



Title: A study of the natural history of psychosis in Indigenous populations in Cape York and the Torres Strait.

Supervisor/s: [Prof Harvey Whiteford](#) and [Dr Fiona Charlson](#)

Funding: Student Scholarship required

Student Objectives:

- Advanced understanding of public health research methods
- Advance understanding of mental health epidemiology and services research
- Develop competencies in conducting research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations
- Proficiency in conducting systematic literature reviews and quantitative analysis techniques.
- Ability to prepare peer reviewed publications.
- Ability to keep to designated timelines.
- Ability to work independently and with other members of the research team where necessary.

Project Outline:

Results published in 2012 showed the prevalence of psychosis in Indigenous residents of Cape York and the Torres Strait to be markedly higher than that that expected in the general population. The prevalence of psychosis varied depending on ethnicity and gender, with highest rates in Aboriginal males. The Remote Area Mental Health Service (RAMHS) has been the sole outreach psychiatric service to Cape York and the Torres Strait since 1992. Clinical information has been recorded in an electronic clinical database maintained by RAMHS psychiatrists. This database provides a unique opportunity for research as it contains documentation of comprehensive initial psychiatric assessments and ongoing management of all psychiatric patients since 1992.

It is proposed to analyse the RAMHS database to determine the incidence of psychosis between 1992 and 2015, and to characterise the natural history of psychosis in this population during this period. It is hypothesised that the data will show an increase in incidence of psychosis during this period and may help identify causal factors underlying the high prevalence of psychosis.

Furthermore, the “Inside Out – The Mental Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Custody Report” (Queensland Health, 2012) documents an extremely high twelve

month prevalence of psychosis in Indigenous adults in custody in Queensland (males 8 %, females 25 %). For comparison, the twelve month prevalence of psychotic disorders in the broad Australian population has been estimated at 0.54% for males and 0.35% for females (“People living with psychotic illness 2010 – Report on the second national survey”). In a previous study published by two of the investigators on this current application (Hunter et al, 2012) 42.5% of Indigenous males and 4.4% of Indigenous females under treatment for symptoms of psychosis in Cape York and the Torres Strait had a life time history of incarceration. The high rate of incarceration in males is consistent with the prison data. Further research is required to explore the apparent disparity in results for females. Data collected provides a unique opportunity to further investigate circumstances that contribute to the high rates of psychosis in custody.

Specific Aims:

The aim of this research is to examine:

1. the natural history of psychosis in Indigenous populations of remote Queensland
2. variables which are associated with an increased prevalence of psychosis
3. trajectories of offending and incarceration of those with psychosis

Achievable Outcomes:

- A PhD in mental health research and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.
- First authored publications in peer reviewed journals.
- Experience with oral/written presentations at national/international conferences.