

It's not just about the pain!

Working with chronic pain as explored through the lens of one Iraqi woman

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and Rehabilitation of Torture
and Trauma Survivors

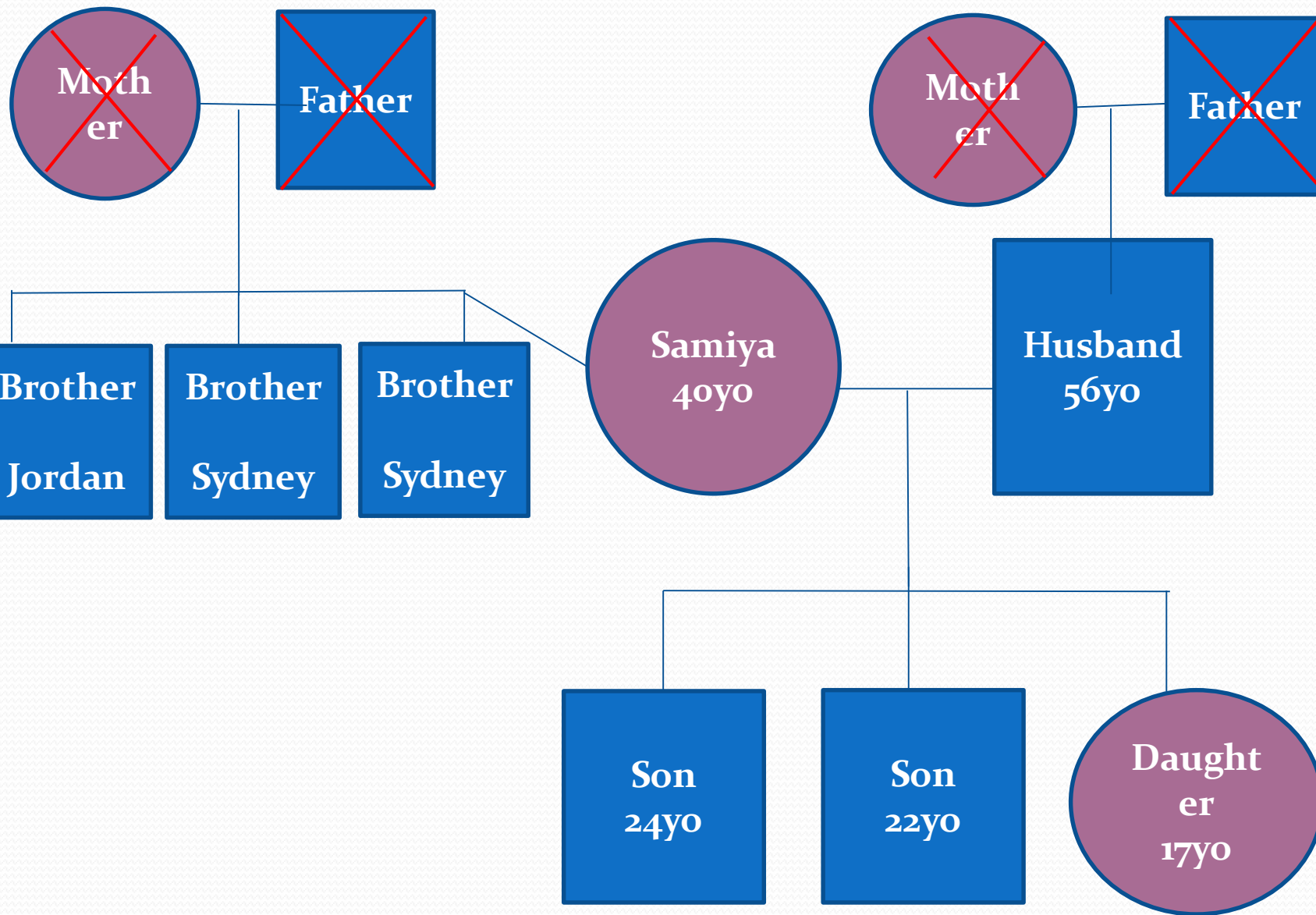
