

Strength and language: Investigating associations between Aboriginal children's language development and resilience in South Australian communities.

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Abstract

Children with speech and language difficulties and children who face social adversities are at risk of socio-emotional and mental health problems. Yet some children thrive despite risks and exposures to adversities. Patterns of positive cognitive development and socio-emotional wellbeing in the context of adversity have received some attention in the literature, but few such studies employing validated measures, have examined language development. Understanding strengths and resources that promote language development across culturally, socially and linguistically diverse populations is essential for developing and tailoring interventions for specific groups. As part of a prospective cohort study of Aboriginal families' health and wellbeing, and in partnership with the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia and an Aboriginal Governance Group, this novel paper reports on plans to describe associations between personal, family, peer, school and community strengths and language development for Aboriginal children aged 5 to 8 years ($n=159$; Mean age = 7.2 years, $SD = 0.9$) growing up in urban (49%), regional (29.6%) and remote (21.4%) South Australian communities (55% male, 45% female). Data collection—completed in 2020 and led by Aboriginal community researchers—included culturally and linguistically adapted or co-designed measures of nonword repetition (Children's test of Nonword Repetition, modified), receptive vocabulary (NIH Toolbox Picture Vocabulary Test) and childhood resilience (Childhood Resilience Questionnaire-Child). Following culturally appropriate research approaches (e.g., using within-sample comparisons only), the planned analysis will: (i) examine the language outcomes for Aboriginal children with low, medium and high levels of resilience; and (ii) examine specific strengths that are associated with higher language performance. Preliminary results will be prepared for presentation. There is potential for findings to shape holistic speech and language interventions by informing the evidence base for promoting socio-emotional wellbeing, behaviour and language development for children facing social and systemic obstacles and adversities.