

2026 Spectrum Research Forum

Presenters and their Abstracts

Dr Jacqueline Huber

Chair of the Australia and New Zealand Emergency Psychiatry Network and the RANZCP ED Steering Group



Dr Jacqueline Huber is a senior psychiatrist and Clinical Lead for Emergency Psychiatry at St Vincent's Hospital Sydney, and the founder and Chair of the Australian and New Zealand Emergency Psychiatry Network. Her PhD at the University of Sydney examines how short-stay inpatient services can better respond to intense suicidality. Her research focuses on moving past 'risk prediction' and 'containment' towards structured, relational and evidence-informed treatment. She is currently leading the development of a standardised short-stay inpatient intervention for people experiencing suicidal crisis.

Title of the presentation: *Stop watching, start treating: Why we need a standardised inpatient model for intense suicidality*

Abstract:

Inpatient care for intense suicidality – usually in the context of complex trauma and personality disorder - often prioritises observation, restriction and perceived 'risk management', despite limited agreement (or energetic disagreement!) about what treatment should achieve. This presentation examines the gap between perception and the reality, and considers what a standardised short-stay inpatient intervention might require. Drawing on research, clinical practice and service-user perspectives, it will explore core treatment principles, including relationality, shared responsibility, autonomy, personalised entrapment-focused formulation, and collaborative discharge planning.

Dr Mithira Nithianandan

Executive Clinical Director and Consultant Psychiatrist, Spectrum



Dr Mithira Nithianandan is a consultant Psychiatrist and Deputy Clinical Director at Spectrum Personality Disorder Service, with expertise in personality disorder and complex mental health presentations. She is committed to improving the quality and accessibility of care for people with personality disorder and complex trauma. Dr Nithianandan has a strong interest in research, clinical education, workforce development and translating evidence-based approaches into everyday practice. She is particularly passionate about supporting clinicians across the

mental health system to develop the skills, confidence and therapeutic frameworks needed to work effectively with people with borderline personality disorder.

Her clinical training includes Good Psychiatric Management, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, Mentalization-Based Treatment and psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy. She is an accredited Mentalization-Based Treatment practitioner with the Anna Freud Centre.

Title of the presentation: *MDMA assisted psychotherapy for people with CPTSD or co-occurring PTSD and BPD – Spectrum's experience*

Abstract:

Trauma disorders frequently co-occur in people diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD). While the only evidence-based treatment for BPD is psychotherapy, this does not directly address the impact of trauma disorder, which, when co-occurring, reduces the likelihood of achieving remission and recovery from BPD. Despite speculation regarding effectiveness, there is very little research evaluating whether MDMA-assisted psychotherapy (MDMA-AP) might benefit people diagnosed with co-occurring post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or complex PTSD (CPTSD) and BPD. Given Spectrum's expertise in treating people with personality disorders and complex trauma, we are investigating whether MDMA-AP might benefit people who have both PTSD/CPTSD and BPD. Of primary interest in this world-first study is the safety and feasibility of offering MDMA-AP within a public mental health outpatient setting given the high costs for patients accessing it in private practice. Female participants with PTSD/CPTSD and BPD will receive MDMA preceded and followed by trauma-informed psychotherapy sessions. This presentation will share the barriers and enablers of setting up this treatment in a public health setting, as well as preliminary clinical observations.

Ms Claudia Vella

Provisional psychologist, Deakin University

Ms Claudia Vella is a provisional psychologist currently in her final year of her Doctor of Psychology (Clinical) candidature. Claudia is a developing clinician with a strong interest in working with individuals experiencing trauma-related disorders and borderline personality disorder (BPD). She is passionate about supporting clients in understanding the impact of their past experiences on current difficulties and in building skills for emotional regulation, stability, and recovery.