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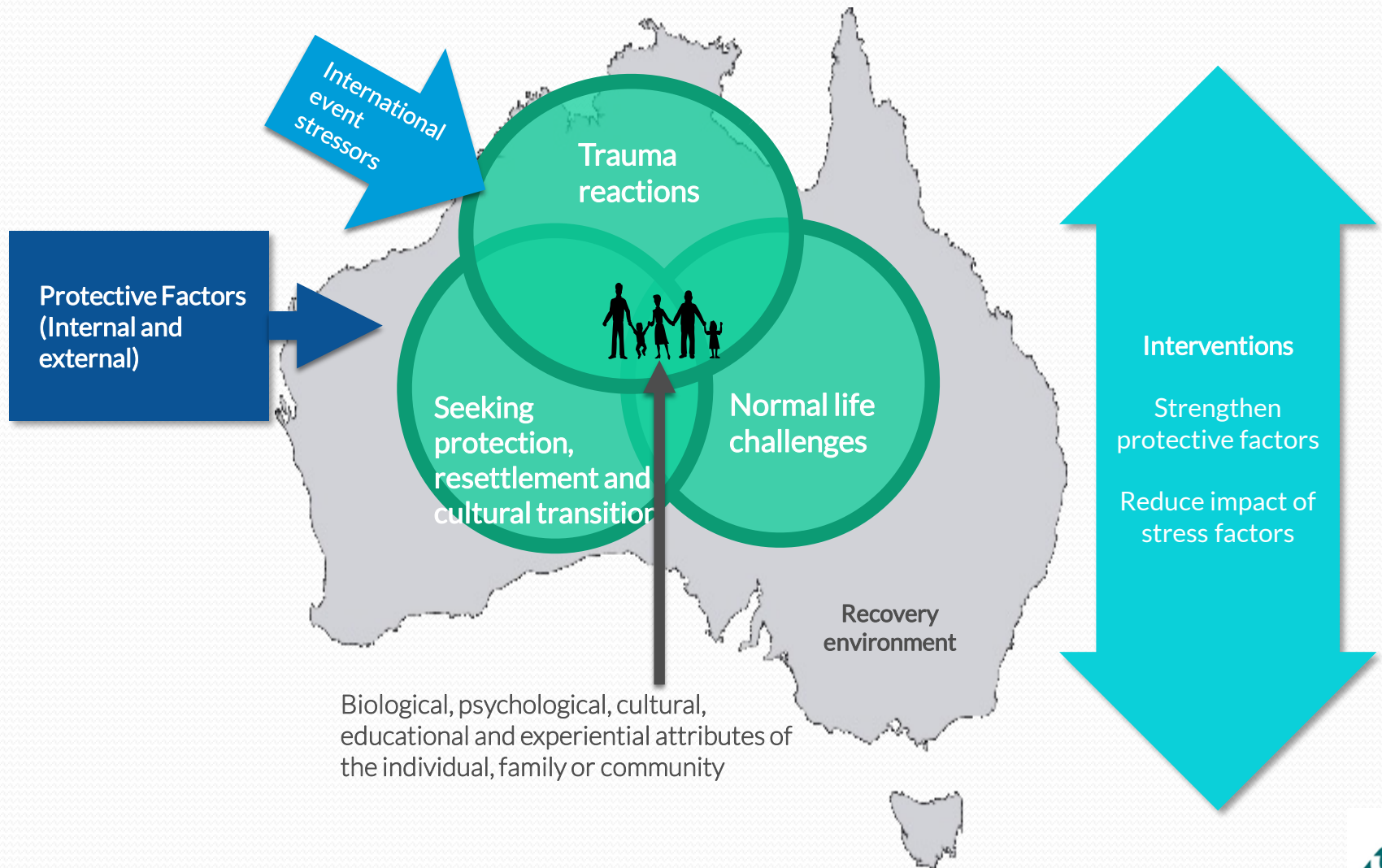
- To demonstrate how different ways of working somatically affect not just the experience of the pain but allows the re-emergence of a more integrated sense of self
- To do this in the context of recent research and thinking around chronic pain

