

Developing ways of Measuring the Impact of Language Reclamation on Social and Emotional Wellbeing: The Barngarla Language & Wellbeing Study



WARDLIPARINGGA
Aboriginal Research



THE UNIVERSITY
of **ADELAIDE**



SAHMRI
South Australian Health &
Medical Research Institute

Aboriginal Health Research Showcase – 27 Feb 2020

Presented by **Leda Sivak** and **Seth Westhead**
on behalf of the **Barngarla Language and Wellbeing Study Team:**

A Brown, G Zuckermann, N Brown, G Gee, A Rosen, E Richards, S Atkinson, H Dare, J Richards, M Wright,
M Walsh, S Westhead S, L Sivak, N Howard

Acknowledgement of Country

*We acknowledge the **Kaurna** people as the traditional custodians of the lands on which this meeting is taking place.*

We recognise Kaurna peoples' cultural, spiritual, physical and emotional connection with their Country.

*We honour and pay our respects to Kaurna Elders, both past and present, and all generations of Kaurna people:
before, now and into the future.*

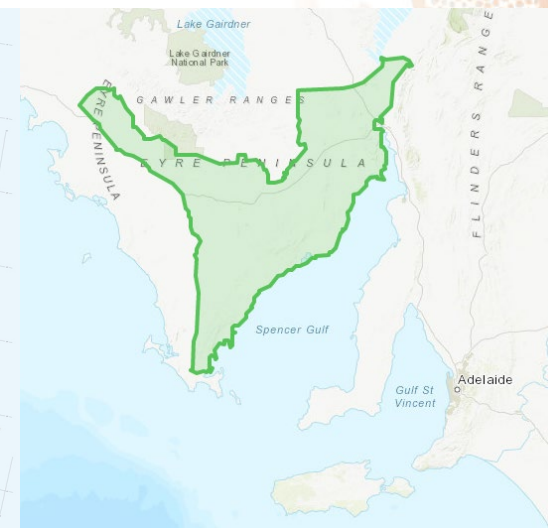
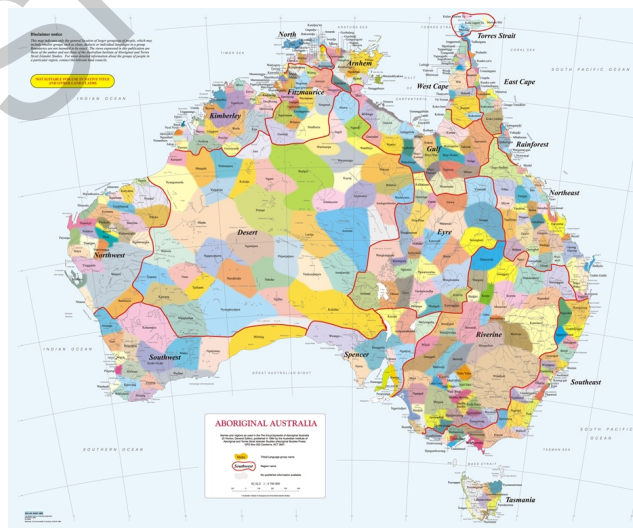
Barngarla Language and Wellbeing Study



FUNDING: National Health & Medical Research Council – Five year Project Grant (2017-2021)

AIM: Systematically assess social and emotional wellbeing impacts of reclaiming Indigenous languages

GOVERNANCE: Barngarla Language Advisory Committee (BLAC)

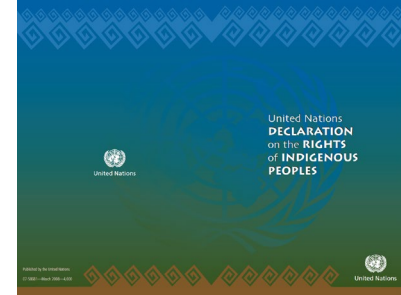


Indigenous Health and Rights

“Aboriginal **health** means not just the physical well-being of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community, in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community.” (NACCHO)

Article 13

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons.



Article 14

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.



