Integrated Therapeutic Justice Care: Transforming systemic responses to relational trauma recovery in family violence and prioritising a biopsychosocial wellbeing-informed approach for relational safety and wellbeing

Dr Effie Zafirakis
BSc/LLB, D.Psych (forensic), MAPS, FCFP

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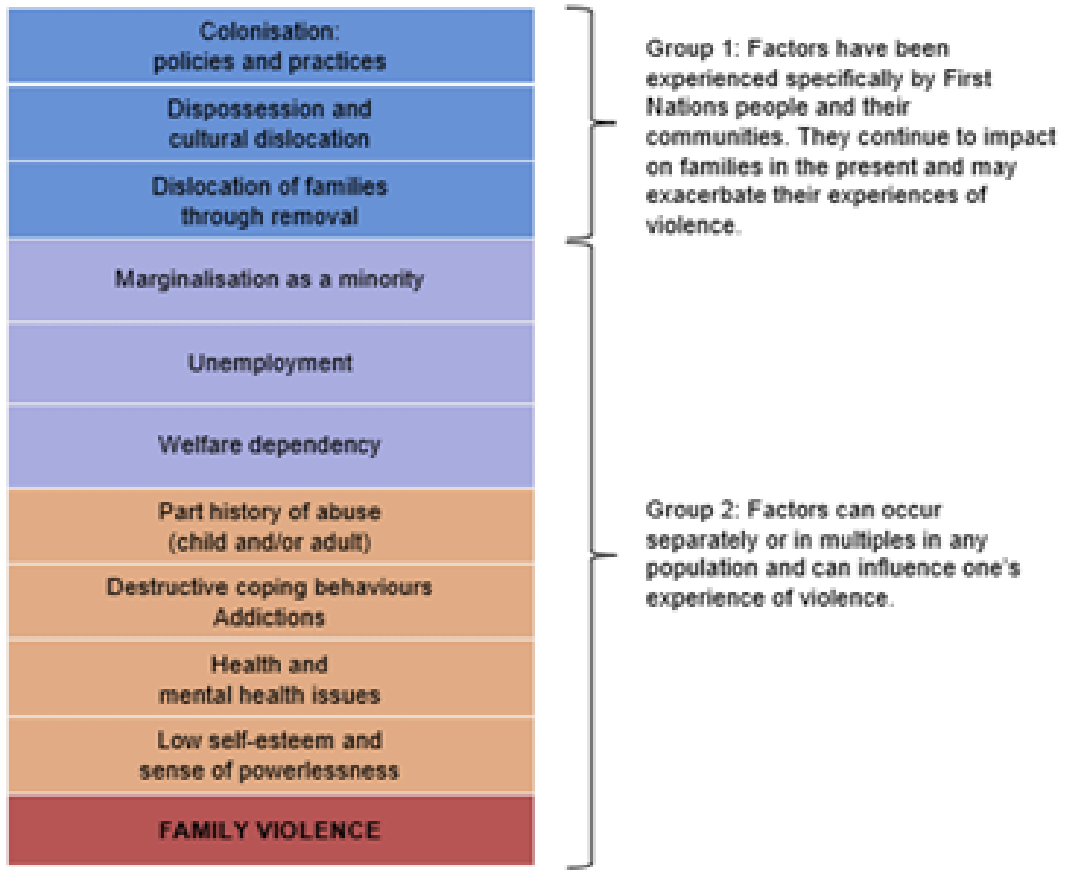
The 'Past is the Present': Contextualising family violence & intergenerational trauma within the 'legacy' of systemic stress perpetuation of traumatic stress activation, cumulative risk & bio-psycho-social harm



