The PATRICIA Project: Summary of the scoping review

The PATRICIA Project: Summary of the scoping review on interagency working between child protection, specialist domestic and family violence services, and family law

Overview of key finding

A scoping review of evaluations of 24 **models** of interagency working between **child protection**, **specialist domestic and family violence services**, and **family law** was undertaken.[1] Using a pre-determined framework of interagency working, it examined aspects of interagency working. The overall key finding was that there is little definitive data on interagency working with child protection involvement because of insufficient evidence about what works for the services and systems or individuals being served. This briefing paper outlines the other findings of the review and implications for policy, practice, and research.

Background

A range of service systems may be involved with families experiencing domestic and family violence, with no single service system having sole responsibility for the provision of interventions. The way these services work together varies and little is currently known about the nature of these interagency working relationships. The scoping review was undertaken to inform a State of Knowledge report on interagency working between child protection and domestic and family violence services and/or family law. This formed the first completed component of the PATRICIA Project's program of research (highlighted in Figure 1) and was undertaken during the first year of the 2 year project (Macvean, Humphreys, Healey, Alberts, Mildon, Connolly, & Spada-Rinaldis, 2015).

Figure 1 The components of the PATRICIA program of action research
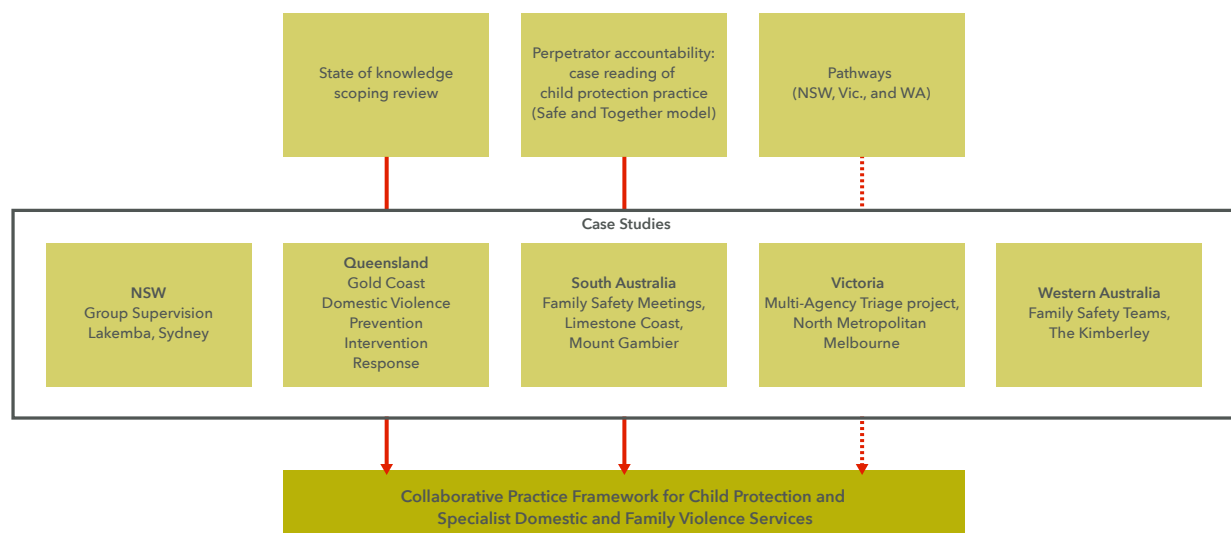
1   Terms that appear in bold the first time they are used in the text (headings and figures excepted) are in the glossary at the end of this paper.

Methodology

This review used a scoping review methodology to map out evaluations of interagency working models (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). A systematic search was conducted of nine academic databases and 10 key organisation websites. Documents from experts and reference lists of included studies were also screened. Studies were included if they reported on models of interagency working that involved child protection and that reported an evaluation with child, parent, family, or service outcomes. The primary focus of this review was on male violence perpetrated against women. As such, studies that did not include these populations, at least in part, were excluded. For the purpose of this review, domestic and family violence where there was no child involved was not in scope.

