

'Who are you getting dolled up for?'

Cultural influences on the effectiveness of trachoma prevention programs in Aboriginal communities in Central Australia

The research project

With support from Newman's Own Foundation, Ninti One conducted research on the cultural factors that affect the prevention of trachoma.



We ran focus groups with people from Papunya and Mutitjulu. We also held interviews with two people with specialist knowledge of culture and health services in remote communities.

We also collected information on other health promotion programs, such as child ear health.

Themes

Jealousy



Why is he walking around being clean?

Self-protection

Young women are beautiful, but they don't want to be seen as beautiful.



Identity

Why you trying to be white?



Bush living

For men it's a lifestyle thing. Being a man is being dirty.



Individual priorities

Shower is a choice. Maybe you're lazy.



Parenting practices

Some parents are young themselves, and they weren't taught how to clean when they were young.

Material poverty

All this uncleanliness, living close with other people, living in crowded housing.



Findings

We found that cultural influences on behaviour relevant to trachoma prevention fall into three categories; self-image, individual priorities and interpersonal relationships.

Self-image

People see themselves a certain way. Their pride in their identity comes from the history of their family and community. Health promotion programs should build on people's self-image by showing respect for life in the bush and the dirt and messiness of community life. That life depends on good eyesight.

Individual priorities

Where people are not making changes to their lifestyle so they can prevent trachoma, they are preoccupied with other matters in their lives. This includes leisure pursuits like playing cards and family conflict and also issues related to poverty like access to services and getting food.

Interpersonal relationships

Jealousy affects relationships. Reducing the way that jealousy stops people keeping clean could be achieved by:

Case management approaches to encourage individual families.

Information campaigns that are clear that clean faces, strong eyes is not about changing the presentation of individual people. It is about caring for family and positive empowerment.

Messages that focus on the importance of being an Aboriginal person and also caring for your eyes so you can be the person you want to be.

Health promotion work could test new approaches to reducing the influence of cultural factors. As part of this work, animated video clips could be an engaging way to present information about trachoma to remote community people.