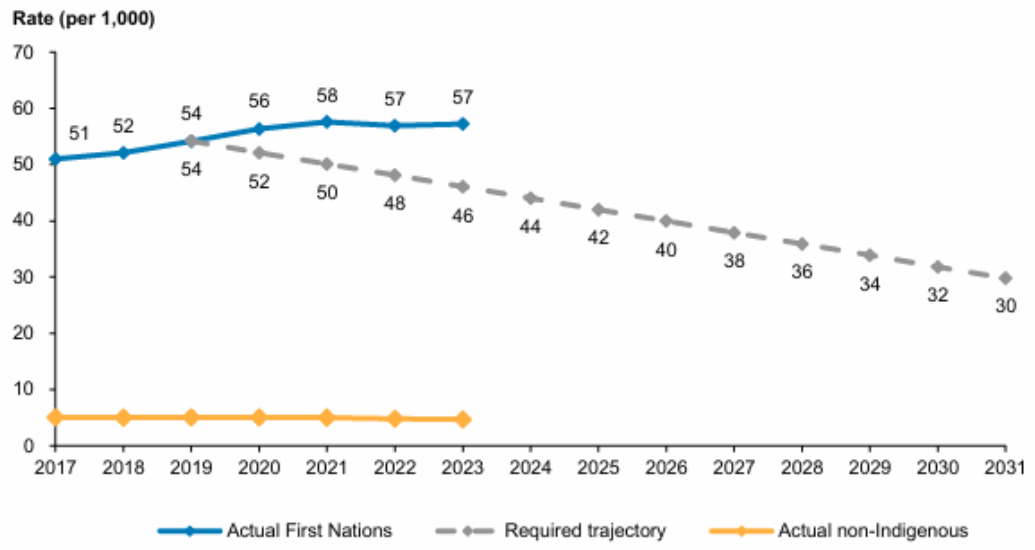
Source: Adapted from Cripps and Adams (2014).

Key findings by the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (2025) "indicates that there are a number of interrelated factors that contribute to the higher risk of family violence:
– Past policies and practices of colonisation continue to have an impact on First Nations communities and have caused considerable social, economic, physical, psychological and emotional trauma" [p.524]

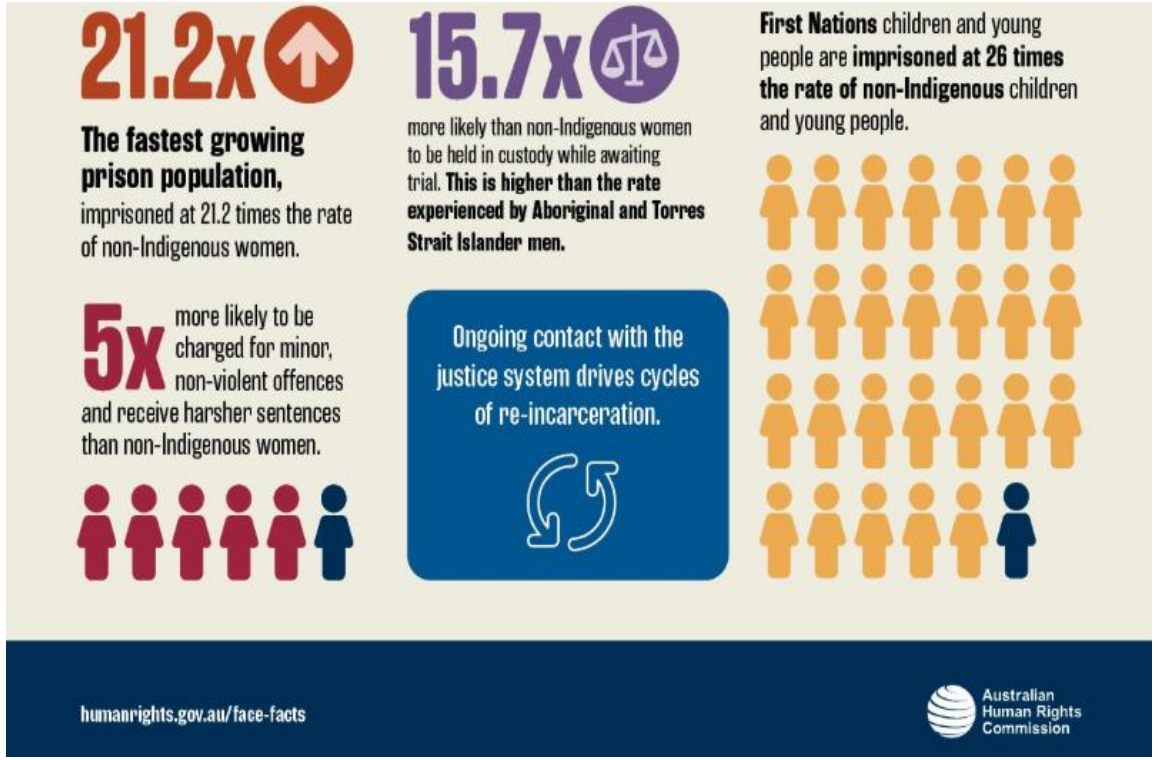
Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025) Closing the Gap targets: key findings and implications, catalogue number IHW 294, AIHW, Australian Government - https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/f88a5ccb-0e3c-448c-b014-ca53773d5337/aihw-ihw-294.pdf