A pre-determined framework of interagency working had previously been developed by members of the research team from the Parenting Research Centre (Macvean et al., 2015). It examined aspects of interagency working with reference to seven criteria, distributed between infrastructure and service components (see Table 1).

Given the overall key finding (the absence of definitive evidence and thus data about what works in interagency working with child protection involvement), the review team were unable to assess the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives. Using the interagency working components framework, however, the team were able to report aspects that were commonly used and contributed to collaborative work as well as note the number of models evaluated that altered aspects of interagency working.

Table 1 Interagency working components framework

Infrastructure components	Examples
Governance	Policy development, revised goals and mission, re-organisation of departments, co-location.
Management and operations	Funding, staff development, organisational change processes, leadership
Service array	Spectrum of services addressing gaps or overlaps, insufficiencies in level of service provision, life course considerations, geographic location
Quality monitoring	Implementation assessment, monitoring processes

Service components	Examples
Entry into the service	Number of entry points, assessment/intake
Service planning	Formal or informal arrangements for working toward service goals, sharing resources and information
Service provision	Quality service to cater for individual/family needs, diverse populations

Findings

- Twenty-four models of interagency working with some degree of child protection involvement were identified: nine were centred on domestic and family violence services, 10 centred on child protection and five were court-based models.

- Of the 24 models, nine were Australian: Armadale Domestic Violence Intervention Project; Family Safety Framework; Green Valley Liverpool Domestic Violence Services; Breaking the Cycle; Safe at Home; Northern Crisis and Advocacy Response Service; Child and Family Services Victoria; Project Magellan; and Joondalup Family Violence Court.

- Aspects of interagency working in these models (from the most commonly altered component to the least) involved changes to:
  ○ Management and operations structures and processes, particularly relating to training in 19 of the models;
  ○ Service provision, such as improvements to the quality of services for families in 19 of the models;
  ○ Service planning relating to formal and informal arrangements for joint working in 18 of the models;
  ○ Governance changes such as policy revision and co-location were involved in 14 models;
  ○ Quality monitoring of services in 12 of the models; and
  ○ Attending to the **service array** to address gaps and overlap in services in nine of the models.

- Models also undertook a number of processes that may have facilitated interagency working with child protection, specifically. These included the:
  ○ Development of formal agreements for working together and sharing information;
  ○ Use of operations manuals;
  ○ Shared theoretical frameworks, goals, and vision;
  ○ Co-location;
  ○ Shared data management and security systems;
  ○ Formation of committees;
  ○ Appointment of agency representatives and coordinators or liaisons;
  ○ Allocation of specific child protection funding;
  ○ Role clarification;
  ○ Shared intake and referral procedures;
  ○ Common risk assessments;
  ○ Agreements to include child protection in various aspects of services;
  ○ Training on interagency working; and
  ○ Cross-agency leadership.

Implications for policy, practice, and research

A stronger knowledge base is needed

There is a requirement to invest in evaluation as well as in the resources to develop and implement new models of working. The evaluations need to consider options for maximising design, providing at minimum pre-post data. Ideally, evaluations would provide comparison samples, contemporaneous and either random or matched sites. However, meeting these criteria in complex systems may be difficult. There is also a need to invest in work to help identify what constitutes rigorous evaluation, or the best possible options for rigorous evaluation, in this context. Within this complex service context, impact needs to be considered across multiple levels and systems and multiple interrelated factors may influence outcomes. The outcome measures also require careful attention so that those changes which are important to women, children, or to system change are appropriately measured. The long term implications of the model and the changes for women, children, and men in relation to safety, wellbeing, and **accountability** may not be seen initially, and therefore, long term evaluation data may be needed.

Quality monitoring of interagency joining up is needed

One of the gaps in this review was that few models reported processes for monitoring the implementation and quality of the changes. Monitoring needs to occur in order to assess whether changes are taking place as intended, if they are working in the desired way, and to determine if further adjustments are needed. Monitoring would allow providers to see, for example, if agreed representatives are participating in risk assessments, why they are not participating, and open the way for adjustments to the practices that may not be working.