2019 | INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
Indigenous Languages

Global Language Loss

GLOBAL LANGUAGE LOSS

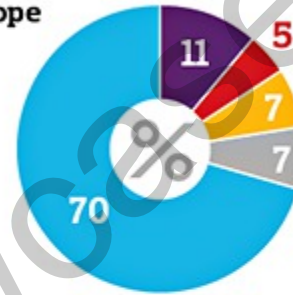
Conservation status of languages by region, since 1970 (percentage*)

- Extinct
- Critically endangered
- Endangered
- Vulnerable
- Data deficient
- Least concern

Americas



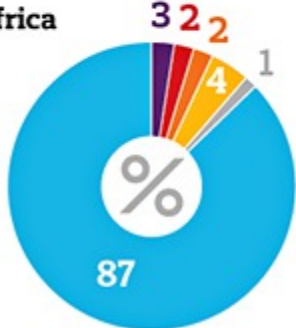
Europe



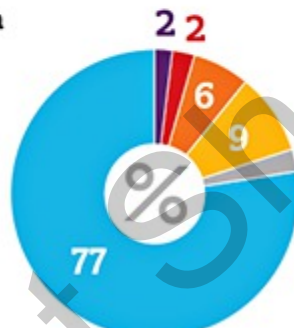
- Americas
- Africa
- Asia
- Europe
- Pacific



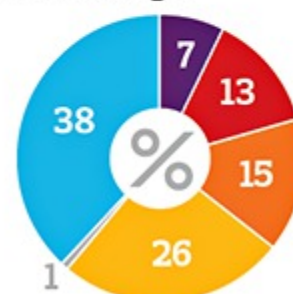
Africa



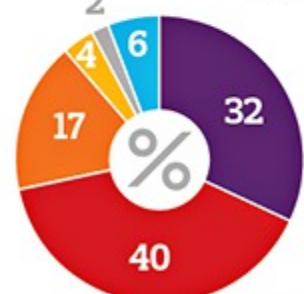
Asia



Pacific including ...



... Australia



*Due to rounding, figures may not total 100%

SOURCE: WWF

Source: The Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jun/08/why-we-are-losing-a-world-of-languages>

Study Team



Alex Brown (Chief Investigator-A)
Ghil'ad Zuckermann* (CI-B – Linguist, UoA)
Ngiare Brown (CI-C – Child & Adolescent Health)
Graham Gee (CI-D – Psychologist)
Emma Richards (Associate Investigator, BLAC)
Stephen Atkinson (Associate Investigator, BLAC)
Harold Dare (BLAC)
Jenna Richards (BLAC)
Alan Rosen* (AI – Psychiatrist, UniWollongong)
Michael Wright (AI – Social Work, Curtin Uni)
Michael Walsh* (AI – Linguist, UniSyd)
Natasha Howard* (Senior Research Fellow)
Leda Sivak* (Study Coordinator)
Seth Westhead (Research Assistant)

Four Study Objectives

2017-2021: (1) Continue supporting language reclamation activities with Barngarla

Year ONE

(2) Explore the impacts of pilot language activities

Year TWO

(3) Develop methods for measuring the impacts of language reclamation

(4) Assess
language use
and wellbeing

Year THREE

Year FOUR

Year FIVE

(Barngarla Language Group: Before and After = 100 people)

Year THREE

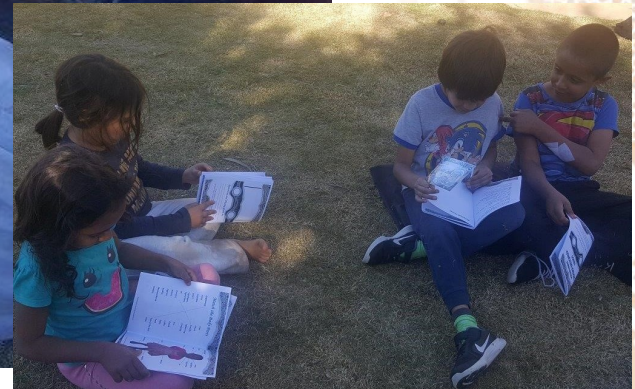
Year FIVE

(Comparator Group = 300 Aboriginal people, Eyre Peninsula)

Barngarla Families



Learning Language on Country



Qualitatively Exploring the Impacts of Pilot Language Activities

Semi-structured interviews

Seth and Leda talked with 16 people in total

- Port Lincoln (26-28 October 2017)
- Port Augusta (2-4 November 2017)

Offered participants the opportunity to talk with younger/older, female/male, Aboriginal/non-Indigenous – most interviews together