WHERE'S THE 'SAFETY NET'? URGENT CALL FOR SYSTEMIC REDRESS OF CYCLES OF SYSTEMIC HARM & the 'widening gap' of 'crisis-driven' overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care & Aboriginal mothers in prison

Figure 12.2: Rate of children in OOHC, current trajectory and trajectory required to meet the 2031 Closing the Gap target

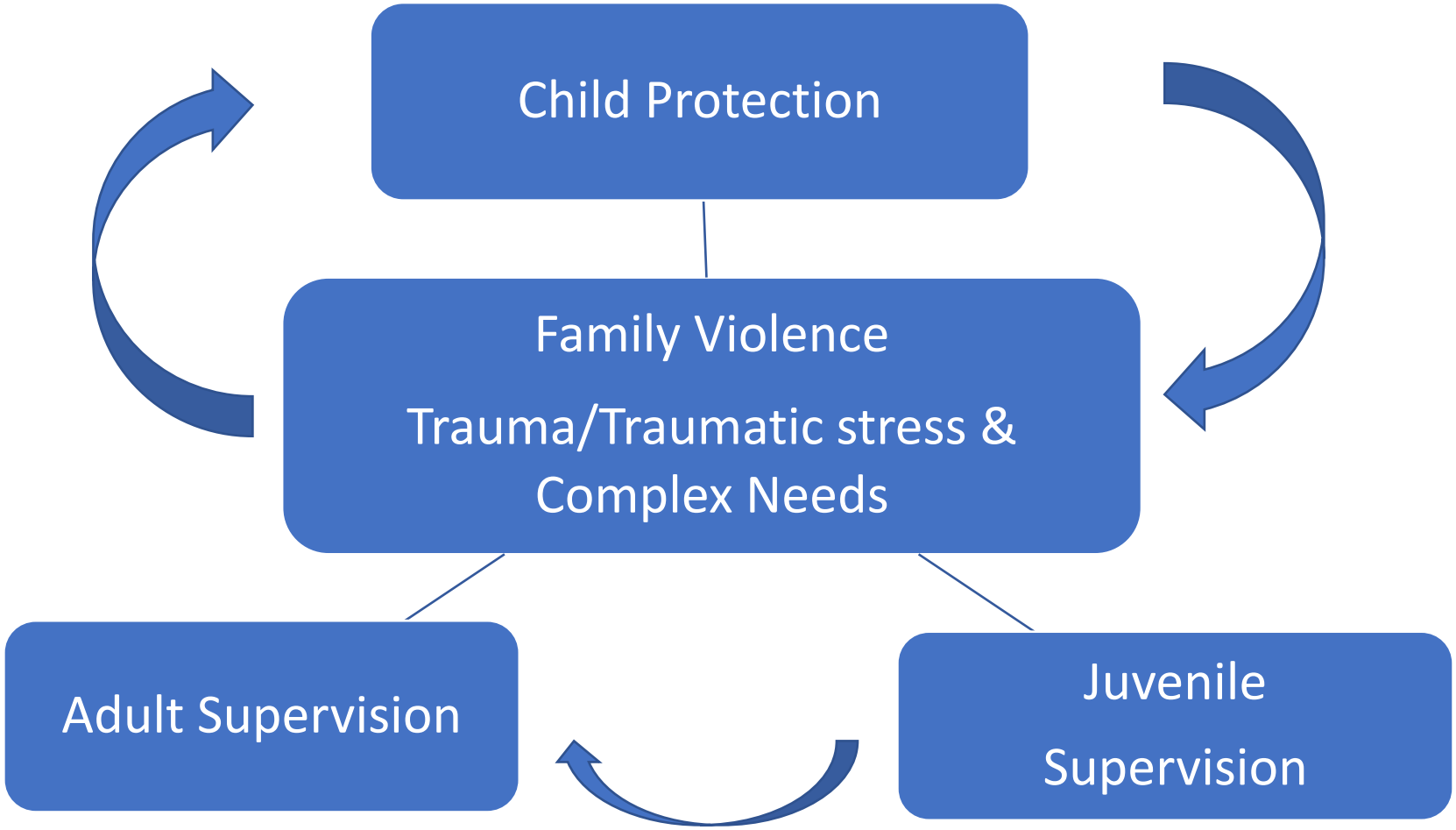


Sources: AIHW 2022b, Table T2; Productivity Commission 2024.



Sources: *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025) Closing the Gap targets: key findings and implications, catalogue number IHW 294, AIHW, Australian Government - https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/f88a5ccb-0e3c-448c-b014-ca53773d5337/aihw-ihw-294.pdf
*Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). Statistics about Aboriginal Women & Girls - https://humanrights.gov.au/human-rights-education/stats-and-facts-about-discrimination/statistics-about-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-women-and-girls

Proposed model: Intergenerational cycle of family violence & justice involvement
QUESTION: Is 'systemic traumatic stress activation' an implicit key driver of 'recursive cycles' of family violence, intergenerational trauma & justice involvement



