

RESEARCH SUMMARY



About Us

'Healing the Past by Nurturing the Future' is an Aboriginal-led project which aims to co-design awareness, recognition, assessment and support strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Aboriginal) parents during the perinatal period (from pregnancy to child age two) who have experienced complex childhood trauma.

The project commenced in 2017 and current funding runs until 2021. We are grateful for funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Lowitja Institute CRC.

Developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Complex Trauma and Strengths Questionnaire (ACTSQ)

What is complex trauma and what are strengths?

Complex trauma (or 'complex post-traumatic stress disorder') is long-lasting distress after repeated or unavoidable harm, such as abuse.

It can affect feelings, thoughts and daily life.

Strengths are the skills, supports and ways people stay strong.

Why is this research important?

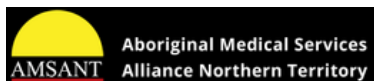
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have thrived for over 65,000 years. Communities have shown resilience following extensive harm from colonisation.

Many communities and leaders are worried about how trauma affects health and wellbeing today. There were no questionnaires made for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to:

- Find out how many people experience trauma,
- Describe what the experiences are like,
- Learn what supports are needed

People experience trauma in different ways.

Culture, poverty and racism can change how trauma is felt and shown. This is why we need questionnaires made with and for specific people.

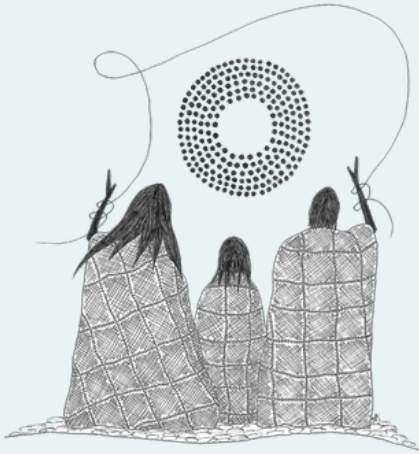


Nunkuwarrin Yunti
South Australia Inc.



Central Australian
Aboriginal Congress
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION





Songs of Strength Ink on paper, 2018, © Shawana Andrews

What is the ACTSQ?

The ACTSQ is a list of questions that helps:

- Identify experiences and effects of complex trauma, and
- Shows strengths and supports helping people to stay strong.

How did we create the ACTSQ?

Work began in 2018. We did lots of things to create the questionnaire, including:

- Looking at similar studies from around the world (scoping review),
- Talking with community members and professionals in co-design workshops
- Testing or 'validating' a list of questions with 110 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in 2020 to 2022.

This summary explains the testing step.

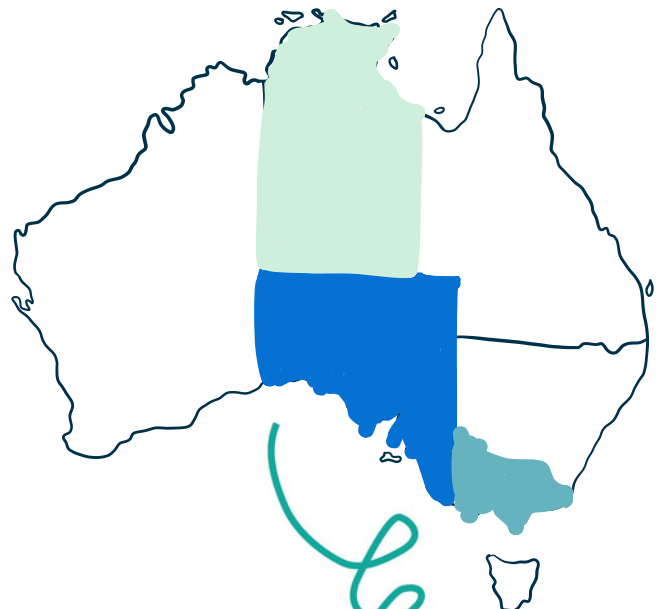
Who joined the study?

People could join if they:

- (1) Identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander,
- (2) Were aged over 16 years,
- (3) Were parents.

Parents living in South Australia, Northern Territory and Victoria did the study.

Parents were invited through community networks and partner health services.

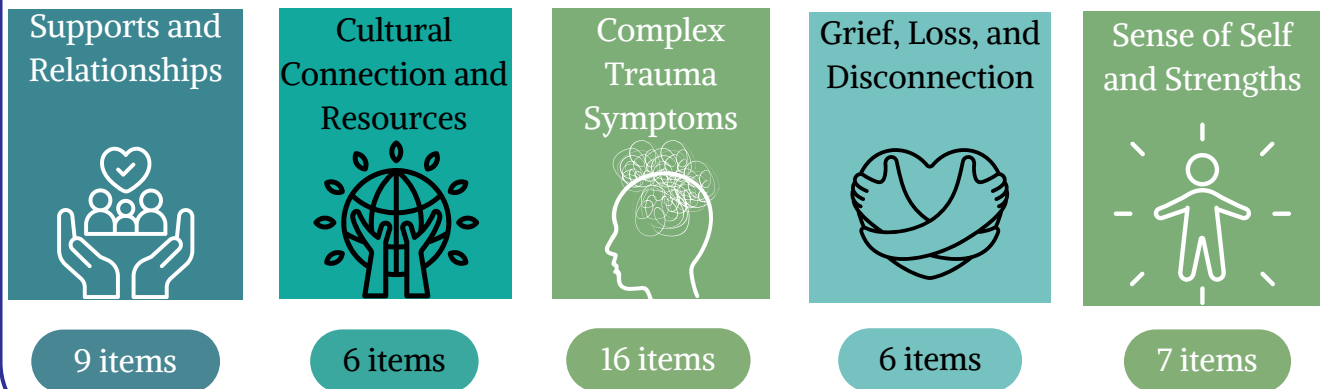


What does the ACTSQ look like?

Parents answered 88 questions about trauma and strengths.

We used their answers to see which questions were most useful.

We reduced the list to 44 questions in five areas:



What we found

This study provides support that the ACTSQ is a culturally appropriate and valid tool to identify complex trauma and strengths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents.

What's next?

We are still working on the ACTSQ.

- We are talking to more parents.
- After, we will compare the ACTSQ results with another validated questionnaire, and
- Try to shorten the questionnaire more.

Service providers wanting to learn about and/or wanting to use the ACTSQ can see more details [here](#).

For more information

Gee, G., Bright, T., Morgan, A., Atkinson, C., Andrews, S., Clark, Y., ... Chamberlain, C. (2024). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Complex Trauma and Strengths Questionnaire: psychometric evaluation. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 76(1).
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