

Measuring research impact:

A case study of the PATRICIA project on child protection policy, practice and outcomes

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ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

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Introduction

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS) is a national organisation tasked with building, translating and disseminating the evidence base to inform policy and practice on women's and children's safety. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth Government and all state and territory governments of Australia as an initiative of Australia's first *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan). ANROWS's constitution identifies a key that aim of the organisation is to "effectively translate and disseminate evidence to inform policy and practice design decisions" (ANROWS, 2020).

By disseminating research and evidence to relevant policymakers and practice designers, ANROWS hopes that its research has an impact on responding to and preventing violence against women and children. The case study reported in this paper examines this link between knowledge dissemination and subsequent policy and practice impact for one major piece of research, the "PATHways and Research In Collaborative Inter-Agency working" (PATRICIA) research project (the research). This research was chosen because it represented the initial project in a series that investigated the use of the Safe & Together (S&T) model (Safe & Together Institute, 2020) in the context of interagency collaboration across child protection, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and family violence services. Subsequent projects have included the "Invisible practices" project (Healey et al., 2018a), the "STACY" project (Healey et al., 2020) and the "STACY for children" project (Humphreys et al., 2020).¹

The PATRICIA research had five components that implemented components of the S&T model of domestic and family violence (DFV)–informed child protection (CP) practice (Safe & Together Institute, 2020):

1. A review ("state of knowledge") paper on CP, DFV and family law collaboration (Macvean et al., 2015).
2. A "pathways" component (Humphreys & Healey, 2017; Shlonsky. et al., 2017) in two parts:
 - a. An analysis of trends in numbers of CP cases with and without DFV in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia
 - b. An analysis of the pathways that children take through the CP system in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.
3. A "case reading" action research component that involved 1) policy analysis and 2) the use of the S&T framework to read cases of children living with DFV and coming to the attention of CP in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia, especially with respect to perpetrator interventions (Humphreys & Healey, 2017; Mandel, et al., 2017).
4. Five action research "case studies of collaborative practice" in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia (Humphreys & Healey, 2017).
5. Development of a *Collaborative Practice Framework for Child Protection and Specialist Domestic and Family Violence Services* (Humphreys & Healey, 2017; Connolly, Healey & Humphreys, 2017). The framework is intended as a mechanism to transfer the research findings into practice. That is, it is a knowledge transfer mechanism (Connolly et al., 2017, p. 3).

¹ STACY is an acronym for "Safe & Together Addressing Complexity".

National policy and practice context of the research

The research was based on a recognition among DFV researchers, practitioners and policymakers that CP systems in Australia do not respond adequately to cases where DFV is present. CP systems tended to:

- focus on mothers and expect them to undertake all the protection work even though mothers themselves may be victims of DFV
- not engage with men, who in this context are predominantly the perpetrators
- lack the skill development required to use a DFV-informed approach to CP
- conflate safety with separation of parents, when it is known that separation is highly dangerous, and many men will be allowed significant unsupervised contact with children
- not identify patterns of abusive and violent behaviour nor use these to understand the mother's response
- lack strong collaboration with the DFV sector (F²).

Queensland policy and practice context of the research

The above issues were also of concern to DFV practitioners. The PATRICIA research was conducted in Queensland soon after a major inquiry into DFV, the findings of which were published in the *Not Now, Not Ever* report (State of Queensland, 2015). This provided impetus for change. In addition, Queensland was one of the jurisdictions already beginning to engage with the S&T model of DFV-informed child protection (Humphreys & Healey, 2017, p. 17) as a way of addressing the concerns regarding how CP dealt with cases involving DFV. In particular, the S&T model aims to “shift the emphasis of practice away from ‘failure to protect’ to accountability and toward intervention with perpetrators as parents” (Safe & Together Institute, 2020, p. 4).