Title of the presentation: *Exploring the Acceptability and Tolerability of Interventions for Co-Occurring BPD and Trauma Disorders*

Abstract:

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or complex post-traumatic stress disorder (CPTSD) frequently co-occur, yet trauma-focused treatment can present unique challenges within this population. Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) with the Prolonged Exposure protocol (DBT+PE) integrates trauma-focused exposure within comprehensive DBT to address trauma symptoms alongside difficulties associated with BPD. While emerging evidence supports its effectiveness, an important question remains: is this treatment actually acceptable and tolerable for the clients receiving it? This presentation reports preliminary qualitative findings from interviews exploring experiences of DBT+PE from both client and clinician perspectives. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study explores how DBT+PE is experienced in practice, including perceptions of readiness, tolerability, therapeutic processes, barriers to engagement, and perceived benefits and challenges.

Mr Harrison Breeuwsma

Provisional psychologist, Deakin University



Mr Harrison Breeuwsma is currently nearing the end of his Doctorate of Psychology (Clinical) at Deakin University. His thesis examines the individual, treatment, and systemic factors which contribute to people with borderline personality disorder prematurely discontinuing psychological treatment. In doing so, Harrison aims to improve our understanding of premature discontinuation so that services and practitioners may enhance engagement and improve treatment outcomes. Harrison's research has been done collaboratively with researchers from Deakin University and Spectrum.

Title of the presentation: *Understanding premature discontinuation of psychological treatment for people with Borderline Personality Disorder*

Abstract:

Research suggests that people with a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder (BPD) prematurely discontinue psychological treatment at a higher rate than people with other mental health diagnoses. This study aimed to investigate what occurs for consumers in the immediate lead up to this premature discontinuation. A conventional content analysis was conducted on the final three treatment session entries in clinical records of all consumers who prematurely discontinued specialist BPD treatment at a tertiary mental health service in the years 2019 and 2023. Three themes were identified from the data as being associated with premature cessation: individual context factors, therapeutic factors, and systemic factors. In this presentation these themes are described, and potential future research and clinical implications noted.

Ms Desna Ramjee

Research Assistant, Spectrum



Ms Desna Ramjee is a Research Assistant at Spectrum. She holds an Honours degree in Psychology, where her research explored the impact of a gender-transformative school-based intervention on adolescent girls in Australia. Desna has worked in several Monash University labs, including suicide prevention and sleep health, where she developed a keen interest in conducting holistic research across a broad range of topics. Her commitment to quantifying and improving client outcomes has aided her in leading the Spectrum Client Care Program

alongside the clinical and medical teams. Motivated to understand the human psyche, and in turn decrease the prevalence of mental illness and associated stigma, Desna hopes to become a clinical psychologist in the future.

Title of the presentation: *Using Treatment Evaluation to Inform Care and Enhance Communication: The Spectrum Client Care Program*

Abstract:

The Spectrum Client Care Program, co-developed with lived-experience consultants and clinicians, tracks symptom changes and treatment efficacy to understand the ongoing needs of clients with personality disorders and improve future care. Quantitative self-report data on clients' symptoms are collected at the start and end of treatment; clinician-reported data on clients' overall well-being, risk of self-harm, occupational status, inpatient admissions, and health service use are collected quarterly. Data are routinely relayed back to clinicians to enhance therapeutic communication and person-centred care. Through continuous improvement, the program demonstrates treatment effectiveness and informs best-practice to improve services for people with personality disorders and complex PTSD.

Mr Joe Fettling

Project Officer, Spectrum



Mr Joe Fettling is a Project Officer with Spectrum's Research and Innovation team. Passionate about person-centred care and research that helps us build fulfilling relationships with ourselves and others, he has contributed to research spanning psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy, neuromodulation, generalist and specialist psychotherapy, community mental health services and stigma. Joe is completing an Honours degree in Psychology, with a thesis project examining shared structural neural correlates across obsessive-compulsive disorder and behavioural addictions.