Demographic details

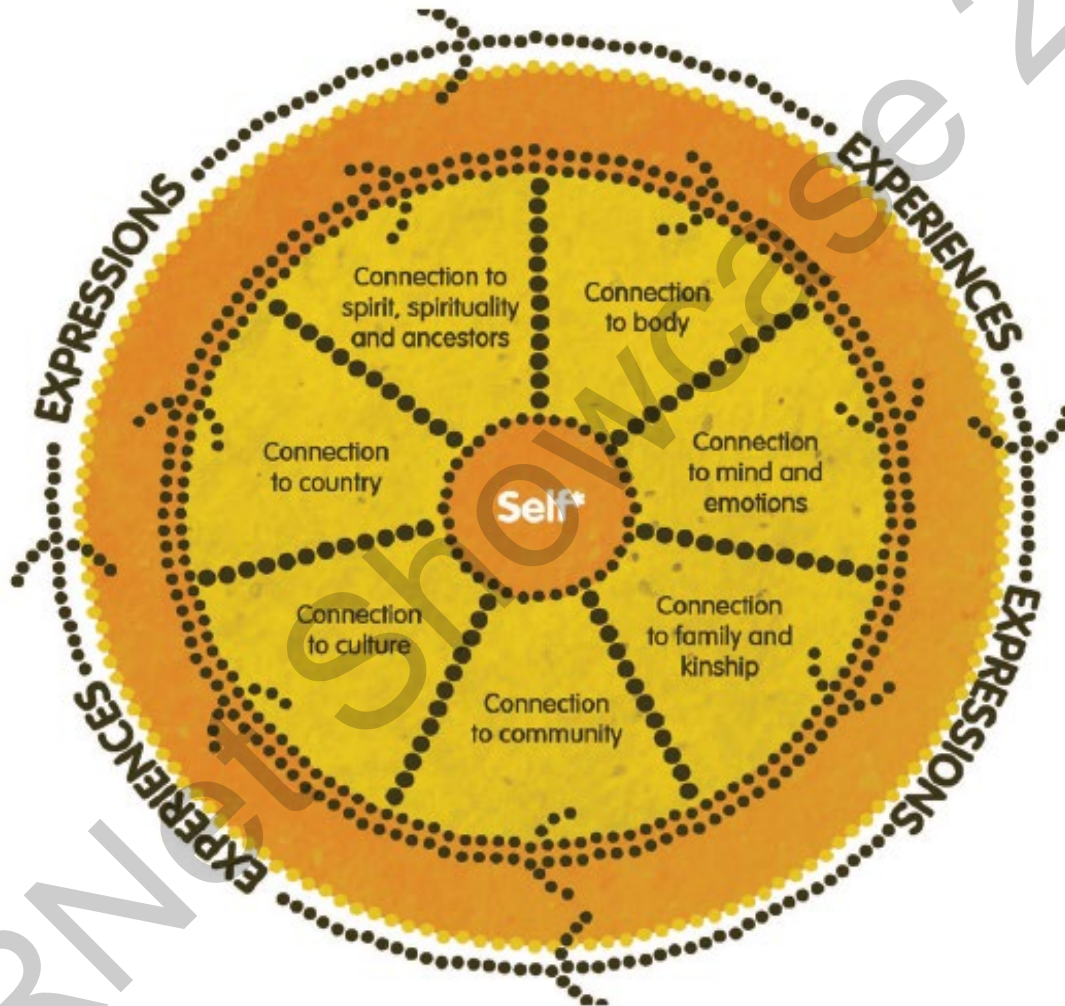
- 10 people from Port Augusta
- 6 people from Port Lincoln
- 10 females
- 6 males
- 6 people aged 15-30 years of age
- 7 people aged 30-50 years of age
- 3 senior Elders

Member checking – verbatim transcripts

Consensus meetings in communities



Qualitative Results: Impacts on Wellbeing – Connectedness



Source: Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly (2013)

Qualitative Findings

Connection to Spirit, Spirituality and Ancestors

“Language breathes life. Like we talked about breathing life back into the land, and it’s that ancient language. [...] When we are talking inside, it’s just us talking. When you’re talking outside, you’re breathing language into the land, and into the sea, and into the air, and into the birds, and into the fish, and into the tress – and you’re awakening that, with all that spirit. **You’re speaking life into all our ancient spirits out there – and they’re sitting around listening.”**

Connection to Country (Connection to Self)

“The land and language are part and parcel – one and the same. [...] And then, to just hear [Barngarla] words start being spoken again, it gives you more of a sense of identity to bring it back, [...] language to the land.”

Connection to Mind and Emotions

“I don’t know how to explain it. It’s like a joyful feeling. Because I’m sharing the language as well as welcoming them to the Country. And me speaking the language, like my ancestors before me, it’s like a step closer to... I don’t know to say it. It’s like an overwhelming feeling of happiness and pride in being who I am, and being a Barngarla descendent.”

