (Krakouer et al., 2022). The mainstream staff worried the Indigenous Australians

clients lacking motivation to change their addiction behaviour, while the ACO staff mainly concerned Indigenous clients with a crisis, homelessness, or financial distress (Krakouer et al., 2022). Their different views on the service model, including the referral process and focus of service, has led to mutual distrust between Indigenous staff and non-Indigenous staff.

The above studies reported on service models and how to improve cultural appropriateness to enhance the engagement of Indigenous Australians in AOD services. Those service models mainly describe the process and focus of services, such as building relationships with Indigenous communities, being non-judgmental, identifying barriers, and increasing Indigenous people's governance in the service.

As a hybrid approach, Farnbach et al. (2021) introduced the five-step process to improve the culturally responsive practice in AOD services, to evaluate the fidelity of implementation for the five-step process, to identify barriers and enablers to implementation, to assess the feasibility and acceptability of this approach, and to describe iterative adaptation of implementation processes based on participant feedback. The study reported that the project was rated highly acceptable and achieved the planned changes. The operationalisation of the five-step process also improved the cultural responsiveness and the interest of staff (Farnbach et al. 2021).

Amanda et al. (2023) conducted a study to review the usability, content, readability, and cultural appropriateness of AOD resources. They reported that many resources met at least half of the cultural appropriateness elements of interest. Many AOD resources are developed specifically for Indigenous Australians, but their usability, content, and readability differ, and they are not culturally appropriate for all communities (Amanda et al. 2023). Similar but different cultures can exist within a country. This final remark is telling, as many practitioners/scholars have failed to learn that each community has uniqueness as well as commonality. Not all Indigenous communities are alike, and services need to be adapted accordingly.

Indigenous scholars and practitioners have emphasised the importance of cultural appropriateness and responsiveness in facilitating the relationship between local services, local Indigenous communities, and kinship groups. Indigenous practitioners emphasised the "localness" in any responsiveness where individual choice is paramount. Cultural appropriateness and responsiveness is an ongoing process of adapting systems, services, and practices to fit user preferences (Farnbach et al., 2021).

In bridging the gap of cultural appropriateness, some authors have suggested that practitioners are more effective in treating and assessing Indigenous clients when they have compatible racial backgrounds (Westerman, 2021). Westerman (2021) also emphasised that the primary skill of cultural empathy can be improved by increasing the cultural compatibility of beliefs and values in order to improve counselling outcomes, such as understanding the worldview of Aboriginal clients. Dr. Ungunmerr-Baumann, an Elder of Daly River, is quoted by Sharmil et al. (2021) that "listening and learning must go both ways; Aboriginal and Western knowledge must come together without one ruling the other". Hewlett et al. (2023) also addressed that "societal-level change requires a pathway where Aboriginal and Western wisdom can come together in a meaningful and equitable collaboration and knowledge". This "learning together" is experienced by members of Bidi Warkoolin (Right way forward) Aboriginal Corporation, Collie, WA, who have shared their cultural ways with Restorative Practitioners to better inform the practice, families, facilitators, and community as they all learn new skills and practices (Anderson, 2023). This hybrid model was somewhat different from Indigenous antagonism to the Western paradigm, but encouraged the benefit of applying both Western and Indigenous knowledge together. But it still

emphasised the importance of learning and understanding Indigenous local culture to enhance the cultural compatibility and cultural appropriateness.

In reviewing Indigenous research models, service models, healing models and hybrid models, there still remains a knowledge gap in explaining the pathway of the development and maintenance of addictive behaviours among Indigenous Australians. Without this understanding, healing and effective treatment in AOD issues will remain limited.

Causes and development of the addiction pathway in Indigenous Australians

Causes of addiction

Colonisation and intergenerational trauma are regarded as underlying causes of AOD issues among Indigenous Australians (Amanda et al., 2023), but other factors may also contribute to ongoing intergenerational addiction.

