

What does it mean to be an Aboriginal father living on Darkinjung Country? yarning with Aboriginal fathers and father figures on the Central Coast of New South Wales Australia

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Abstract

Strengths-based parenting research involving Aboriginal fathers is scarce. This study centralises the knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal fathers and father figures living on Darkinjung Country, Central Coast of New South Wales, Australia. Yarning methodology was used to explore the roles and experiences of Aboriginal fathers living on Darkinjung Country and discuss what it means to be a healthy father as defined by Aboriginal men. Role modelling positive behaviours, connecting with other Aboriginal men, and fulfilling cultural obligations were identified as distinct elements of being an Aboriginal father. Processing trauma, healing, and disconnection from culture were identified as factors that can negatively impact fathering, while caring for others, making healthy choices, and strong relationships can positively impact fathering. This study addresses the omission of Aboriginal fathers in the parenting conversation and findings should be factored in the provision of care of Aboriginal fathers and their children.

Keywords

child health, Indigenous health, men's health, parenting, yarning

Introduction

Aboriginal fathers play a critical and unique role in child-rearing; in traditional Aboriginal parenting, such value was placed on a man's ability to care for others that cultural authority could be earned through their capability to nurture children (Ryan, 2011). However, post-colonial commentary on Aboriginal men having the worst health and wellbeing outcomes in Australia is regularly followed by unsubstantiated and hostile generalisations about their fathering capabilities (Prehn et al., 2024). Aboriginal fathers have often been described as threats to women and children (Cameron et al., 2014). Such discourse does not exonerate those who make such claims under the guise of misunderstanding Aboriginal parenting methods; rather, it spotlights the continued violence against the First Peoples of Australia, which has not ceased since colonisation began (Watego, 2021). Not only are these statements inaccurate, but such rhetoric negatively impacts the wellbeing of Aboriginal men. Colonisation has led to Aboriginal people experiencing feelings of meaninglessness, alienation, and loss of culture (Stevens et al., 2017).

The colonisation of Australia continues to have a devastating impact on the lives of Aboriginal parents (Dudgeon et al., 2014). Among many colonial strategies, arguably the most damaging was the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families under state protection laws, now known as the Stolen Generations (Barta, 2008). Formation of assimilation policies which justified the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families were built on racist ideologies that

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Aboriginal parents did not have the capacity to raise children (Marchetti & Ransley, 2005). During this period, it is estimated that up to one in three Aboriginal children were stolen from their families and placed into institutions that were designed to rid them of their cultural identity, and to create a domestic workforce (Barta, 2008). Alarming, Aboriginal children still remain 10 times more likely to be removed from their families than non-Aboriginal children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2024). Colonisation has disrupted roles such as provider and role model for Aboriginal fathers (Prehn et al., 2024) and Aboriginal men have since reported that being forced to assimilate into non-Aboriginal constructs of parenting has undermined their critical role in child-rearing (Reilly & Rees, 2018).

Fathers are generally underrepresented in parenting research. A global systematic review conducted by Morgan et al. (2017) found that fathers only represented 6% of parents who participated in parenting lifestyle programmes where interventions were limited to one parent. Furthermore, a review conducted by Davison et al. (2016) found that there is an imbalance of fathers involved in observational parenting and childhood obesity research with fathers only representing 17% of parent participants. The lack of parenting support available for fathers generally is compounded by the limited support available for Aboriginal fathers in Australia. The scarcity of parental education, support programmes, and services that exists for Aboriginal male parents clearly demonstrates a damaged system (Canuto et al., 2019). Disappointingly, words spoken by former senator Pat Dodson (1996) nearly three decades ago remain equally as relevant today: “The track behind us is littered with the relics of policies, programs and projects that failed, mainly because they did not include Indigenous people in making the decisions” (p. 3).

The lack of involvement of Aboriginal fathers in shaping parenting research has created a chasm of authentic knowledge about Aboriginal fathering and has established a policy platform that continues a process of assimilation. The lack of published scholarship on Aboriginal fathering presents an opportunity to extend parenting research by providing a forum for Aboriginal fathers to inform the field (Prehn et al., 2024). Insights gained from fostering an environment where Aboriginal men are able to talk about parenting should be incorporated broadly into the provision of care for Aboriginal fathers and their children (MacDonald et al., 2024).