Title of the presentation: *Exploring the intersection between sleep quality, nightmares, and borderline personality disorder*

Abstract:

Sleep disturbances are common in borderline personality disorder (BPD), yet their nature, prevalence, and impact are not well understood. In this cross-sectional study, 160 adults with BPD completed self-report measures assessing sleep quality, the frequency, content and associated distress of nightmares, and two factors commonly implicated in sleep disturbances: alcohol consumption and use of prescription medication. 96% of respondents reported poor sleep quality. 85% reported clinically significant nightmare frequency and associated distress, with common nightmare themes including past trauma, interpersonal conflict, physical injury, and death/loss. Poor sleep quality was associated with use of prescription medications. These findings suggest people with BPD may benefit from interventions targeting sleep quality.

Dr Karthika Kasiviswanathan

Research Officer, Spectrum



Dr Karthika is a dedicated medical professional and researcher committed to improving access to adequate and appropriate care received by people living with borderline personality disorder (BPD). Since joining Spectrum in 2024 as a Research Officer, they have led several projects integrating clinical expertise with the voices of lived experience. Their contributions include co-editing *A Practical Guide for Area Mental Health Services* and authoring comprehensive reviews aimed at improving support for people with BPD. Guided by both personal and professional passion, Dr

Karthika's work focuses on advancing evidence-based practices and fostering compassionate, person-centred care for people with BPD.

Title of the presentation: *Good Psychiatric Management-based post-crisis support for people diagnosed with BPD leaving emergency care*

Abstract:

Spectrum and the Mental Health Access at Eastern Health are collaboratively evaluating the feasibility, acceptability and appropriateness of a brief, structured intervention modelled on Good Psychiatric Management (GPM) for adults diagnosed with borderline personality disorder (BPD). The pilot study will recruit up to fifteen patients presenting to Eastern Health (EH) emergency departments (EDs) in a mental health crisis. They will be referred to a GPM-trained clinician at an EH site for ten one-hour individualised GPM sessions focused on psychoeducation, crisis management, and alternative help-seeking strategies. Outcome data from both patients and staff will be collected to understand the utility of GPM in this novel setting. This presentation will examine the rationale for this study, key research questions and the details of the data that will be collected.

Ms Taylor Morgan

Research volunteer, Spectrum



Ms Taylor Morgan is a volunteer researcher at Spectrum. She completed her Bachelor of Psychological Science at the University of New England in 2025 and aspires to be a researcher in the field of clinical psychology. Taylor is particularly passionate about contributing to research that improves long-term outcomes for people suffering from stigmatised and misunderstood mental health conditions such as personality disorder and complex trauma.

Ms Jacqueline Munoz

Senior Clinical Psychologist, Spectrum



Ms Jacqueline Munoz is a senior clinical psychologist, board-approved supervisor, and trainer at Spectrum within the Dialectical Behaviour Therapy program. She has experience working across a range of mental health settings, including an inpatient eating disorder program, intensive outreach team, adult community mental health, youth services, and a team developing service-wide plans for complex clients frequently attending emergency departments. Jacqueline has a special interest in trauma treatment and DBT Prolonged Exposure and in providing psychoeducation for people living with BPD. She is passionate about helping people develop practical

skills to navigate difficult emotions and relationships, strengthen their sense of self, and build lives that feel meaningful and aligned with their values.

Title of the presentation: *Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Web-Based Psychoeducation Workshop for Improving Perceived Knowledge, Hope, Attitudes and Agency Among People with Borderline Personality Disorder*

Abstract:

Borderline personality disorder (BPD) is a severe, often misunderstood and stigmatised psychological disorder. People living with the condition are often not provided with accurate information regarding the diagnosis and treatment, which can contribute to hopelessness and negative self-appraisals. Some evidence suggests

that psychoeducation programs can reduce self-stigma and increase hope for people living with various mental health conditions, including BPD. However, it has yet to be determined whether a single-session web-based group psychoeducation workshop for people with BPD improves participants' perceived knowledge and understanding of BPD, their attitudes towards the diagnosis and their sense of hope for recovery. Participants were adults, mostly female (~80%), with a diagnosis of BPD or suspected BPD, who attended a psychoeducation workshop between 2023 and 2026 provided by a specialist personality disorder clinic. Participants were invited to complete a modified version of the BPD attitude and knowledge survey (e-KALM) before and after the psychoeducation session and provide written comments and feedback. Ninety-two participants completed at least one survey, and more than half completed both pre- and post-test surveys (~55%). A linear mixed model analysis determined that participants' self-reported knowledge, attitudes and hope for recovery improved significantly ($p < .001$) after attending the program. The content analysis of the written responses largely complemented the e-KALM survey results with additional insights and suggestions for improving the program. Given its accessibility, potential cost-effectiveness, and the benefits reported by participants, this approach may be suitable for large-scale implementation.