Evidence for underlying practice is as important as evidence for interagency working

The review showed that the processes through which professionals came together to assess people and refer them to services were the main focus of the evaluations and models. Less focus was placed on the evidence for the service provided at the practice level. Most of the underlying services and supports already existed, with perhaps coordination services being an additional element. Evidence for how well these services and supports were already working may not have been determined and may require separate or linked evaluations.

A common feature of interagency models was the establishment of formal agreements

Unsurprisingly, one of the most common developments for interagency working lay with the development of protocols and agreements for ways of working together and information sharing. Given that child protection is a statutory service, any **interface** in relation to others in the domestic and family violence service system will require this foundational development. Nevertheless, some models commented on limitations of the information sharing which provide important pointers for further development. Once protocols were established, shared databases increased the level of service development in ways that were reported to be helpful in some models. Information sharing is the precursor to risk assessment and risk management, as each agency often holds different knowledge of the level of severity, vulnerability, and protective factors which may be present for each child in a family. A number of the models had developed shared or agreed risk assessments that contributed to service access and the intervention or management of the case. A particular challenge in this area is the lack of agreement about the risks to children from domestic and family violence and different perspectives on risk thresholds.

Training is a frequently used starting point in interagency working

Training in relation to attitudes, the knowledge base, and practice development was a commonly identified initiative. Training appears to be the main component of infrastructure support. While foundational, it is insufficient on its own to support a major culture and service system change process. Evidence suggests that training alone has little impact on change (Mildon, Dickinson, & Shlonsky, 2014). Some of this training was much more in-depth in some of the models described. Much of the training also appeared to involve a single agency. This meant that some of the compounding benefits of multi-agency training, such as getting to know other professionals, exchanging different perspectives, and developing "institutional empathy" (through an understanding of how different services or systems work with families where there is domestic and family violence) were not available to support the development of a stronger interface between child protection and specialist family violence services or family law professionals. In addition, issues of social and cultural diversity need to inform training as a way of embedding responsiveness to diversity in the policies and practices of interagency work.

Working with the court requires additional formal agreement considerations

Working with the family law system in Australia is complex, and includes the Federal Circuit Court, Family Law Court, and dispute resolution services. The Magellan Project (an interagency collaborative model of case management in the Family Court of Australia for where there are serious sexual or physical child abuse allegations in separating parent cases) highlights the importance of formal arrangements for information sharing in the court process. Without a strong injunction or protocol, there is little information sharing regarding issues of risk for children. There may be a need for stronger governance or infrastructure arrangements to support information sharing or serious risks to children may not be taken into account when decisions are being made about child living arrangements.

Further consideration is needed for the infrastructure to support models

In addition to formal agreements and training, some of the infrastructure provided to support interagency work included: co-location, committees to oversee work, appointment of agency representatives on committees, policy developments, funding, manuals, and common frameworks. However, infrastructure components were less frequently cited in these models than service components. Where infrastructure components were used, some challenges still remained. For example, co-location or required representation on a committee did not necessarily result in people working together or being present and engaged.

There is an apparent lack of child protection presence

Unsurprisingly, the interface with child protection presents several challenges. Given the well-established risks for children exposed to domestic and family violence, the potential high numbers of children exposed, and the very high risk posed by populations participating in these models, a greater child protection presence could be expected. Despite efforts to increase collaborations and some improvements noted in many models, there were several instances, including in high-risk panel meetings, where child protection involvement and the interests of children were reported to be inadequate.

Evidence may be available in other fields or sectors

Evidence in this field is insufficient in order to determine what works in the interface between child protection and domestic and family violence and/or family law and previous reviews on interagency working provide little further guidance about effectiveness. There may, however, be evidence of promising models in other sectors, such as health, from which transferrable elements may be drawn. A recommendation of this review is that evidence for models of working together in other fields is sought. Elements of these models, such as interagency components and structures designed to support the interface between agencies, could be gleaned from models that have demonstrated success in both the way people work together and for improving outcomes for clients.