To provide culturally relevant care for Aboriginal families, it is important that the unique context of local communities is considered (MacDonald et al., 2024). From an Aboriginal perspective, Australia is a continent consisting of hundreds of Aboriginal nations that are unique, with their own ways of being, knowing, and doing, and have had vastly different experiences of colonisation (Kwaymullina, 2016). The Aboriginal population living on Darkinjung Country (Central Coast, New South Wales (NSW), Australia) is one of the fastest growing Aboriginal populations in Australia, with a 38%

increase in population between the two most recent censuses, with many Aboriginal families moving from other locations throughout Australia (Central Coast Council, 2022). The Central Coast First Nations Accord highlighted that Aboriginal people living on Darkinjung Country continue to experience higher levels of disadvantage than non-Aboriginal people and require targeted, intensive services (Central Coast Council, 2022). To provide culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal fathers living on Darkinjung Country, meaningful consultation at the local level is required; doing so builds an evidence base that is shaped by Aboriginal men for Aboriginal men. Therefore, the aims of this study are to understand the roles and experiences of Aboriginal fathers and father figures living on Darkinjung Country, and to understand what it means to be a healthy father as defined by Aboriginal men.

Methods

Ethics

This research was approved by the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW’s Ethics Committee, Application ID: 32414513, and registered with the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee (H-2023-0137), and the Australian New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry (ACTRN12623000901606).

Study design

All methods described were developed in collaboration with a cultural affirmation panel who provided cultural governance and informed the study design. The cultural affirmation panel consisted of eight key stakeholders from Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services, the University of Newcastle, and the local Darkinjung community. Darkinjung Country is the traditional lands of the Central Coast of NSW, Australia; the Aboriginal population living on Darkinjung Country forms the Darkinjung community. All members of the cultural affirmation panel were Aboriginal, some members were Elders, and there were both male and female representations.

A community panel was established with consenting members of a pre-existing Men’s Group at Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services. The role of this community panel was to provide insight into the needs of Aboriginal fathers living on Darkinjung Country via a yarning process. Yarning facilitates in-depth discussions in a relaxed and open manner providing a source of rich data and thick descriptions on a particular issue (Bessarab & Ng’andu, 2010). Yarning is an Indigenous way of doing; its strength is in the cultural safety that it creates for Indigenous people, allowing research to take place through a flexible process (Kennedy et al., 2022). The yarning process was conducted with two specific aims: (a) to understand the roles and experiences of Aboriginal fathers and father figures living on Darkinjung Country, and (b) to understand what Aboriginal fathers and

father figures living on Darkinjung Country define as health and wellbeing.

Participant recruitment

The cultural affirmation panel advised that the appropriate group to inform the study was the Men's Group at Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services. Therefore, eligibility criteria to participate in the community panel were as follows: identifying as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander, currently living on Darkinjung Country, and a member of the Men's Group at Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services. All participants in the community panel were presented with an AUD30 gift voucher as a token of appreciation.

Aboriginal father and father figure constructs

It is important to note that the term father has been defined as the male or males most involved in caregiving and committed to the wellbeing of children, regardless of living situation, marital status, or biological relation (Coleman & Garfield, 2004). For the purposes of this study, the term father or dad is inclusive of biological, adoptive, guardian, stepfather, grandfather, brother, uncle, and kin relationships. Participants were not required to be biological fathers; doing so acknowledges the broad nature of the term father and the varying cultural kinship systems in Aboriginal communities.

Informed consent

Prior to participating in the yarn, all members of the community panel provided written informed consent. Before commencing, co-facilitators Jake MacDonald and Nathan Towney re-affirmed consent verbally. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason, and that this would not affect their relationship with the University of Newcastle, Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services, or the Men's Group at Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services.

Participant privacy protection

The cultural affirmation panel requested that the identity of yarn participants be protected. Any further information about the study participants is anonymous.

Yarning session information

The yarn was conducted at Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services on the Central Coast of NSW, Australia. Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services is an Aboriginal community-controlled health service. Aboriginal community-controlled health services are key in the provision of health care for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; they apply a holistic model of care which is understood to be an Aboriginal definition of health (Panaretto et al., 2014). Twenty-one men participated in the yarn, all identified as Aboriginal, and no participant identified as Torres Strait Islander. The yarn took place in one single group session that included social yarning over a shared meal and research topic yarning facilitated by Jake MacDonald and Nathan Towney who are both Aboriginal fathers and experienced facilitators. The research topic component of the yarn involved participants sitting in a large circle where all participants had the opportunity to contribute over a 2-hr period.