2 Capital letters are codes representing the interview participants for this case study.

Methodology

This case study analysed the impact of the research by:

1. Using Google search and Google Scholar to identify academic papers citing the PATRICIA research products up until the end of 2020. Relevant items were then collected and reviewed to identify the way in which they were using the research, particularly in terms of impact on policy and practice.
2. Analysing materials on the Queensland Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women (CSYW) web site, in particular the *Child Safety Practice Manual* and related resources.
3. Interviewing key stakeholders in the CSYW including:
 - a. The former Director General of CSYW
 - b. The Practice Leader (Domestic Family Violence), Practice Quality and Clinical Support, Child and Family Practice
 - c. The Official Solicitor, Office of the Child and Family Official Solicitor (OCFOS)
 - d. The Regional Executive Director, Moreton Region
 - e. The Regional Domestic and Family Violence Senior Practitioner, Moreton Region.
4. Interviewing the lead researcher for the PATRICIA project.

The interview questions focused on the policy and practice context of the PATRICIA project and the respondents' views on the need for and impact of the research.



Results

Impact on policy and practice scholarship

For the most part, the research was only cited in derivative articles, that is, summaries or re-workings of the ANROWS publications (e.g. Healey, Connolly & Humphreys, 2018; Humphreys, Healey & Mandel, 2018; Macvean, Humphreys & Healey, 2018; Schlonsky et al., 2019;) or papers produced from subsequent, related research (e.g. Invisible Practices; Healey et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). One article used the PATRICIA research to justify including questions about parenting practices in an assessment/intake form in Sweden (Hultmann et al, 2020).

According to one high-level CSYW official, the PATRICIA project successfully drew people in the sector into the DFV-informed approach. As a result, when the subsequent studies (Invisible Practices, STACY and STACY for children) were proposed, CSYW was willing to support them, thus further impacting policy and practice scholarship (B).



The PATRICIA project successfully drew people in the sector into the DFV-informed approach.

Impact on child protection policy and practice

The interviewees agreed that the PATRICIA project, as part of a broader set of initiatives, has made a significant contribution to a more ethical and appropriate approach to CP incidents involving DFV.³ The other initiatives which PATRICIA complemented were the *Not Now, Not Ever* report, internal CSYW reviews, and reports from the child death review and DFV death review panels. In addition, CSYW also was influenced by the Victorian Royal Commission into family violence. Although it is difficult to tease out the precise contribution of each of these initiatives to changes in policy and practice, several PATRICIA-related impacts are noteworthy.

Impact on the Safe & Together model implementation in Queensland

Many of the PATRICIA project's practice-focused activities were derived from the S&T model. Indeed, the project's final report notes that:

The strongest group of recommendations from the project advisory group related to the training and coaching of workers across statutory and non-statutory agencies using the Safe & Together model with families experiencing DFV. (Humphreys & Healey, 2017, p. 11)

Therefore, an analysis of the extent to which these recommendations have been taken up, that is the extent to which the S&T model is being implemented in CP practice in Queensland, is central to a study of the impact of the PATRICIA project.

The S&T model had already been introduced into CP practice to a small extent in Queensland at the commencement of the PATRICIA project. However, interviewees argued that the project supported, gave impetus to, and added credibility to the nascent implementation of S&T (B: it gave S&T a "huge boost"; E, F). It did this by providing an evidence base (B, E) and an authorising environment (B), and by partnering with practitioners in knowledge production (A).

³ The main initiatives which have complemented the PATRICIA project include implementing the Safe & Together model, and the subsequent research projects: Invisible Practices, STACY and STACY for Children.

S&T is a model borrowed from the United States. The PATRICIA project added to the evidence that the S&T model was appropriate to the Australian context (B, C, E) and could help address the issues identified in, for example, *Not Now, Not Ever* (B, C). In addition, recommendations in the PATRICIA report paralleled several recommendations in the *Not Now, Not Ever* report. Such congruence was seen, for example, in, greater collaboration through the establishment of high-risk panels, trialling of integrated service responses, and the development and use of common risk assessment approaches and information sharing protocols (State of Queensland, 2019a).

