Reviewer's report

Title: "You've got to make it relevant": barriers and ways forward for assessing cognition in Aboriginal clients.

Version: 1 Date: 5 December 2013

Reviewer: Anne Stephens

Reviewer's report:

Thank you for the opportunity to review “You've got to make it relevant": barriers and ways forward for assessing cognition in Aboriginal clients by Kylie M Dingwall, Melissa A Lindeman and Sheree Cairney.

This is a tight and well written findings paper of a recent study examining cognition assessment within Aboriginal populations: barriers and limitations in assessment.

Strengths of the paper include a well written rationale for the study and clear methods sections. The qualitative thematic findings are clearly presenting perceived sets of barriers and enable for medical and health professionals to undertake assessment. The discussion synthesises the experience of professionals using a limited range of tools available with relevant literature. The authors make a set of recommendations around the design and administration of culturally appropriate screening and assessment instruments – a valuable contribution to people working in this field.

1. Discretionary Revisions:

I think the paper may benefit from further examination of the concept of appropriate assessment in the discussion. There are phases of assessment and cultural protocols that can be observed, to overcome the barriers to successful engagement identified in the first theme of the findings. Culturally appropriate engagement observance could be included in the discussion/conclusion, as it is not only the absence of an appropriate assessment battery that prevents effective testing, but the degree of culturally competence and sensitivity of the practitioner and the system from which they emerge, that influences such things as time available to undertake assessment; the rapport and relationship one builds with clients and informants (beyond a parent/carer to include community and other service providers), and clear translation of the purpose and outcomes of the assessment. Despite the authors’ noting the importance of taking a strengths-based approach, the qualitative data statements selected on pages 6 – 7 infer a deficit of the client cohort, rather than systematic limitations experienced by the assessor. I would also recommend the value of cultural awareness and competency training for practitioners, particularly for, but not restricted to, people entering the field, and that this might be discussed in the context of the ontological difference between Western trained non-Indigenous practitioners and
Aboriginal clients as a problematic that underlies all aspects of assessment practice, including the search for a culturally appropriate and robust tool/s.

The following references may help if the authors wish to consider incorporating some literature around protocols for engagement.


Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development. (2001). Mina Mir Lo Ailan Mun: Proper communication with Torres Strait Islander People.: Queensland Government.

2. Minor Essential Revisions

To conclude these comments, I would suggest some grammatical revisions in the following places:

P 10: Sentence beginning with "Highly visual…” Revise sentence structure
P 16: Line 3: “Impairment limit is current…” Should this be …limits its…
P 17: Paragraph 2, line 5. Sentence beginning with “Kerin’s (1976) utilised…” Should this be Kerin (1976)…
P 19: Suggest revising line’s 3 and 4 to read: “… assessment. The KICA was identified as it includes a…”
P 19: Revise sentence structure of 1st line of paragraph 3. “As epitomised…”

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published
Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests: I declare that I have no competing interests