Data collection

Data were collected using audio recording and field notes by the yarn facilitators. To ensure that the perspectives of Aboriginal men were represented in a culturally appropriate way, yarning methods were used to document participant's perceptions.

The yarn was conducted using a semi-structured guide that was developed in partnership with the cultural affirmation panel. Questions asked were the following:

What does it mean to be a father or a father figure?

If you think about either your father, or a father figure in your life, what is something that stands out to you?

What does it mean to be a healthy father or father figure?

Data analysis

Data collected from the yarn were analysed and presented using thematic network analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). One Aboriginal researcher Jake MacDonald conducted the analysis without the use of coding software. This method was guided by previous qualitative research conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (Canuto et al., 2019). The process adhered to the six stages of employing thematic networks as described in Attride-Stirling (2001) and is informed by the positionality of the single analyst who is an Aboriginal father from the Darkinjung community.

Results

Data are presented in global, organisational, and basic themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Three global themes were identified: being a father or father figure, father figures in own life, and health as a father or father figure. A range of topics were addressed pertinent to what it means to be an Aboriginal father or father figure living on Darkinjung Country. The thematic network analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Thematic network analysis.

Global	Organisational	Basic
Being a father or father figure	Role modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching through actions rather than words • Displaying a healthy relationship with child's mother regardless of the family situation
	Providing support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breaking the cycle of substance use • Being present in child's life • Communicating with children • Being vulnerable • Teaching and learning culture • Connection to Country
	Connecting with other Aboriginal men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing stories • Learning from other Aboriginal fathers • Healing from trauma
Father figures in own life	Giving back to community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving more than you have receive • Displaying cultural values
	Substance use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not talking about their life unless using substances • A generational change not relying on alcohol to connect with other men
	Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in sports together • Conflicting emotions, good and bad experiences • Showing affection
Health as a father or father figure	Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A holistic approach to health • Connection to children • The relationship between mental and physical health
	Healthy choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting expectations for the family • Not needing to use substances at social events
	Caring for others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritising the health of others over individual health • Understanding the needs of your children

Being a father or father figure

Role modelling. It was commonly agreed by yarn participants that being a father or father figure is a privilege and brings about much joy; however, many responsibilities come with this role. Yarn participants expressed it was important to be a role model for their children:

Not through my words, but more through my actions, that what I think is appropriate and what's not appropriate for children to be able to be exposed to, to be able to do. That to me, shows a particular value system. (Participant 1)

The theme of role modelling good behaviours was supported by many statements from yarn participants. In particular, role modelling a positive relationship with the child's mother was highlighted:

Leave your ego at the door, leave it at the door man, because your kids are there and they're asking the same questions that we asked ourselves. When I had kids, I found that I didn't have skills to handle the relationship. I hadn't seen a unit, like family unit. But I learnt that if you want to be in your kids' lives you have got to be civil with the mother, or you're going to miss out on them. (Participant 8)

An example of role modelling was shared on the topic of substance use in the family:

For me as a father, I wanted to break that chain for my kids. I know right from wrong now. You know, my kids have never even seen me drink or drug. You know that's what I wanted, to be a part of their life. I wanted to sort of break that chain to

give my kids a bit of a chance to know it's not normal to rely on alcohol to have a good time. (Participant 2)

Providing support. Another topic discussed is that Aboriginal fathers or father figures are required to provide support in a range of different ways. Participants shared that being present in their child's life is a valuable way which they can provide support:

Something I think is important is being present in your children's life and in your family's life. Probably one of the big things I see, taking children to sporting events and stuff like that, is people on their phones instead of committing their time to actually be there with their children. (Participant 4)

Showing up and just building that trust too with them, making sure it's okay, you know what I mean, just instilling that trust and encouragement. (Participant 5)

Participants shared that communicating and listening to their children create a sense of safety:

Letting them know that you're there to support them is probably a big thing that they will get out of later on in life. (Participant 9)

Communication is important when they are acting up in public not being embarrassed but just pull them aside and yarn to them. (Participant 6)

Participants spoke about providing emotional support, particularly through being vulnerable to their children:

When we talk about being a good father, it's being able to have those conversations and being a bit vulnerable and it's okay to be a bit vulnerable at times. (Participant 1)

Support my family emotionally, I think is the biggest one, just lots of yarns with the kids, check in with them, have a yarn with them. (Participant 5)