Involvement in the PATRICIA project provided an authorising environment for the S&T model (B, F). This occurred because S&T was a key component of the PATRICIA project, which in turn was seen as a major, national research project led by a prominent and credible DFV researcher (B, C, F). In addition, the research was funded by a national research organisation (ANROWS) in which Queensland has a stake and which already had a positive track record in Queensland through its involvement in developing the common risk and safety framework (State of Queensland, 2017a), the information sharing guidelines (State of Queensland, 2017b) and ANROWS's commissioned research to inform the implementation of the National Outcome Standards for Perpetrator Interventions (NOSPI; Commonwealth of Australia, 2015; A).

This authorising environment has contributed to an increased uptake of the S&T model (as recommended in the PATRICIA report). S&T is now the official model for DFV-informed practice for CP in Queensland and is being implemented in more than 50 Child Safety Service Centres around the state (B). About 2,000 workers in both the government and non-government sectors have undertaken S&T training (B), with workers from various sectors being trained together (C). CSYW has 17 approved S&T trainers in its ranks (B). The S&T model has spread beyond the ranks of child safety and DFV specialists to related sectors. For example, in 2019, the S&T Institute conducted two workshops on domestic violence-informed practice for solicitors in the Queensland Office of the Child and Family Official Solicitor (OCFOS; Safe & Together Institute, 2020). In addition, S&T and the PATRICIA and subsequent research gave confidence and permission to practitioners to pivot to perpetrators and intervene with them so that the perpetrators and their behaviors were no longer invisible (C).

The PATRICIA project focused on working with practitioners to produce knowledge about what works in CP. It provided a credible practitioner-focused impetus to implementing the S&T model. As a result, staff felt like they were partners in improving practice and generating knowledge, rather than being the subjects of research (A).

Participants in this case study acknowledged that implementation of the S&T model is ongoing in Queensland CP practice. Variability exists in the extent to which practitioners are using the model (B, C). In addition, although the CSYW *Child Protection Safety Manual* promotes the S&T model (State of Queensland, 2019b), many of the resources linked to it date from the pre-S&T period (e.g. the *Case Consultation Guide*: State of Queensland, n.d.⁴).

4 Although the *Case Consultation Guide* has no publication date, the most recent item in the reference list dates from 2012.

Impact on conceptualising and practising child protection

The PATRICIA project and the S&T model provided a common language, tools, philosophy and concepts for CP work (A, C, F). This had several major impacts.

First, there has been improved coordination of approach between CP and DFV sectors and the integration of a DFV-informed approach to child safety. The PATRICIA project is directly referenced in Queensland's *Child safety and domestic violence-informed practice strategy 2019–2023* document (State of Queensland, 2019c). Aspects of this approach are seen in current DFV-informed child safety practices such as:

- partnering with the non-offending parent
- undertaking a pivot to the perpetrator (see below)
- focusing on the perpetrator's patterns of coercive control
- focusing on the impact of the father's behaviour as a parenting choice and its impact on children (C, E).

Second, the uptake of the S&T model has had several impacts on legal aspects of the CP system, both within the OCFOS within CSYW, and in the legal sector more broadly.

- The language used by officials in the OCFOS shifted from victim-blaming to focusing on the perpetrator's behaviour and patterns of coercive control (D, E). For example, the practice had been to write notes and affidavits, present evidence in court or talk about DFV in the case using phrases like "There was a history of domestic violence in this relationship". This language elides the perpetrator's behaviour and responsibility. Following S&T training, lawyers from OCFOS will use a phrase such as "This man uses violence" and provide evidence to support that claim (D).
- Training in S&T has also been extended to officials in Legal Aid Queensland, the Director of Child Protection Litigation (DPCL), and the Office of the Public Guardian (OPG). At the time of writing, OCFOS was about to take up an invitation to the family law court to talk to judges and the officials who write the social assessment and family reports (D).
- OCFOS now prefers to write or vary domestic violence orders (DVOs) on behalf of mothers (with their consent), because it is safer for OCFOS to do this than for the woman to do so. While OCFOS will give the case over to the DCPL at a certain point, OCFOS aims to partner with the woman from the beginning in a way that keeps her safe. CP previously did not partner with the non-violent partner (most often, a woman) before because it was considered to be taking sides (D).

