

Empowering Indigenous Communities? A Review of the NT Emergency Response

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Overview

- Discuss the concepts of disempowerment and self-efficacy
 - Outline the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER)
 - Link the specific measures enacted with the concepts of disempowerment and self-efficacy
 - Discuss ways to improve intervention programmes in the future
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Disempowerment

- Lack of control over one's life circumstances/environment/community.
- Linked to a devaluing of one's culture



Yuendumu, NT, 2008 (Gosford, 2011)

Self-Efficacy



Albert Bandura (Stanford University, 2013)

- Self-efficacy: the belief in our ability to execute certain tasks and achieve specific goals (Bandura, 1986, 2006)
- “Among the different aspects of self-knowledge, perhaps none is more influential in people’s everyday lives than conceptions of their personal efficacy,” (Bandura, 1986, p. 390).

Self-Efficacy

- Self-efficacy level has been found to be predictive of many health related behaviours, e.g., smoking cessation (Stuart, Borland, & Murray, 1994) and diet and exercise regime adherence (Burke, et al. 2004)
 - Self-efficacy a major aspect of multiple health related behaviour models, such as the Health Action Process Approach (Schwarzer & Renner, 2000)
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The NTER

- *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* “*Little Children are Sacred*” Report released 15 June 2007
 - 21 June 2007 the Howard-led Liberal Government announced the NTER, a series of emergency measures to be enacted in the Northern Territory
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Emergency Measures

- **Widespread alcohol restrictions in Indigenous communities.**
 - **Introducing welfare reforms which would deny a portion of welfare benefits to those deemed to be neglecting their children, including those whose children were repeatedly absent from school.**
 - **Introducing compulsory health checks for all Indigenous children.**
 - **Acquiring Aboriginal townships that were previously held by Indigenous people under native title legislation.**
 - **Increasing policing levels in prescribed communities.**
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Emergency Measures

- The clean-up and repair of communities, utilising workers employed as part of the work-for-the-dole scheme (a work-based welfare programme).
 - Improving housing, including rent and tenancy arrangements.
 - Filtering all public computers for pornographic material, as well as banning the possession of X rated material.
 - **Scraping the permit system (an arrangement which required permits to be sought before entering Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory) for common areas, access roads and airstrips.**
 - **The appointment of managers to oversee all government businesses (Brough, 2007, June 21)**
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The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007

- **No longer allowing bail and sentencing considerations to be based on Indigenous customary law.**
 - Greater management of community stores.
 - The allocation of over \$500 million for the NTER for the year 2007-08 (Brough, 2007, August 6).
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Criticisms of the NTER

- Very few of the 97 recommendations put forward in the Little Children are Sacred report were followed (Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association & the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation, UNSW, 2010; Tait, 2007).
 - Brown and Brown describe the Little Children are Sacred report as having joined the “disturbingly long list of reports [on Indigenous affairs] whose recommendations have been largely ignored” (p. 621).
 - Serious lack of community consultation (Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association et al., 2010; Australian Psychological Society, 2007; Brown & Brown, 2007; Hunter, 2008).
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Relating the Concepts to the NTER

- Lack of community consultation generally disempowering—conducting policy development through a cultural lens ensures appropriate input from important stakeholders (Li, Hodgetts, Ho, & Stolte, 2010)
- Specific measures enacted also disempowering in their restricting personal autonomy



Kuna Rurrpa: 'Big Hole'
(Gosford, 2011)

Welfare Reforms

- Introducing welfare reforms which would deny a portion of welfare benefits to those deemed to be neglecting their children, including those whose children were repeatedly absent from school.
 - “Rather than enabling Aboriginal families to better manage their money the process of compulsory quarantining was seen as reinforcing beliefs that Aboriginal people were not able to manage their lives. This loss of autonomy about where to shop and what to buy was seen as degrading and shameful,” (Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association & the Centre for Health Equity Training, Research and Evaluation, UNSW, 2010, p. 23).
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Acquisition of Land

- The acquisition of townships and scraping the permit system for common areas disempowered communities.
 - Scraping customary law considerations during the legal process communicates a general dismissive attitude toward Indigenous self-regulation.
 - The NTER means “a potential end to the progress made in generations of struggle for acknowledgement and recognition of Aboriginal people’s right to have some control over the future of their families and communities,” (Brown & Brown, 2007, p.621).
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Disempowerment and Mental Health



Willowra, NT, 2008 (Gosford, 2011)

- In a study on North American Indigenous people it was found that community self-governance levels were a powerful predictor of suicide rates (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol & Hallett, 2003).
- This strongly suggests a link between community disempowerment and mental health issues.

Alcohol Restriction

- 73 communities made “dry” areas as part of the NTER (Hudson, 2011).
 - Reducing heavy drinking is a health related behaviour and therefore involves self-efficacy.
 - The aforementioned disempowering measures being forced upon communities communicates a lack of self-efficacy
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Recommendations for Future Policy

- Evidence-based interventions
- Greater self-governance
- Support of existing community initiatives
- Local input
- “respectful partnership with the Aboriginal leaders and organisations.” (p. ix).



(Gosford, 2011)

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