Conclusions

This review presents the first step in the process of determining the nature of the interface between child protection and domestic and family violence services or family law. While little regarding effectiveness can be gained from this review, it does highlight some of the underlying practices that have been used. In particular, some of the steps taken to work with child protection have been identified.

The key recommendations arising from this review are to invest more funding and support into evaluation and implementation of models, and consider the evidence for models outside this field where there may have been more rigorous evaluations.

Further information

This report forms part of the **PAT**hways and **R**esearch **I**n **C**ollaborative **I**nter-**Ag**ency working, or the PATRICIA Project. The full report: Macvean, M., Humphreys, C., Healey, L., Albers, B., Mildon, R., Connolly, M., ... Spada-Rinaldis, S. (2015). *The PATRICIA Project: PAThways and Research in Collaborative Inter-Agency working: State of knowledge paper* (ANROWS Landscapes 14/2015). Sydney: ANROWS.

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Key definitions

Please note that these terms appear in bold the first time they are used in the text (headings excepted).

Action research—participatory	An interactive, cyclical process of changing things in the process of studying them (Wicks, Reason & Bradbury, 2008). In the case of the PATRICIA Project, it involved influencing or enhancing collaborative practice and exploring how to strengthen perpetrator accountability in the process of researching it. This was achieved through bringing together the "right" interested stakeholders to pose questions, reflect on findings, and prompt new directions in data-gathering, analysis, and reflection in participatory ways.
Child protection	The statutory child welfare authority in each state and territory that is responsible for providing assistance; investigation into allegations of child abuse (including domestic and family violence) or neglect; care; and protection to children suspected of, or vulnerable, to harm.
Domestic and family violence— specialist DFV services	"Domestic and family violence" (DFV) is the term used in this report to encompass the range of violent and abusive behaviours—physical, psychological, sexual, financial, technology-facilitated, and neglectful—that are predominantly perpetrated by men against women and their children in current or past intimate, familial, or kinship relationships. This is consistent with the Third Action Plan 2016–2019 of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 (http://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/). The phrase "specialist DFV services" is used in this report to refer to a range of diverse agencies that provide specific interventions for women, children, or men who have experienced DFV either as victim-survivors or as perpetrators. They include (but are not limited to) agencies with a dedicated purpose to address DFV; agencies with a focus on a particular population (for example, Indigenous or CALD families and communities); legal and health agencies with particular expertise or programs in supporting women, children, or men who are affected by DFV; and peak DFV bodies in the different state and territory jurisdictions.
Family law system	Used in this report to refer collectively to the Family Court of Australia, the Family Court of Western Australia, the Federal Circuit Court of Australia, and family law and post-separation services, including legal aid, private legal services, and family relationship services. This is consistent with the Family Law Council Report to the Attorney-General on Families with Complex Needs and the Intersection of the Family Law and Child Protection Systems: Final Report—June 2016 (https://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/FamilyLawCouncil/Pages/FamilyLawCouncilpublishedreports.aspx).

Interface	Used in this report to refer to the joining or working together of different systems supporting families, in this case domestic and family violence, child protection, and family law. There is a range of different terms that may be used to describe different aspects of systems, services, or professionals working together. Some terms are used interchangeably and some have different meanings. Examples of terminology that may be used to describe the interface between systems reported here are: joined up; interagency; multi-agency; multisite; multidisciplinary; co-located; linked; linkage; coalition; cooperative; collaborative; networked; integrated; partnership; streamlined; coordinated.
Model	Practices, interventions, services, policies, reforms, or initiatives of interagency working.
Service array	The label given to one of the components in the interagency working framework used in this report (see Table 1). It refers to revisions to the spectrum of services that are available for clients in order to remove insufficiencies including: gaps or overlaps, level of services provision (universal/secondary/tertiary), life course considerations (services across age groups), or geographic location.
Perpetrator accountability	The process of men as individuals, or as a collective (such as in the case of Indigenous communities), taking responsibility for their use of DFV. It also means that it is beholden on service systems—criminal justice, civil justice, and child protection systems, as well as non-mandated services—to ensure that the impact of their responses is not complicit in the violence and abuse and does not perpetuate the conditions that create it.