The impact of this pivot to the perpetrator and partnering with the non-offending parent in the legal system has been summarized in the *Invisible Practices* final report and the practice guide (Healey, et al, 2018a, p. 14; Healey et al, 2018b, p. 6):

Being specific in describing the perpetrator's behaviours in case files and reports leads to perpetrator-focused interventions rather than interventions focused on the mother and children.

Safety planning and advocacy are central to partnering with women, but it is based on the documentation of the harm created by the perpetrator's use of DFV (not on an assessment of the mother's parenting, protection or whether she is prepared to separate).



The language used by officials in the OCFOS shifted from victim-blaming to focusing on the perpetrator's behaviour and patterns of coercive control.

Third, the emphasis on collaboration between CP and DFV sectors recommended in the PATRICIA report has supported Queensland's work to bridge the gap between the two sectors. CSYW has funded:

- DFV workers in new family and child connect services
- CP workers placed in DFV services
- DFV workers placed in CP centres
- Assessment and Service Connect (ASC), a system in which CP investigations are linked to an NGO child or family support intervention and which includes DFV support services during that investigative phase (A). This means that the CP system is better at screening and identifying patterns of behavior and harm and partnering with mothers, so it can support mothers to not have deep/unnecessary/intrusive involvement with the system when that is not necessary (E).
- while not every region has a high-risk team to coordinate collaborative practice, most regions have an integrative service response approach to information sharing and coordinating service delivery and sharing roles and responsibilities (E).

Fourth, the PATRICIA project, along with the S&T model, were influential in instigating a "pivot to the perpetrator" in CP cases involving DFV:

- CSYW has increased funding for perpetrator programs and implemented the "Walking with Dads" (WWD) program in four sites (Meyer et al, 2019).
- The evaluation of the integrated service response trial showed perpetrators being referred to high-risk teams and increased information sharing about perpetrators (State of Queensland, 2019a).
- CSYW safety initiatives for CP workers who were engaging more with fathers who used violence included providing them with mobile devices and special apps to see where they were in the field; distress alarms in cars; distress buttons on mobile phones; and provision of alerts if there was an incident in a place they were going to, at, or leaving (A).
- Practice focuses on the perpetrator's pattern of behavior, the probability of perpetrating against people outside the home, and the potential impacts on CP and other workers' physical and emotional safety (C, E). This leads to decisions about how to engage with each person safely, such as "How do we get mum on her own to talk about his coercive control, so she is safe" (C).
- Child safety workers and other practitioners are gaining confidence in engaging and intervening with perpetrators and using integrated service responses (C) and in responding to DFV issues in general (E).
- Safety plans are based on the pattern of coercive control. This produces better safety plans and intervention with the perpetrator, and focuses on children, which has been a gap in the CP sector (C).

Fifth, the PATRICIA project had a major impact on case work. It provided practical strategies to think about and improve CP practice through case readings that revealed practice deficiencies and their unintended consequences for victims and survivors and children (C, F). A follow-up case-reading in northern Queensland (cited in Healey al., 2018a, p. 18) showed "significant improvement in CP case file documentation where DFV was identified following significant exposure of CP practitioners to the Safe & Together model". Case analysis also continues to be a strategy used by CSYW quality practice

review teams undertaking case reviews in the CSSCs to gauge the extent to which CP officers are employing the S&T model (A).

One interviewee reported that “the case read tool is absolutely brilliant”. On completion of an investigation, the tool is used to evaluate the extent to which the case documents and practice are DFV-informed and areas where improvement is needed (C). This interviewee also noted that the regional practice task force developed a practice improvement plan and strategy based on the elements in the S&T case reading tool (C).

Impact on programs for victims and survivors, children, and perpetrators

The PATRICIA project has contributed to various positive impacts on victims and survivors, children, and perpetrators.