Client details

- 40yo female – Samiya (name has been changed)
- Country of Origin: Iraq
- Ethnicity: Chaldean
- Arrived in Australia in 2012 with her children – husband arrived later
- Her and children have permanent residency – husband is on a Temporary Protection Visa

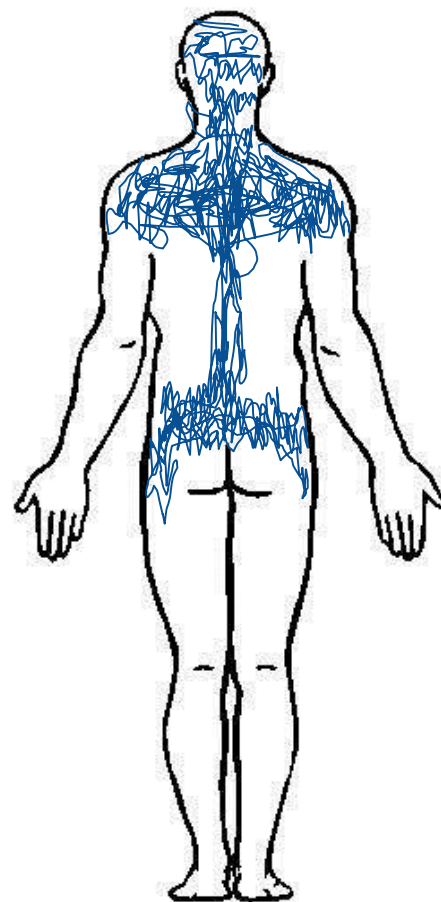
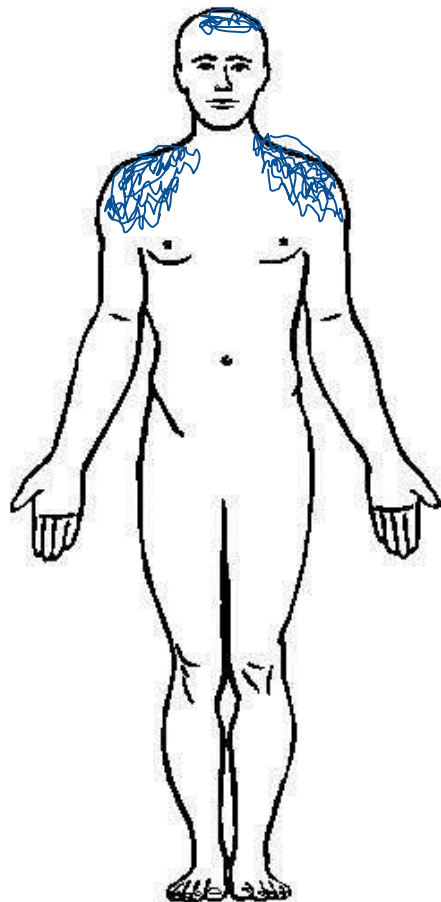


THE COMPLEX INTERACTION OF CHALLENGES



Presentation

- Referred due to the amount of pain she was experiencing
- Scans from 2 years previously had shown disc herniation (bulge) between C5/6 and L4/5/S1
- Previous left shoulder reconstruction
- Tension throughout her neck, shoulders, spine, ribs and internal fascia



Presentation

- Described herself as depressed and on SSRI antidepressants
- My sense of her was of someone who was prickly – I felt dared to ‘take her on’
- Made eye contact, was well dressed and quite western in dress and outlook

Therapeutic Goals

At it's most basic it was to address the pain – obvious to both of us that it was influenced by more than the herniated discs, injury or any local inflammation

Therapeutic goals

- For her to be able to notice what was happening in her body – sensations and feelings other than the pain
- To reduce the tension and facilitate more responsiveness in her tissues
- To ‘hold’ and support her while the court case played out
- Allow more movement – physically, emotionally, cognitively, creatively

Treatment

- Received 27 sessions of somatic work based on the principles of Ortho-Bionomy over a nine month period
- 2 years previously had received 15 sessions
- Had previously also had neurofeedback
- Worked in collaboration with her psychologist



How did we do this?

- Through assessing her pain, her understanding of the pain and its causes
- We needed to work in a way that supported her tissues and structures – if we tried to do too much she would ‘revolt’.
- Did this by ‘mimicking’ what the body was doing
- We were working with and encouraging more flexibility in the reflexive/autonomic responses in her tissues and structures

How did we do this?

- Helping her to notice internal sensation and build her capacity for this - this wasn't a cognitive process
- We included any emotional/mood changes as they occurred
- As a mood started to arise we would notice that and the changes in the tissues
- If an emotional response arose was she able to tolerate the charge or did we have to find some other way to allow it to move?

How did we do this?

I was also aware that I would become part of a dynamic

How I responded to what I felt in the tissues AND how I responded to her at a more interpersonal level would influence what happened next and potentially change or re-inforce the dynamics around how her tissues and expectations organised

What happened?

- Very slow for her to notice the changes. Did generally feel better after the session but at the start it would last until she got home
- Gradually able to notice more of what was happening in the tissues and to trust that
- Tissues were becoming more responsive

What happened?

- She started to feel more. Then started to talk about her life with affective quality and more feeling. That's when things really started to change in the sessions
- Usually started the session with “alhamdulillah” but with a sense of resignation. When talking about how she prayed there was also this sense of resignation. But this changed

Several key events

- Her son's charges were withdrawn after multiple attempts at prosecution
- Second was the protests in Iraq – deeply affected and saddened by what was happening
- Also went for her citizenship test – passed on second attempt with her children and was accepted as a citizen

Therapeutic outcomes

- The pain persisted but the severity and debilitating nature of it decreased
- She had more capacity to work with the pain and more motivation to do the self care exercises that were given to her
- Her capacity to function and her sense of aliveness increased

Delivered on behalf of STARTTS by
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