Instead, Hewlett et al. (2023) suggested that colonisation has given rise to a number of narratives that blame, shame, and stigmatise Indigenous people, their culture, and their way of life. For years, Indigenous people have heard these negative messages and deficit narratives in generational cycles, which subsequently re-traumatise them. Hewlett et al. (2023) refer to this as internalised colonisation or internalised oppression, where too often the impact on Indigenous people is a build-up of blame, jealousy, hurt, and anger in themselves and their families. This is continually stated and reinforced in the narrative, and because of this internalised oppression, further harmful behaviours are generated. Some people resort to substances, including alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, at harmful levels to cope with their negative feelings of anger, hurt, and loss. In turn, these Indigenous Australians become consistently traumatised and further oppressed by AOD problems and associated family and community violence.

This process indicates that the importance of some core cultural values has reduced among Indigenous communities and kin groups, and has caused a vacuum in cultural values among later generations of Indigenous families. This loss remains a significant cause of the loss of spirit and disconnection among Indigenous people today. A study reported that Indigenous Australians with weak or moderate cultural attachment are more likely to have been arrested and have consumed alcohol at riskier levels than those with strong cultural attachment (Dockery, 2010). And in the main cities, upholding of traditional cultural attachment is associated with a lower level of criminal behaviour among the Indigenous Australians (Dockery 2010). Dockery's study provides empirical evidence to support the destruction of cultural values in association with the AOD problem and criminal behaviour. As a counter to such narratives, the Peer Lead, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation's Restorative Justice Programs both in prison and in local communities, have their yarning circles and encounters, support for positive narratives of self and sites, totems, and plans for their collective future (Anderson & Steels, 2023). Dockery (2010) also reported that 17 percent of members of Stolen Generation or direct descendents of the Stolen Generation who took compensatory steps to re-engage their culture reported higher measured cultural attachment. This study evidences how rebuilding cultural values and connection can create positive impacts and narratives.

Westerman (2021) has proposed seven important culture-bound syndromes in the Indigenous Australian population. One of the Indigenous Australians' culture-bound syndromes is "Sorry-cutting" for grief during the sorry business/funeral time. Many people are known to commit self-harm, called "Sorry-cutting" as a means to disconnect from pain, as dissociation is a

practiced cultural phenomenon to release pain. Westerman (ibid) also reported that sorry-cutting is still practiced in significant parts of the Pilbara region in Western Australia, as one of the authors can attest. However, there is a difference between urban and rural Indigenous people. Sorry-cutting occurs less in urban Indigenous people compared to rural Indigenous people (Westerman, ibid), but the former may instead resort to substance abuse, including alcohol, and illicit drugs such as cannabis and methamphetamine as a means to disconnect or dissociate from pain and grief during sorry business (Westerman, 2021). Peer pressure to engage in AOD use as a means of dissociation is also strong.

It is also suggested that stress is one of the factors contributing to alcohol use among Indigenous peoples. The study also reported that frequent loss of close family members was due to overdose from substance use. An observation in Central Australia reported that almost 30 per cent of Warlpiri people were grieving for loss of family members, and their grief was attributed to their excessive use of substances and sometimes violent death (Gray et al., 2018).

Discussion

This literature review provides a summary of Indigenous Australians culture; which encompasses the importance of kinship structure, collective values, as well as the deep value of the environment via a connection with the Country and spirit. It also summarises Indigenous research models, and AOD service models. Existing models and elements are used to analyse Indigenous AOD issues.

In reviewing the treatment models of AOD problems in Indigenous Australians, there is little literature suggesting a therapeutic model. All existing literature was consistent in emphasising the impact of colonisation and oppression in the development of AOD problem among Indigenous Australians without proposing a therapeutic approach. This knowledge gap makes the progress of AOD treatment for Indigenous Australians slow, and dependent on individual treatment options.

