

Section 6.

Conclusion

There has been limited Australian (and in some areas international) research that investigates the recruitment, retention, assessment, training and support of carers and almost no research investigating these issues in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The literature reviewed showed that in some instances, knowledge drawn from existing studies and evaluations of models of practice with non-Indigenous communities was broadly applicable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, such as research highlighting structural problems in the assessment and support of kinship carers. However, some of the research was related to practices that are culturally inappropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, generally the care of children in traditional Aboriginal societies is shared between several adults, negating the relevance of Anglo-centric theories of parent-child attachment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The findings of this review have shown that there is a lack of research applicable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The lack of research – coupled with the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out-of-home care system – demonstrates the need for research in this area to be prioritised. There is a lack of sufficient culturally-appropriate placements, demonstrated by the poor compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle in some areas. The inability to place children in culturally-appropriate placements increases the urgency for research to take place that will inform practice.

There is an urgent need for further research in the areas of recruitment, retention, assessment, training and support of carers that:

- identifies culturally-appropriate practices;
- evaluates the cultural relevance of current practices; and
- investigates structural barriers to culturally-appropriate practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

There is a need to consult current foster and kinship carers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to determine how current practices impact on them, their cultural appropriateness, and whether they are meeting the needs of carers.

In addition, in order to identify current practices and structural barriers to culturally-appropriate practice, there is a need to consult Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers who are currently responsible for or engaging in the care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children unable to live with their parents. Consultation with state and territory governments are crucial as they fund out-of-home care services and are the primary out-of-home care service provider in Australia.

Given the findings in this review in relation to the interrelated nature of the wellbeing of children and carer support - and the need to involve children and young people in

factors affecting their lives, research should also canvas the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in care on these issues.