Impacts on victims and survivors and children

As part of the S&T approach that involves a “pivot to the perpetrator” and holding perpetrators accountable, and in line with the fifth practice recommendation of the PATRICIA report, Queensland developed and trialed the “Walking with Dads” (WWD) program. The evaluation of the trial (Meyer et al., 2019) included a survey of parents associated with the trial. The sample was small (n=24) but did show that no further Child Safety notifications were reported by the respondents. Over the course of the trial, mothers reported emotional wellbeing improvements for themselves and their children, an overall decrease in abusive behaviours, and an increased perception of their own safety (Meyer et al., 2019, p. 20).

One interviewee recalled an Invisible Practices forum in Sydney at which a mother from Queensland talked about WWD and child safety. She said that she feels CSYW is on her side and that the focus is on the perpetrator’s behavior (B). Another interviewee noted that the WWD program has provided a more engaging and appropriate way to support women (C).

Responses from service users to the S&T model, which the PATRICIA project supported, have been collected as part of the STACY for Children project. These users reported that working with the worker trained in S&T was an improvement on their previous experiences. In particular, they liked how the worker worked respectfully with their children. They also liked using the perpetrator mapping tool to understand and increase their DFV literacy. The tool provided a means for not shying away from the DFV but talking about the behaviours associated with DFV (F).

Because a wide range of stakeholders have now been trained in the S&T model, CSYW is able to allocate child safety cases to two different systems. Some cases enter the statutory system for investigation. However, other cases are directed to the NGO system, whose main point of reference is S&T. The NGO system works with the family and tries to keep the child with the non-offending parent. As a result, CSYW is more likely to send a case to the NGO system in order to keep the children together with the non-offending parent (most often, the mother; B).



The PATRICIA project has contributed to various positive impacts on victims and survivors, children, and perpetrators.

In the legal arena, the focus on partnering with the non-offending parent has resulted in OCFOS being more involved in supporting women to obtain DVOs. In the past, child safety officers (CSOs) would tell victims to go to Legal Aid or just give them a legal aid application form but not help them fill it out. However, OCFOS now supports vulnerable victims and survivors to fill out the form to make sure appropriate phrasing is used, especially around the DFV aspect. In addition, CSOs are available to support the applicant when they present the application at court. For example, a case study reported in the OFCOS described how a DVO was successfully submitted after the 16-year-old applicant challenged (upon her CSO's advice) the registrar's refusal to accept the application (D). Increased organisational support for applying for DVOs and greater success in obtaining them has led to even greater organisational buy-in for the S&T approach (D). DVOs reduce the likelihood that children will be removed from the non-offending parent, thus reducing the frequency of removals (C).

Another legal aspect that has changed due to S&T and focusing on women's and children's safety concerns subpoenas for CP case documents. These documents may contain information about women and children that compromises their safety. OCFOS is working on improving redaction from subpoenaed records of information that may place victims and survivors and/or their children at risk (D).

Impacts on perpetrators

One interviewee reported that in one region "mothers and children are saying that he has ceased some behaviours and (at least some of) the fathers are changing" (C). One contributing factor is the fact that the case tool provides case workers with a means of engaging the perpetrator in discussions about his behaviour and parenting. On the other hand, another senior manager suggested that it is too early to say if WWD has changed the behavior of perpetrators, but perpetrators were more motivated and engaged as a result of using the WWD approach (E).

In the legal arena, the perpetrator's behaviour is being more clearly described. For example, OCFOS separates out the risks for the father (e.g. further perpetration and not engaging with an intervention) from the risks to the mother in the legal work, identifying the pattern of behavior and its impact on children and mothers (D).

Conclusions

Overall, the PATRICIA project has had a major impact on shifting the CP system in Queensland. This shift has been *from* practices in which cases involving DFV were handled in such a way that the non-offending parent was unethically and unjustly further victimised by the removal of (usually) her child or children *to* an S&T model of DFV-informed approach in which the perpetrator's actions and choices are recognised, the perpetrator is held to account and the non-offending parent is treated as a partner in keeping herself and the children safe.