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Redressing the disproportionate increase in Aboriginal women respondents to family violence orders: Are under-resourced &‘crisis–driven’ systemic responses inadvertently displacing blame & shame on victims ?

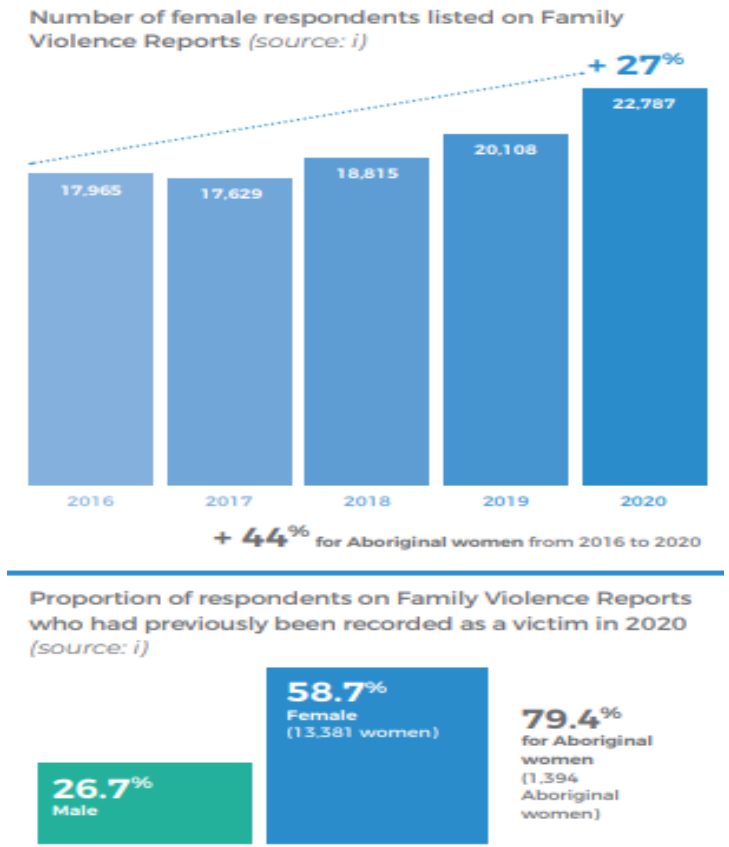


Figure 2- Key statistics relating to women as respondents, and indicators of their misidentification
Source: https://archive.fvrim.vic.gov.au/monitoring-victorias-family-violence-reforms-accurate-identification-predominant-aggressor/misidentification-significant-issue-enormous-consequences-victim-survivor

The systemic misidentification & disproportionate number of Aboriginal women as respondents on family violence orders has: “contributed to a profound sense of injustice and distrust of the police and legal system, meaning victims/survivors came to view the legal system as an extension of violence rather than a protective resource. For many women, this trauma manifested in a range of poor mental health outcomes and substance use issues … At a personal level, this also translated to deeply felt impacts of misidentification on their self-worth, with many women expressing shame humiliation and socialisation”.