Limitations of this study

In researching the literature on Indigenous Australians models, some important concepts are over two decades old, with more recent research sparse. The last Indigenous Australian model of the "Strong Spirit Strong Mind Model" was published two decades ago. In Australia, values among Indigenous people are under-researched and hindered by the current approach (Gratani et al. 2016). Although some Aboriginal-controlled organisations (ACOs) have started to develop models recently to meet their funding requirements, publications are yet to come. The scarcity of recent papers has put a limit on this present literature review. Moreover, some Indigenous concepts and values are abstract and cannot be measured. In addition, even though there are studies conducted by Indigenous researchers, most of those studies are restricted to qualitative methods. Focusing on a qualitative study also shows the difference in the research paradigm among Indigenous researchers who dislike the Western approach of collecting a large amount of data from Indigenous clients, as they feel being treated as subjects of research 'terra nullius research' (Martin & Mirraoopa, 2003). This puts a limitation on providing data to support those models.

Implications for future study

As Westerman (2021) suggested, future studies on Indigenous Australians' AOD issues will benefit from both Indigenous pedagogical methodology to develop a new ground theory and a Western quantitative approach to provide evidence-

based data to support their theory. Dockery's (2010) study provides support for applying a quantitative method to examine the association between culture, AOD and degree of arrest. This study also indicates the importance of cultural attachment for Indigenous Australians. However, there is another knowledge gap in examining the elements of Indigenous values. Gratani et al. (2016) also suggested using Schwartz's theory of universal human values to understand Indigenous Australians values.

Finally, the existing literature mainly focuses on attributing the development of AOD issues to colonisation. Those existing approaches do not provide a therapeutic direction for Indigenous Australians, and thus this paper supports the development of a model specifically designed for AOD problems for this group.

Conclusion

The main finding of this study is that most of the work in Indigenous AOD pertains to Indigenous Research models or Service models. Those models are not therapeutic models or healing models and so cannot be considered optimal for use by mental health professionals. Developing a therapeutic model will help practitioners to support Indigenous clients recover from their AOD problem.

References

- Absolon, K.E. (Minogiizhigokwe) (2022). *Kaandossiwin: how we come to know: Indigenous re-search methodologies*. 2nd Edition. Fernwood Publishing.
- Amanda R, Rana K, Saunders P, et al. Evaluation of the usability, content, readability, and cultural appropriateness of online alcohol and other drug resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in New South Wales, Australia. *BMJ Open* 2023;13:e069756. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2022-069756
- Anderson, J. (2023). *Bidi Warkoolin Service brochure*.
- Anderson, J. and Steels, B. (2023) *Restorative Justice: moving from a state's colonial, penal populism, towards fair and just treatment*. Unpublished material.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2014-15
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Causes of Death, Australia 2023*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/latest-release#leading-causes-of-death-in-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, 2024. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-survey/latest-release#health-risk-factors>
- Burlew, A.K., Copeland, V.C., Ahuama-Jonas, C., & Calsyn, D.A. (2013). Does Cultural Adaptation have a role in Substance Abuse Treatment? *Social Work Public Health*, 28 (0) 440-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2013.774811>
- Commonwealth of Australia (2024). *Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2023 Annual Report and Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Implementation Plan*. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/news-centre/indigenous-affairs/commonwealth-closing-gap-2023-annual-report-and-2024-implementation-plan>
- Cox, Z., Carlin, E., Derry, K. & Dudgeon, P. (2023). "It's Us, Or Maybe No One": Yarning with Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Workers from the Kimberley Region of Western Australia. *Journal of the Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet*: 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.14221/aijhjournal.v4n2.2>
- Craven, R. G., Ryan, R.M., Mooney, J., Vallerand, R.J., Dillon, A.,