Ms Alisa Sharkova

Research volunteer, Spectrum



Ms Alisa Sharkova is a Research Volunteer at Spectrum who has recently completed her Honours degree in Psychology at Monash University. Her Honours research on dimensional personality disorder diagnosis sparked a passion for the field, which continues to drive her work today. Alisa is currently aspiring to undertake a Clinical PhD, where she hopes to further expand her research focusing on understanding personality disorder and develop her clinical skills to work directly with clients to support their mental wellbeing and health outcomes.

Dr Hemalatha Jayaram

Senior Clinical Psychologist, Eastern Health



Dr Hemalatha Jayaram is a Senior Clinical Psychologist with the Older Adults Mental Health and Wellbeing Service at Eastern Health and a Clinical Academic and Director of Older Adults Mental Health Research and Evaluation at Eastern Health. Hema has a keen interest in the diagnosis and treatment of personality disorders in older adults and runs a psychotherapy clinic in Normanby House at St George's Hospital in Melbourne. Hema currently provides clinical supervision for students and psychology

registrars and holds an appointment as a Clinical Supervisor with Swinburne University of Technology - Wellbeing Clinic for Older Adults. Hema is a peer reviewer for the Australasian Journal of Psychiatry and has held previous positions with the State and National Committees of the Australian Psychological Society.

Title of the presentation: *Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Web-Based Psychoeducation Workshop for Improving Perceived Knowledge, Hope, Attitudes and Agency Among People with Borderline Personality Disorder*

Abstract:

Underdiagnosis of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is not uncommon in older adults (60 years+). This is due to clinical reluctance to diagnose this population, classification systems not being designed for older adults, and the historical misconception that it 'burns out'. To address this gap, the BPD-OA (Borderline

Personality Disorder for Older Adults) screening tool has been developed by Spectrum for identifying BPD presentations in this population. As part of the second stage, the tool has been refined and trialled across multiple older-age services. The present study reports demographic variables in 29 older adults that present with BPD psychopathology at the Peter James Centre. Various life events such as the loss of a partner, retirement, and estrangement with family has been found to trigger emotional dysregulation, continue interpersonal conflicts, and perpetuate depression; all of which are commonly associated with BPD pathology. These factors can help identify possible predictors and inform clinical management.

Ms Stephanie Schildknecht

BPD Diaries: Stories and Science, Creator and Host



Ms Stefanie Schildknecht is a psychology professional and the creator and host of BPD Diaries: Stories and Science, a podcast bridging lived experience with evidence-based research on BPD. She holds Master's degrees in Clinical Psychology and Business Psychology and works therapeutically in private online practice with individuals with BPD using DBT-based and schema-focused approaches, alongside her clinical work in a psychosomatic healthcare setting in Germany. Steff's work in the public space focuses on translating psychological research into accessible conversations, reducing stigma, and creating spaces

for more compassionate conversations where people with BPD feel understood and supported.

Title of the presentation: *BPD Diaries Podcast: Bridging Research and Lived Experience in BPD*

Abstract:

Research has the potential to change lives, but only when the people that need it can access and understand it. In this presentation, Stephanie Schildknecht shares how her podcast BPD Diaries: Stories and Science grew from a personal mission into a platform connecting researchers, clinicians, and people living with borderline personality disorder. Through stories from the podcast and emerging evidence on knowledge translation, she explores how accessible communication can reduce stigma, cultivate hope, and help translate research into meaningful real-world impact for the communities it aims to serve.