Developing the Quantitative Assessment Tool



Quotes to Survey Questions

SUPPORTING QUOTES	DOMAIN	QUESTIONNAIRES	PROPOSED QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS
<i>"I don't know how to explain it. It's like a joyful feeling. Because I'm sharing the language...And me speaking the language, like my ancestors before me...It's like an overwhelming feeling of happiness and pride in being who I am and being a Barngarla descendent."</i>	Happiness	GEM (Inner Peace Subscale)	(I) Feel very happy with my self and my life
<i>"For me to actually learn about my language and my culture...I reckon it's just given me more courage and gave me pride to think, 'I know who I am. I know my language'. Even if I'm not fluent...I just feel real proud to be who I am."</i>	Pride	ARRQ (Self-esteem Subscale)	I feel pride in my achievements.
<i>"Language plays probably the most important part, I believe, in me being who I am and my family being who they are... I think it's very important that we, as Barngarla people, get to learn what's us, what makes us, us. And that's our language and that's our culture and that's our Dreaming. Those three there are interconnected with who we are as Aboriginal people."</i>	Identity	ARRQ (Cultural Identity Subscale) ARRQ (Cultural Identity Subscale)	Being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is an important part of who I am I am able to maintain my Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity, values and beliefs.

Measuring Wellbeing

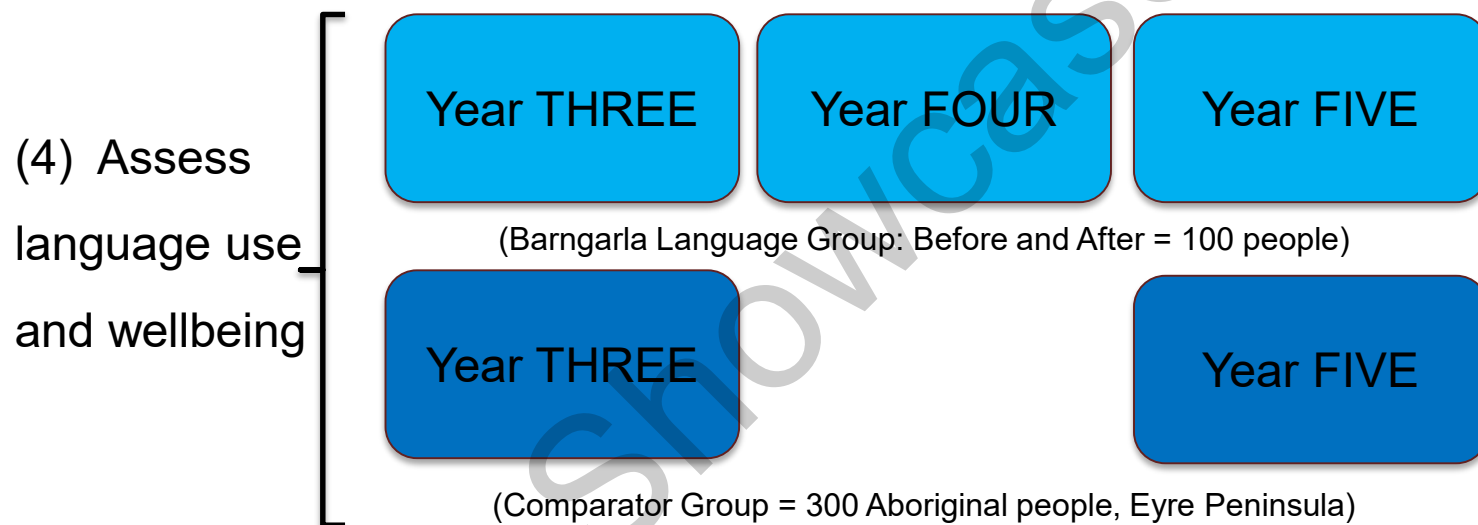
PART III. SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

We are now going to move to some questions about wellbeing. We are interested in how you have been feeling lately. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers.

The first eleven questions are around how you are feeling about life now and also how you feel about the future. Please rate from 1 to 5 how each of these strength-based questions describe yourself, and the way you are with your family, community and culture. (1 = Not at all; 5 = A lot)

	Not at all 1	A little 2	Somewhat 3	A fair bit 4	A lot 5
C1. I feel very happy with myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C2. I feel very happy with my life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C3. On a daily basis things happen that make me happy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C4. Right now, I have all the things in my life I need to be happy and healthy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C5. There is meaning in what I do in my daily life	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C6. I have opportunities to work in my life, keep busy and stay involved	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C7. I feel hopeful for a better future for myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C8. I feel hopeful for a better future for my community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C9. I can do just about anything I really set my mind to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C10. I feel strong and full of energy to do what is needed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
C11. I have things in my life that I am passionate about	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Assessing Wellbeing – Before and After



Conclusion

Key outcomes of the study include:

- First formal test of a causal relationship between language revival and mental health;
- Establishing community-based methods for evaluating mental health interventions; and
- Innovative strategies to improve community wellbeing and mental health.

Importantly, Aboriginal community voices form the central foundation from which the methods for this study are being developed .