- Blacklock, F., Magson, N. (2016). Toward a positive psychology of indigenous thriving and a reciprocal research partnership model. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 47, 32–43
- Dale, E., Lee, K.K.S., Conigrave, K.M., Conigrave, J.H., Ivers, R., Clapham, K. & Kelly, P. J. (2021). A multi-methods yarn about SMART Recovery: First insights from Australian Aboriginal facilitators and group members. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 40, 1013-1027.
- Danyluk, P., Burns, A., Pratt, Y.P., Kendrick, A., Plante, M., Wessel, S., Crawford, K., Lemaire, E., Hill, J., & Bright, R. (2023). *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*. 69(3), 384-405.
- Dockery, A. M. (2010). Culture and Wellbeing: The Case of Indigenous Australians. *Social Indicators Research*, 99 (2), 315-332.
- Dudgeon, P., Milroy, H., & Walker, R. (2014). *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practices*. Commonwealth of Australia. <https://timhwb.org.au/working-together-book/>
- Dudgeon, P., & Bray, A. (2019). Indigenous healing practices in Australia, *Women & Therapy*, 41 (1-2), 97-113
- Dudgeon, P., & Bray, A. (2019). Indigenous relationality: Women, kinship and the law. *Genealogy*, 3 (2), 23
- Farnbach, S., Allan, J., Wallace, R., Aiken, A., & Shakeshaft, A. (2021). Formative process evaluation of a guideline-driven process for improving the cultural responsiveness of alcohol and drug treatment services. *BMC Health Services Research*, 21:352. <http://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-06367-7>
- Finau, G., Jarvis, D., Stoeckl, N., Larson, S., Grainger, D., Douglas, M., Ewamian Aboriginal Corporation, Barrowei, R., Coleman, B., Groves, D., Hunter, J., Lee, M., & Markham, M. (2023). Accounting for Indigenous cultural connections to land: insights from two Indigenous groups of Australia. *Accounting Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 36(9):370-389 DOI: 10.1108/AAAJ-08-2022-5971
- Fong, C., Owens, S. L., Segovia, J. H., Meagan A., Alejandro, A. J. (2023). Indigenous cultural development and academic achievement of tribal community college students: Mediating roles of sense of belonging and support for student success. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, Vol 16(6), Dec 2023, 709-722
- Fono, M., Chapman, F., Parter, C., Knight, J., Sheriff, S., Christie, V. & Gwynne, K. (2025). A culturally grounded framework for co-designing policy with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. *Policy Design and Practice*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2025.2514340>
- Gratani, M., Sutton, S., G., Butler, J., Bohensky, E. & Foale, S. (2016) Indigenous environmental values as human values, *Cogent Social Sciences*, 2:1, 1185811, DOI: 10.1080/23311886.2016.1185811
- Gray, D., Catwright, K., Stearne, A., Saggars, S., Wilkes, E. & Wilson, M. (2018). Review of the harmful use of alcohol among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. *Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet*.
- Healing Foundation (2020). *Glossary of healing terms*. https://healingfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2020/07/HF_Glossary_of_Healing_Terms_AS_Poster_Jul2020_V1.pdf.
- Hewlett, N., Hayes, L., Williams, R., Hamilton, S., Holland, L., Gall, A., Doyle, M., Goldsbury, S., Boarden, N., & Reid, N. (2023). Development of an Australian FASD Indigenous Framework: Aboriginal Healing-Informed and Strengths-Based Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2023, 20, 5215. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20065215>
- Krakouer, J., Savaglio, M., Taylor, K. & Shouteris, H. (2022). Community-based models of alcohol and other drug support for First Nations people in Australia: a systematic review. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, Vol 41, 1418-1427.
- Langton, M., & Corn, A. (2023). *Law: The Way of the Ancestors (First Knowledges)*. Thames and Hudson (Australia)
- Larsen, J.J. (2014). Restorative justice in the Australian criminal justice system. *AIC Reports Research and Public Policy Series* 127.
- Liddell, J. and Burnette, C.E. (2017): Culturally-Informed Interventions for Substance Abuse Among Indigenous Youth in the United States: A Review, *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, DOI: 10.1080/23761407.2017.1335631
- Liu, D., de Crespigny, C., Procter, N., et al. (2016). Comorbidity Action in the North: a study of services for people with comorbid mental health and drug and alcohol disorders in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. *Australasian Psychiatry*. 24(6):592-597. doi:10.1177/1039856216657694