Source: https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people

Examining the relationship between conflation of risk, systemic bias & systemic biopsychosocial stress activation & harm: Is it time for a 'paradigm shift' from a deficit-focused to a trauma & wellbeing informed discourse?

"Many of the stakeholders we met with said there are some ingrained assumptions – which 'can be highly racialized, gendered and classed' – about how a 'real' victim survivor should look and behave. Victim survivors who appear agitated and/or uncooperative are less likely to be seen as being in need of protection, even though they may be exhibiting a very normal response to the, often extended, trauma they have endured. Stakeholders told us that some cohorts of women are more likely to be subject to bias and discrimination and less likely to be taken seriously as a victim survivor (such as women experiencing mental illness, women using alcohol or other drugs, and criminalised women). These issues are particularly salient for Aboriginal women, many of whom have experiences of intergenerational trauma, racism and criminalisation".

Source : https://archive.fvrim.vic.gov.au/monitoring-victorias-family-violence-reforms-accurate-identification-predominant-aggressor/misidentification-significant-issue-enormous-consequences-victim-survivor

Considering the impact of biopsychosocial determinants of traumatic stress activation & stress vulnerability on reciprocity to care & relational resilience

"Mothers of children removed experience multiple and complex health conditions which require a more comprehensive response by service providers to address needs and support mothers … Addressing these needs becomes even more urgent when taking into consideration the profound impacts of child removals on the mother's health, mental health, employment and social life in general. The immediate psychological crisis following child removals …. compounds with the multiple and complex issues these mothers were already facing prior to removal." [p.820]

Source: Lima ,F., O'Donnell ,M. Gibberd , A., J. et al. (2025). The Physical and Mental Health of mothers of Aboriginal Children in Out-of-Home Care in Western Australia, *Australian Journal of Social Issues,* 812-823. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393571489_The Physical and Mental Health of Mothers_of_Aboriginal_Children_in_Out-of-Home_Care_in_Western_Australia

Reframing system responses to family violence: Mitigating the risk of systemic autonomic nervous system & stress activation & refocusing on healing relational trauma

"Family violence is a significant factor contributing to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. Fear of child removal remains one of the greatest deterrents for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to report violence or seek assistance. This fear is strengthened by previous child protection exposure, ongoing institutional racism and the history of the Stolen Generations". [p.29]

Source: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025-Under the National Plan to End Violence against women and Children 2022-2032. https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/dedicated-action-plan.pdf

Closing the ('care & carer' criminalisation) Gap: Prioritising primary prevention & differential pathways that address interconnected & intersectional biopsychosocial relational needs of mothers and children

"The existing literature is fragmented, investigating only individual health outcomes and not addressing the multiple complex and interconnected health needs experienced by mothers and children placed in OOHC, … Early intervention and support may reduce the number of Aboriginal children entering care and increase the number of children restored to their families." [p.813]

Source: Lima, F., O'Donnell, M. Gibberd, A., J. et al. (2025). The Physical and Mental Health of mothers of Aboriginal Children in Out-of-Home Care in Western Australia, *Australian Journal of Social Issues,* 812-823. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/393571489_The Physical and Mental Health of Mothers_of_Aboriginal_Children_in_Out-of-Home_Care_in_Western_Australia,

At the ‘heart’ of systemic change: Relationships Participation & Empowerment & co-Investing in new ‘ways of working together’ to achieve better service outcomes

...When the voices of the families and communities we work with are involved, solutions and strategies are much more likely to be effective...