Participants shared that some of the roles and responsibilities of being an Aboriginal father or father figure are different to those of non-Aboriginal people. Participants discussed that teaching and learning culture is an important element of being an Aboriginal father. Participants highlighted that it is important to ensure their children feel connected to culture:

On the mission, culture was a part of our life, a lot of rabbiting and fishing and we knew respect. We knew if we hung around and listened to the Elders talk, what would happen to us. I suppose once we moved into town, that sort of went out the window, there was no culture. (Participant 2)

I grew up on an Aboriginal mission and lived there for 61 years, we learnt a lot from our family and our land. (Participant 9)

I think there's a cultural element too, cultural networking I think is important to link our kids in another way, I guess that culture. As blackfellas, we are all intertwined and interconnected. (Participant 1)

What I feel, and what I've done within my life is, I've always had very strong senior male role models. So, a grandfather that was very strong with culture, very strong as a leader within the community, it takes a community to raise a child. (Participant 4)

Participants discussed the importance of connecting their children to Country, particularly to places where their family has cultural ties. Participants shared that to develop the cultural identity of their children, it is important that they spend time on their Country:

It's important for me to go back and spend time out the common and the mission and back where I grew up. When I'm done and dusted, they know where dad's from, they know all that stuff, it's important for them. It's good to break the intergenerational trauma and that chain, and let my kids know that when I'm not here they know who they are and where they are from. I take them back home, it's so important, take them out to the mission and say, "Dad grew up here," because they weren't born on their Country. (Participant 2)

Connecting with other Aboriginal men. Participants identified it was important to have opportunities to connect with other Aboriginal men to share their stories:

We all have got something in common as fathers, that is what's good about the men's group, we can sit and talk to each other. We take a piece out of each other's learnings in life. (Participant 8)

Participants also shared that connecting with other Aboriginal men is an opportunity to learn from each other's experiences:

I'm still far from perfect with trying to co-parent, but I'm trying. Coming in here and this stuff here, I can take stuff out of this men's group today and go, took bit out of that, share, I listen, but I can relate. (Participant 10)

Participants discussed how connecting with other Aboriginal men can help them heal from trauma. Participants spoke to the value of sharing personal stories with other men who had similar lived experiences; it was identified that doing so empowers Aboriginal men as fathers and father figures:

I had a daughter when I was 20 years old and she was taken straight away, and I never saw her again until she was 37 years old. When I met her, she had two children, but I never got to raise my daughter. (Participant 9)

I'm on that healing journey too, what I've learned about that grieving process is to talk about it, you can't sit there and dwell about it and think what should have been, it's horrible. (Participant 7)

Father figures in own life

Giving back to the community. Participants reflected on their own lives and the fathers or father figures who influenced them. Participants were asked to consider specifically Aboriginal father or father figures in their life, although it is important to note that not all participants may have a paternal Aboriginal father. When reflecting on their own fathers or father figures, yarn participants identified the importance of giving back to their community. It was identified that the way in which Aboriginal people are expected to give to their community is distinctly different from expectations of non-Aboriginal people:

If you ask difference with us as blackfellas, you talk about giving back to the community and the value systems that gets instilled in us a lot of the time as blackfellas. You know, if you ask maybe a non-Aboriginal father, it might be about giving their children skillsets to earn as much money as they can and there's this concept of ownership and earning lots of money and having the right job and that's all based around money and ownership. Whereas for us, it's about contributing and giving. (Participant 1)

Participants also discussed that giving back to community instils cultural values that are important for Aboriginal fathers and their children:

There is a cultural difference in being an Aboriginal father and the types of values we grew up with and that we want to instil in our kids that sometimes is a little bit different, it is important to give back to community. (Participant 1)

For me, that's what I got out of that because I resonate with that and the way I was brought up is around that, and I think there's a big difference there, that's cultural, that's for blackfellas. (Participant 11)

Substance use

When yarn participants reflected on their own fathers or father figures, there were several stories related to substance

use. One topic discussed was that their own fathers would rarely talk about their lives unless they were using substances:

Pop would talk about the mob when he was drinking. He would never speak about the mob when he was sober, he never even spoke about it when we would go fishing. If I ever asked him, he would go blank, he wouldn't talk about it, because a lot of stuff happened. But some stuff would come up when he was charged up, and that was the beauty of poor old pop, you could yarn with him when he was charged up. (Participant 2)

