

**Brave in their new world: Service provision for refugee youth  
with comorbidity in northern metropolitan Adelaide**

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**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

JANUARY, 2016

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank all the individuals from refugee backgrounds who were involved in this research. I have met so many people who have experienced the unspeakable and continue to endure such difficult and challenging lives, yet show such courage, strength, resourcefulness and humour!

To the health professionals who participated- you are doing a fantastic job despite so many constraints and uphill battles. Thanks for taking the time out of your busy days to sit with me and my voice recorder!

To my clients on Christmas Island and at STTARS, you taught me so much about the refugee, asylum seeker, and detention experience and I feel privileged to have sat with you, shared tea with you, and to have listened to your stories and daily struggles of the mind and soul.

To my eccentric family- you must be the reason I got myself into this field so it is a good thing you stuck around to support me in my endeavours.

Mum, you are the strongest, most independent, and inspirational woman I know and this has been a huge influence on me setting out to do all the things I've strived to do. You are also the most patient person I know and I thank you for reading my work and offering your critical eye whenever I need.

Thank you dad for your never ending crazy clichés encouraging perseverance and determination. You manage to be outrageous, optimistic, cynical and completely hilarious all within the space of a minute and this has no doubt had a huge impact on the path I have taken and how I view the world. It might take my whole career as a psychologist but I am determined to find out what is going on in that brain!

To my brother Justin, I can always count on you to turn a difficult and frustrating situation into a humorous one and you are probably unaware of how much that has helped me over the years so thank you for your sense of humour, love, support and example of hard work and resilience.

To Tom, you have been so supportive, patient and understanding of the never ending work load, late nights, stay at home weekends, and cut-short holidays. I am so grateful for your constant encouragement and I feel so lucky to have met someone who is as loving, fun and entertaining as you. I promise we will have the most amazing adventure at the end of all our studies.

Finally, last but by no means least, thank you to my supervisors- Cherrie, you are one of the most encouraging, enthusiastic and optimistic women I know and these are great qualities in a supervisor- so thank you for keeping me going. Thank you Charlotte, you are such a passionate woman who has a wealth of experience to share, along with some excellent stories and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with you! Nicholas, I am so glad you came on board this project as you enriched it greatly with your own expertise and knowledge of the field. You have always been encouraging and happy to make time to talk and offer guidance. I am very appreciative of each of you for being so generous with your time and being a pleasure to work with on the project.

*So how do you sit with a shattered soul?*

*Gently, with gracious and deep respect.*

*Patiently, for time stands still for the shattered, and the momentum of healing will be slow at first.*

*With the tender strength that comes from an openness to your own deepest wounding,  
and to your own deepest healing.*

*Firmly, never wavering in the utmost conviction that evil is powerful, but there is a good that is more powerful still.*

*Stay connected to that goodness with all your being, however it manifests itself to you.*

*Acquaint yourself with the shadows that lie deep within you.*

*And then, open yourself, all that is you, to the light.*

*Give freely. Take in abundantly.*

*Find your safety, your refuge, and go there as you need.*

*Hear what you can, and be honest about the rest: be honest at all cost.*

*Words won't always come;*

*sometimes there are no words in the face of such tragic evil.*

*But in your willingness to be with them, they will hear you;*

*from soul to soul they will hear that for which there are no words.*

**Steele, K. (1989). Sitting with the shattered soul. *Pilgrimage: Journal of Psychotherapy and Personal Exploration*, 15(6), 19-25.**

## SUMMARY

Northern metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia is an area which experiences considerable social disadvantage. It is also an area in which a significant number of (predominantly young) refugee background individuals have resettled. Research indicates that refugee youth may be at elevated risk of mental health (MH) and alcohol and other drug (AOD) problems. These factors, combined with the low socio-economic status of northern Adelaide, the number of refugee youth residing there, and the added complexity of treating comorbid MH and AOD problems (comorbidity) prompted this research.

This thesis explored the experiences and needs of young people from refugee backgrounds with comorbid MH and AOD disorders living in northern metropolitan Adelaide. The first aim was to identify risk factors which lead to the development of comorbid MH and AOD disorders among refugee youth living in this region. The second aim was to explore the challenges refugee youth experience once they develop comorbid MH and AOD disorders and how these may impact on the provision of MH and AOD services. The third and final aim was to identify the barriers and facilitators to effective, culturally responsive service provision for refugee youth with comorbid MH and AOD disorders.

This research employed a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design drawing on principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) and with theoretical underpinnings in critical theory and constructionism. Qualitative interviews were conducted with refugee youth aged 12-25 years from African, Bhutanese, and Afghan backgrounds ( $n = 15$ ) and with service providers from MH, AOD and refugee support services ( $n = 15$ ). Interview data were analysed using a thematic approach. The findings from the interviews then informed development and analysis of the quantitative online survey which was conducted with managers of MH, AOD and other services ( $n = 56$ ).

Overall, this research highlighted significant difficulties which impact on the ability of a young person from a refugee background with comorbidity to access and receive adequate service provision. This thesis discussed ways of overcoming these challenges in order to improve the service response to this client group in this region. It is hoped that the findings presented in this thesis are of value to both policy makers and clinicians.

## DECLARATION

I, Miriam Posselt, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Miriam Posselt \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Published works

### List of publications within this thesis

- Posselt, M., Galletly, C., de Crespigny, C., & Procter, N. (2014). Mental health and drug and alcohol comorbidity in young people of refugee background: A review of the literature. *Mental Health and Substance Use*, 7(1), 19-30.
- Posselt, M., Procter, N., Galletly, C. & de Crespigny, C. (2015), Aetiology of Coexisting Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drug Disorders: Perspectives of Refugee Youth and Service Providers. *Australian Psychologist*, 50(2), 130–140.
- Posselt, M., Procter, N., de Crespigny, C., & Galletly, C. (2015). Merging perspectives: Obstacles to recovery for youth from refugee backgrounds with comorbidity. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 23(3), 293-9.
- Posselt, M., Mc Donald, K., Procter, N., de Crespigny, C., & Galletly, C. (2016) Improving the provision of services to young people from refugee backgrounds with comorbid mental health and substance use problems: Addressing the barriers. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Posselt, M., Galletly, C., de Crespigny, C., Cairney, I., Moss, J., Liu, D., Francis, H., Kelly, J., Procter, N., & Banders, A. (2014). Ethics overload: Impact of excessive ethical review on comorbidity research. *Mental Health and Substance Use*, 7, 184–94.
- de Crespigny, C., Grønkjær, M., Liu, D., Moss, J., Cairney, I., Procter, N., Posselt, M., Francis-Jebaraj, H., Schultz, T., Banders, A., King, R., Lee, D., & Galletly, C. (2015). Service provider barriers to treatment and care for people with mental health and alcohol and other drug comorbidity in a metropolitan region of South Australia. *Advances in Dual Diagnosis*, 8(3), 120-128.

### List of conference presentations based on this thesis

- The “too hard basket”*: Service delivery and support for young people of refugee background with mental health and substance use conditions. (Posselt, M., Galletly, C., de Crespigny, C. & Procter, N.) 4th WA Transcultural Mental Health & 2nd Australasian Refugee Health Conference, 31st October & 1st November 2013. Perth, Australia.
- The cultural responsiveness of mental health and drug and alcohol support services for resettled refugee youth in northern Adelaide*. (Posselt, M., Galletly, C., Procter, N., Liu, D., & de Crespigny, C.) Society for Mental Health Research Conference, December 2014. Adelaide, Australia.



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