Source: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2021), Keeping Our Kids Safe: Cultural Safety and the National Principles for Child Safe Organization [p.19]

Promoting Aboriginal workforce capacity for ‘cultural affiliation', connection & healing: The vital role of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations in adopting holistic models of care & restoring healthy relationships

“Women have described healing processes as key to overcoming traumas and changing behaviours through the restoration of individual and collective identity and social and cultural strengths. Women want to see a continuum of culturally safe and responsive services, from interventions and wrap-around supports, before, during and beyond crisis to all centred in healing and recovery.” [p.29].

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025 -Under the National Plan to End Violence against Women & Children 2022-2032 https://www.dss.gov.au/national-plan-end-gender-based-violence/resource/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-action-plan-2023-2025

Co-investing in ‘mutually reinforcing enablers’ for care capacity-building: Reducing ‘systemic stress activation’ & facilitating ‘systemic responsivity’ to care & carer needs

- Continuum of care – facilitating ‘access’ to differential responses

- Continuity of care - facilitating ‘continuity’ of funding for program and staff retention

- Congruence of care - responding to client ‘needs’ as informed by lived experience and context of relational trauma

Co-creating of a ‘safety net’ of care for 'transformative & sustainable’ systemic responses: Informing the implementation of collaborative outcomes & processes by addressing systemic ‘responsivity to needs’

- Collaborative service design & ‘outcome orientation’ to services for facilitating better access - the ‘WHAT’
- Collaborative care & relational ‘process orientation‘ to services - the ‘HOW &
- Collaborative responsivity to needs: Listening & responding to the lived experience & context of relational trauma by empowering participation/shared decision-making and voice & choice - the ‘WHY

Source: Zafirakis, E. (2022). Feature Article: Collaborative care: A way forward. NAIDOC Special Edition: Law Institute Journal, 96(7), 40-43, Jul 1, 2022

Embedding Collaborative Care in policy & practice: Promoting relational care processes for 'systemic responsivity of care'

- Collaborative care essentially embraces a relationship-based approach which is key to implementing effective collaborative practice and facilitating trust for timely service engagement.

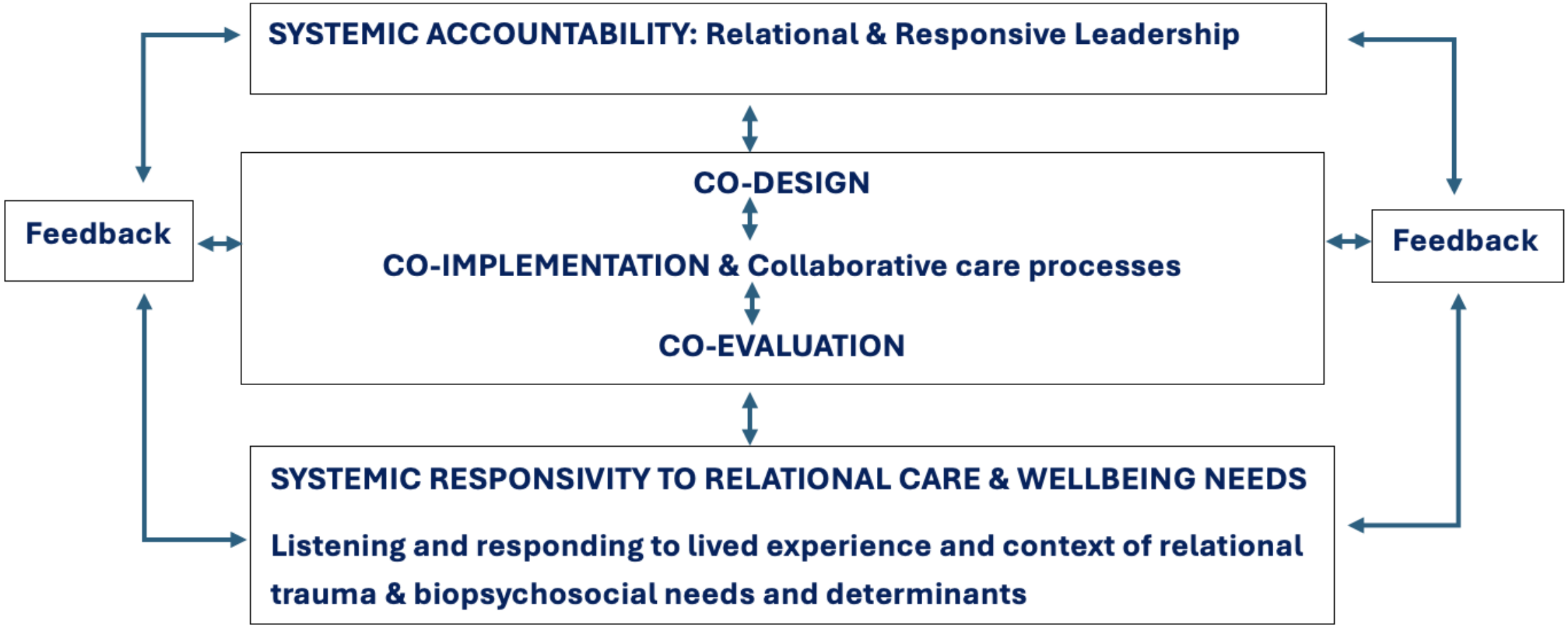
- Integral collaborative care processes, such as inter-agency communication, collaboration, coordination, and continuity of care, have reportedly been found to be facilitative processes in reducing system fragmentation and facilitating meaningful, timely & responsive service engagement.