Participants discussed that the normalisation of men needing to drink alcohol to be able to connect with each other emotionally was common when they were growing up; however, participants shared that this is changing with a new generation of fathers:

That can come from the home environment too, you know, like I hang around a lot of drinking and not so much drugs but just drinking and that sort of thing. And all my uncles and pop and that would sit around, have yarns only when they're drinking, you know. They wouldn't sit around like this. (Participant 8)

Relationships. Participants spoke about the varying relationships they had with their fathers or father figures; these varying relationships were identified as both positive and negative. Sport was identified as a way that participants had connected with their fathers:

He introduced me to golf from a young age, and every time me and him were on the golf course over four hours just with dad, and that to me, that that still stands out as the best time we ever had together, because it was just me and him. (Participant 1)

Participants discussed conflicting feelings about their fathers and father figures; there were both positive and negative reflections:

I knew who my dad really was, deep down, I saw the best and worst of him. I saw good times. He always tells me he loves me, always kicked the footy with me, but also saw those bad times, but I suppose it was always hard as well because he's my blood connection. (Participant 11)

Participants reflected on how modern parenting has changed since they were children, and that there are many differences in their parenting style, in comparison with how they were parented as a child. Yarn participants identified the way in which contemporary fathers or father figures display affection is distinctly different from when they were children:

One thing with my kids that sticks out for me is I tell them I love them. I never heard that stuff. I never heard that stuff at home. "I'm proud of you son, I love you." I tell them four or five times a day. I say, "I love you." I'll be driving, and I'll turn the music down and say, "I love you boy." I've never had that stuff. I never heard dad say "Son, I love you." It feels good. But that's probably one of the most enjoyable things, I am able to look my kids in the eye every morning, every night, and say I love them. (Participant 2)

Health as a father or father figure

Wellbeing. Participants identified that taking a holistic approach to health and wellbeing is important:

Healthy habits, healthy routines, you know structure. I feel healthier and I feel I'm more committed and I'm more present as a father and as a husband since I've given up the drink. And it's made me think about health in a completely different way. That it's not just about your physical health, but it's the environment that you create for your whole ecosystem. And your ecosystem for me is my family, my work, the things that I surround myself with. And since I haven't had alcohol in that ecosystem, it's changed the way I look at stuff. And so, yeah, for me that's improved my own mental health just by taking that out of my life. (Participant 1)

Participants discussed that being emotionally connected to their children was important for their health and wellbeing:

I'm still definitely learning the ropes about what it means to be a dad. One thing that really matters for me is I want to really know that my daughter can come and talk to me when she gets older. Like that if stuff's going on in her life, that she feels comfortable talking to me about stuff. I think that social and emotional stuff is important because I know for a lot of us fellas we don't naturally go and talk to people about stuff. But I want to know that my kids can come and talk to me. (Participant 17)

Yarn participants identified that the relationship between mental and physical health is important:

It all starts with your mental health to be honest, looking after your own wellbeing. Because you know, I think you have to try to build good relationships, you know, healthy relationships with your partner. Like modelling healthy father and mother relationships in front of the kids. (Participant 14)

Healthy choices. Yarn participants discussed the importance of making healthy choices by setting expectations in their family:

Setting expectations so they know what to look up to and what to expect, you know what I mean? So, they're not drawing in people that can hold them back in life, do you know what I mean? Setting those boundaries, those sorts of things, do you know what I mean? Healthy choices. (Participant 12)

Caring for others. Participants identified an important aspect of being a healthy father or father figure is the ability to care for others. It was highlighted that Aboriginal fathers or father figures tend to look after the health of others before taking care of their own health. It was shared that Aboriginal men need to be healthy themselves to help others:

Being from our background, our blackfella way, we always care for other people and make sure other people are right first. We always make sure we look after our kid's health, but I don't do any of that myself. I can't remember the last time I went to the doctors or anything like that. So that's probably one thing that I've learned in here is to make sure you put yourself

forward as well because we constantly look after everyone else that's part of who we are, but just make sure we give time to ourselves as well. (Participant 9)

Discussion

The aim of this study was to understand the roles and experiences of Aboriginal fathers and father figures living on Darkinjung Country, and to understand what it means to be a healthy father as defined by Aboriginal men. Role modelling positive behaviours, connecting with other Aboriginal men, and fulfilling cultural obligations were all identified as distinct elements of being an Aboriginal father. Processing trauma, healing, and disconnection from culture were identified as factors that can negatively impact Aboriginal fathering. Caring for others, making healthy choices, and strong relationships were identified as themes that can positively impact Aboriginal fathering.