While the PATRICIA project was not the only influence driving this shift in practice, the project provided impetus and Australian-based evidence to support the uptake of the S&T model throughout Queensland. The national scope of the project and the reputation and standing of the key researcher and funding body, as well as the gaps in CP identified in the *Not Now, Not Ever* report, facilitated buy-in from key stakeholders in government. The most influential aspect of the research was probably the participatory case reading. This exercise presented stark evidence of the extent to which CP practice was failing victims and survivors of DFV, and together with the S&T model, provided alternative ways of conceptualising and addressing child protection cases involving DFV. As a result, the S&T model has not only been extensively incorporated into CSYW's work but has also been taken up by other stakeholders including affiliated NGO service providers and entities in the legal system.

One consequence of the uptake and adaptation of the S&T model across the CP, DFV and legal sectors has been improved collaboration and communication by providing a common language, philosophy and approach to CP cases involving DFV.

Finally, there is some evidence from evaluations and quality team reports that the S&T model has a positive impact on adult and child victims and survivors of DFV. CSYW officials note that information systems need to be improved before this impact can be systematically documented.



The PATRICIA project has had a major impact on shifting the child protection system in Queensland.

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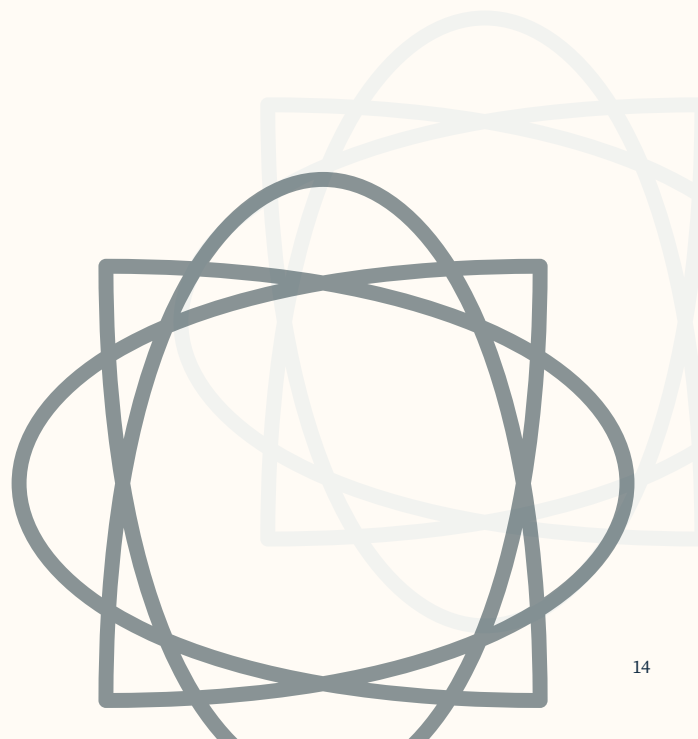
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Acknowledgement of Country

ANROWS acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge. We are committed to standing and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, honouring the truths set out in the [Warawarni-gu Guma Statement](#).

Acknowledgement of lived experiences of violence

ANROWS acknowledges the lives and experiences of people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence who are represented in this report. We recognise the individual stories of courage, hope and resilience that form the basis of ANROWS research.

ANROWS acknowledges that children and young people living in homes where domestic and family violence (DFV) is present are not simply "exposed" to DFV – they are experiencing it. There are no circumstances in which children and young people are exposed to DFV and are not also being impacted by this violence. Therefore, ANROWS will always default to using "experienced DFV" instead of "were exposed to DFV" or "witnessed DFV". This language aligns with the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, which recognises that children experience DFV as victims in their own right, and also seeks to honour the voices of victims and survivors who have felt minimised, erased or unacknowledged as childhood survivors.

Caution: Some people may find parts of this content confronting or distressing. Recommended support services include 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732), Lifeline (13 11 14) and, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 13YARN (13 92 76).

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