- These relational domains have been recognised as essential in addressing client needs and developing a proactive and collaborative approach to care provision by helping families to feel safe and supported in accessing servicing and support.

- Embedding Collaborative Care in policy & practice may potentially help to co-create a 'Safety Net of Care' & optimise service provision for more responsive, reflexive & sustainable service outcomes aimed at early intervention, family restoration and enhancing wellbeing outcomes for children and families with complex needs.

Source: Zafirakis, E. (2022). Feature Article: Collaborative care: A way forward. NAIDOC Special Edition: Law Institute Journal, 96(7), 40-43 · Jul 1, 2022

Co-creating a ‘safety net’ for wellbeing-informed biopsychosocial relational care



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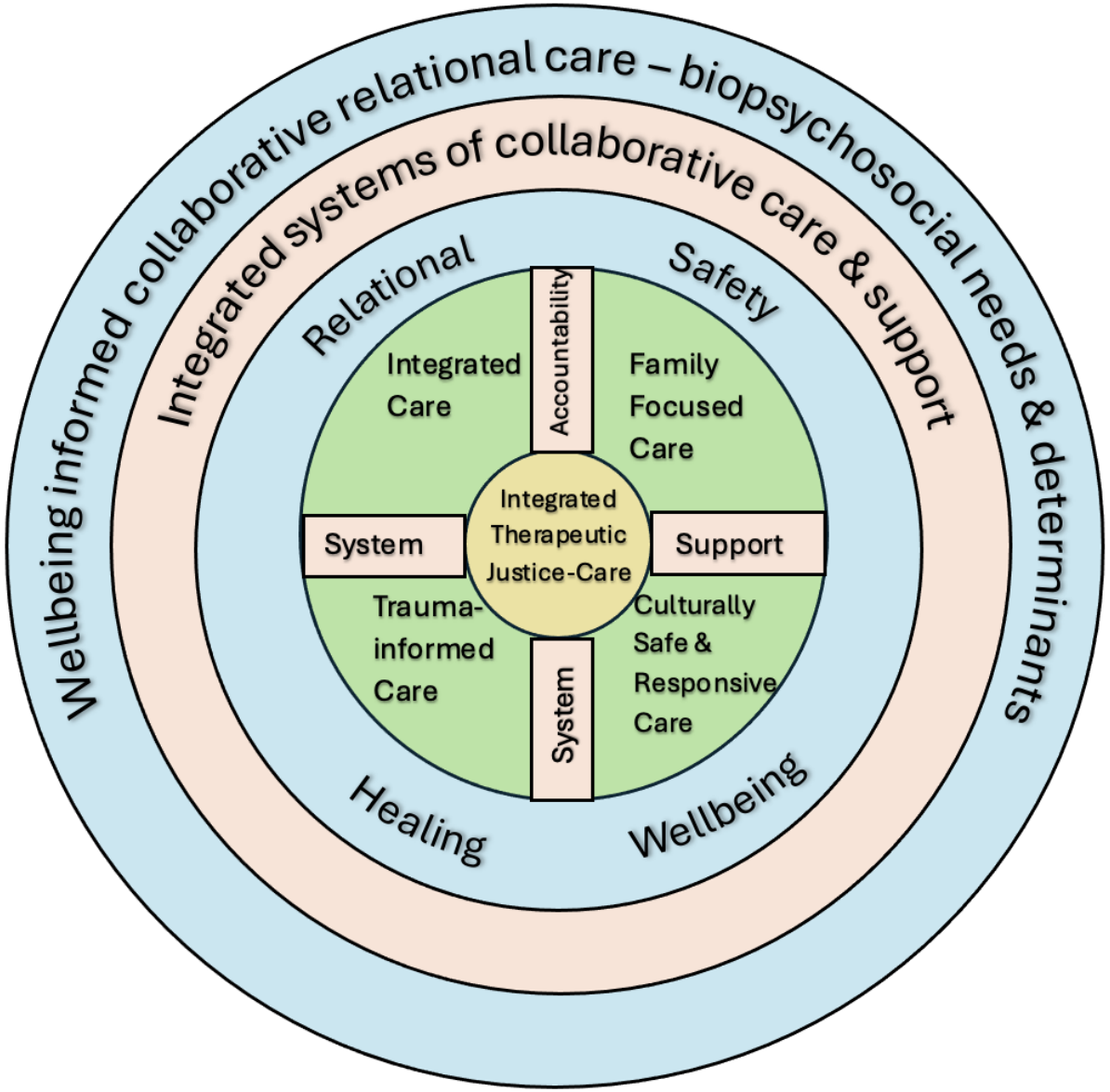
ITJ-care: Promoting a Wellbeing–informed Biopsychosocial Collaborative Relational Care approach