- Liu D, de Crespigny C, Procter N, et al. (2016). Comorbidity Action in the North: a study of services for people with comorbid mental health and drug and alcohol disorders in the northern suburbs of Adelaide. *Australasian Psychiatry*. 24(6):592-597. doi:10.1177/1039856216657694
- Madden, E., Fisher, A., Mills, K.L., and Marel, C. (2021). “Best practice approaches for alcohol and other drug treatment in residential settings”. Evidence check prepared for the Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs Agencies (NADA), commissioned and managed by NADA.
- Martin, K. & Miraboopa, B. (2003). Ways of Knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous and Indigenous re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27:76, 203-214, <http://doi:10.1080/14443050309387838>.
- Murrup-Stewart, C., Whyman, T., Jobson, L., & Adams, K. (2021a). Understanding culture: The voices of urban Aboriginal young people. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 24(10), 1308–1325.
- Murrup-Stewart, C., Whyman, T., Jobson, L., & Adams, K. (2021b). ‘Connection to culture is like a massive lifeline’: Yarning with Aboriginal young people about culture and social and emotional wellbeing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 31(10), 1833–1846.
- National Indigenous Language Report* (2020). The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Pattel-Gray, Anne (2014). “Spirituality”. In *Dwight N Hopkins, Marjorie Lewis (eds.). Another World is Possible: Spiritualities and Religions of Global Darker Peoples*. Routledge.
- Purcell-Khodr, G., Webster, E., Harrison, K., Dawson, A., Lee, K.S.K. & Conigrave, K. (2022). The importance of culture in alcohol care: Listening to First Nations staff in Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 13(3), <https://10.18584/iipj.2022.3.13.14030>
- Putt, J. & Delahunty, B. (2021). Illicit drug use in rural and remote Indigenous communities. Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, Vol. 322. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi322>
- Ringland, V.S.C. (2019). Indigenous Trauma Healing: A Modern Model. *Australian Counselling Research Journal*.
- Ringland, V. S. C. (2020). A Case Study on Sex Offending: Indigenous Healing in Qualitative Research. *Australian Counselling Research Journal*, 24-32.
- Shakeshaft, A., Clifford, A., James, D., Doran, C., Munro, A., Patrao, T., Bennett, A., Binge, C., Bloxsome, T., Coyte, J., Edwards, D., Henderson, N., & Jeffries, D. (2018). *Understanding clients, treatment models, and evaluation options for the NSW Aboriginal Residential Healing Drug and Alcohol Network (NARHDAN): a community-based participatory research approach*. Prepared by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (UNSW Sydney) for the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, ACT.
- Sharmil, H., Kelly, J., Bowden, M., Galletly, C., Cirney, I., Wilson, C., Hahn, L., Liu, D., Elliot, P., Else, J., Warrior, T., Wanganeen, T., Taylor, R., Wanganeen, F., Madrid, J., Warner, L., Brown, M., & de Crespigny, C. (2021). Participatory Action Research-Dadirri-

- Ganma, using Yarning: methodology co-design with Aboriginal community members. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20:160, 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01493-4>
- Siekman, S., & Webster, J. P. (2023). Reclaiming and Reinventing Indigenous Ways of Being-Knowing-Doing. In *Multiliteracies Pedagogy and Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31812-2>
- Taani, P. (2022). WHAKAPAPA: Our ways of knowing, being and doing. *MAI Journal, A New Zealand Journal*, 11(2), 117-127.
- Tutchen, D. & Turnbull, D. (2022). Aboriginal cultural values framework: producing and communicating Bunurong values and meanings within Bunurong Country, Vol. 30 (1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14744740221096091>
- Wallace, R., Clay, S., Shakeshaft, A. & Farnbach, S. (2025). 'I Think That Is a Big Step From Here to There': Exploring the Views of Service Providers About Delivering Drug- and Alcohol-Related Health Services to Aboriginal People in Rural New South Wales. *Drug and Alcohol Review*. 01-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.14096>
- Westerman, T. (2021). Culture-bound syndromes in Aboriginal Australian populations. *Clinical Psychologist*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13284207.2020.1843967>