Study participants identified colonial strategies are still impacting their roles as fathers and father figures. Some of these strategies include the forced removal of children, forced relocation onto missions, and the intergenerational impacts of being disconnected from family and culture. While unique factors that negatively impact Aboriginal men and their roles as fathers and father figures have been discussed, there are also many strengths that are distinctly different to non-Aboriginal fathers. Participants discussed the resilience of Aboriginal people, drawing power from returning to cultural values that remain instilled in them. Such values included prioritising communal health over individual health, teaching and learning culture as a source of wellbeing, and maintaining strong family and kinship relationships.

Aboriginal men living on Darkinjung Country have expressed a need to connect with other Aboriginal men to share their stories, heal, and grow together. This study highlighted that navigating roles and responsibilities required to be a father or father figure can bring about much uncertainty, particularly if positive fathering has not been role modelled by their own fathers or father figures. However, participants acknowledged that being a positive role model is a key factor when considering what constitutes a good father. Participants shared their personal experiences of both being a father and being fathered which included both positive and negative experiences. Positive experiences of fathering included playing sports together, teaching children to respect women and children, and fathers prioritising the needs of others above their own. Some negative experiences of fathering included substance use, processing trauma, and disconnection from culture. Yarn participants expressed a need for culturally responsive support that is informed by their unique needs.

Until recently, Aboriginal fathers have not been included in the parenting conversation. Due to lack of research in this area, it is difficult to compare findings. One study by Canuto et al. (2019) yarned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers across four locations in South Australia to better understand their roles and needs. There are some common themes between both studies such as the

desire for Aboriginal men to participate in parenting programmes, the importance of community and cultural connections, and that fathering is emotionally fulfilling. Some themes were identified in the Canuto study that did not appear in this study, such as limited employment opportunities, financial insecurity, and a lack of activities that engage children. It is important to note that each Aboriginal community is unique, and the Canuto study took place across several locations, including both rural and urban areas. This study only focused on one community, although it is also important to note that a significant number of men who participated in this study have moved from different locations throughout Australia.

The underrepresentation of Aboriginal men in parenting research is concerning. It is possible that such a gap in the research exists due to the fact that until recently, Aboriginal men have not been in positions to lead parenting research, resulting in their own experiences and understandings not informing the field. Furthermore, non-Aboriginal researchers may not have valued the positionality that Aboriginal researchers and facilitators have in being able to relate to participants' experiences and understand cultural nuances. Aboriginal men sharing their knowledge and experiences of fathering builds an evidence base that has been created by Aboriginal men, for Aboriginal men, and these findings should be considered in delivering culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal fathers.

This study has both strengths and limitations. Strengths of this study include cultural governance by a self-determining cultural affirmation panel, the support of an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service, Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Services, the use of culturally appropriate methodology; and that the yarning session was entirely Aboriginal-led. Limitations of the study included the relatively small sample size, and the yarn being conducted at only one location on the Central Coast, meaning that this cohort may not have been representative of all Aboriginal men living on Darkinjung Country.

Conclusion

Aboriginal men living on Darkinjung Country require culturally responsive health and parenting support. There are unique factors that impact Aboriginal men's roles as fathers and father figures, many of which are directly related to the colonisation of Australia. Not addressing the unique cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal fathers may contribute to continued poorer health outcomes between groups. Prioritising communal health, role modelling positive behaviours, and teaching and learning culture as a source of wellbeing have been identified as unique strengths of Aboriginal fathers. Parenting research conducted in Australia must deliver strengths-based support that draws on the cultural values of local Aboriginal communities. To conduct research with Aboriginal fathers, Aboriginal men must have the autonomy to define their own terms and measures of culturally appropriate parenting and define what it means to be a healthy father. Parenting research involving Aboriginal

men must centralise the knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal fathers and deliver parenting support that is responsive to their needs.

Authors' note

Jake C MacDonald (BPhysEd(SecTchg)) is a Ngarabal man with family ties to Emmaville and Deepwater, Northern New South Wales (NSW), Australia. Jake has lived on Darkinjung Country, the Central Coast of NSW his entire life, and is part of the Darkinjung community. He is a father, educator, and PhD student at the University of Newcastle. Jake has a background in teaching, previously working as an Aboriginal Education consultant.

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