"ITJ-care: Embedding an 'ethos of care' & collaborative care processes and collaborative service design for the implementation of sustainable and transformative systemic change, requires collaborative innovation and action across the sectors of health, justice and social services, to maximise systemic impact. This requires services to work together, 'hand-in-hand' with Aboriginal families and communities by embedding collaborative care processes and an 'ethos of care' in action. At the same time, for the implementation of these collaborative care processes to be effective, there is an urgent need for redress of systemic gaps of inequality and responsivity. At the 'heart' of this framework is the need for a 'paradigm shift' that prioritises a wellbeing discourse through relational and responsive leadership and the collaborative design and implementation of relational systemic responses that promote timely access to trauma-informed culturally safe and responsive, family-based integrated care. The collective aim is to mitigate cycles of systemic stress activation & biopsychosocial harm & systemically nurture the facilitation of relational trauma recovery through building relational capacity for care & wellbeing and healthy relationships. ITJ-care is essentially an interdisciplinary relational collaborative care network model that prioritises the need for holistic care in addressing bio-psychosocial relational needs and building capacity for relational resilience & reciprocity of care. To be effective, this calls for 'collective action' in addressing the complex needs of children, women and families 'at risk' of justice involvement & proactively refocusing our collective attention on prevention & early intervention, relational care, family restoration and systemic responsivity to care needs. Integral to this process is also facilitation of a care continuum, continuity of care and care congruence for more holistic and relationally responsive outcomes in policy & practice".

Integrated Therapeutic Justice Care – Proposing a Wellbeing-informed Biopsychosocial Collaborative Relational Care Network model



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Replenishing relational safety, resilience & wellbeing: Refocusing our collective attention on mitigating systemic traumatic stress activation & embodying safety - Is this a way forward?

"Replenishment refills or rebalances, … Replenishment helps us rebalance and care for each other, care for self and also care for Country. It's about being together, about supporting each other being on Country and grounding ourselves on earth and all that we are connected to. Replenishment can bring about feelings of calm and true connection" [p.205].

Tujague, Nicole & Ryan, Kelleigh & EBSCOhost. (2023). Cultural safety in trauma-informed practice from a First Nations perspective : Billabongs of knowledge / Nicole Tujague, Kelleigh Ryan. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan

THANK YOU

Dr Effie Zafirakis

BSc/LLB, D.Psych (forensic), MAPS, FCFP

Contact details

Email: effie.zafirakis@gmail.com

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