

Screened but not heard:

The importance of bringing children's voices into the room when parents present for non-parenting services

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Issues

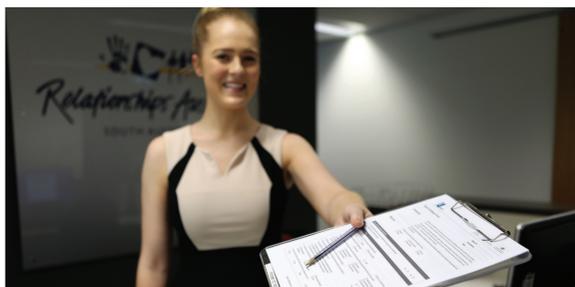
- People seek out community-based services more often after harms like Family Violence. Usually children will have also been harmed by exposure to this violence (1).
- When they arrive at services, clients may not name risks unless asked appropriately (2). Despite being expected to ask about safety risks, many practitioners don't (1).
- Risks to children might be missed if practitioners are not in parenting or children's programs because they may not think it's within their scope to ask about risks to children

Opportunity

- DOORS takes a wide, whole-of-family view on risk (3). DOOR 1 is validated as an effective universal risk screening tool (4)
- DOOR 1 covers risks like FV, suicide, mental health, as well as child abuse and parenting stress. Because it is a universal tool, it can identify risks to children even when their parents are not using parenting or children's services
- Can DOOR 1 discover risks to children from people who present for non-parenting/non-children's services? How do these risks compare to parenting and children's services? Will it bring children's voices into the room?

Setting and Sample

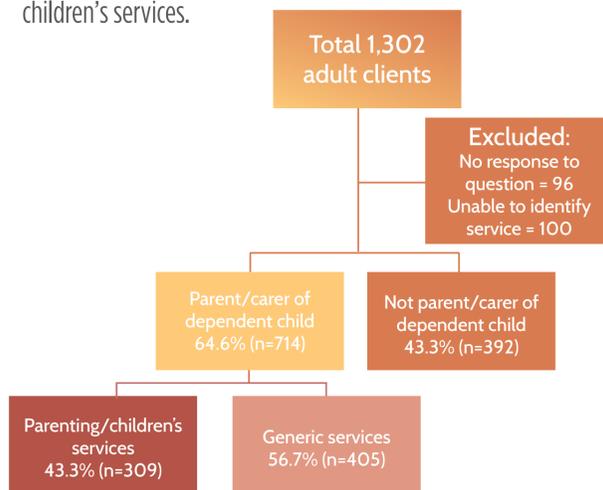
- DOORS is routinely used at Relationships Australia SA. The DOORS app 1 takes 15 minutes to complete in the waiting room before meeting with a practitioner for elaboration
- Clients overwhelmingly see DOORS as 'just part of paperwork' and many see the benefits to 'being screened' (5)



- We asked all adult clients over one month to complete an anonymous survey, totalling 1,302 clients. Parents and carers in all services then anonymously completed DOOR 1 items about risks to children, as part of the survey.
- Where possible, the primary service was identified as follows:
 - 'Children's' where the child is the primary client (eg iKids/ Supporting Children After Separation Program/SCASP)
 - 'Parenting' where the parent/carer focuses only on parenting issues (eg Children and Parenting Services/CAPS)
 - 'Generic' where the adult does not need to be a parent/carer to use the service (eg Family and Relationships Services/FARS)

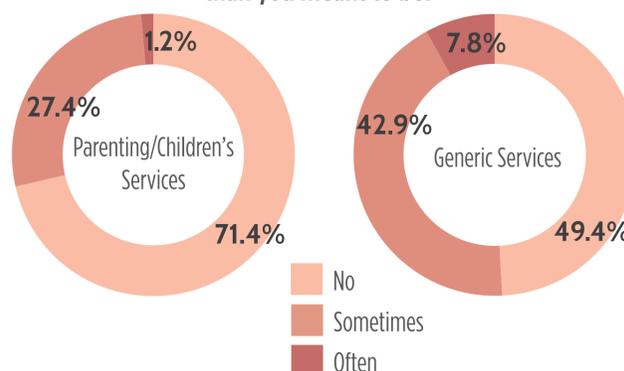
Results

- Overall, we found 54.8% of all adult clients were parents or carers of dependent children. 309 (43.3%) were parents or carers but using generic services, and 405 (56.7%) were using parenting or children's services.



- Crucially, parenting stress was higher on key variables for those using generic services, not children or parenting specific services.
- The highest raised stress was excessive 'harshness', which may indicate coercive, physical parenting style and a risk of abusive behaviour to a child

"Were you harsher to your children than you meant to be?"



- Parents reported no significant difference in children's distress whether they were actually using parenting and children specific services, or generic services – kids were equally stressed no matter which door their parents entered.

	Parenting and Children's Services (% Yes)	Generic Services (% Yes)	Chi-Square (p value)
Baby/Young Children (under 5 years)			
In the past 6 months, has any professional (teacher, doctor, etc.) been concerned about how your young child/ren was doing?	19.7%	15.3%	p > 0.05
In the past 6 months, has your young child(ren) seemed:			
more fussy/aggressive/upset than usual?	24.6%	29.8%	p > 0.05
distressed/angry/withdrawn?	21.4%	23.5%	p > 0.05
School-Aged Children (5 years or over)			
In the past 6 months, has any professional (teacher, doctor, etc.) been concerned about how your child was doing?	33.4%	33.9%	p > 0.05
In the past 6 months, compared to how they usually are, do any of your children seem:			
behaving in concerning ways?	31.6%	28.7%	p > 0.05

Your take home messages

- Parents of dependent children frequently use community-based relationship services which are not about their children or about parenting
- Parents not using parenting/children's services say their children are equally distressed as those in parenting/children's services
- Parents not using parenting/children's services report higher parenting stress than those using parenting/children's services, suggesting a risk of harm to children
- Practitioners in generic non-parenting/children's services are unlikely to ever see the children; they must bring children's voices into the room another way
- Practitioners can do this by asking all parents about parenting stress and risks including those outside their immediate service frame
- DOORS provides a robust framework for universal screening for all risks after separation, including risks to children

Further Information

- DOORS resources are freely available for service providers at www.familydoors.com. This includes the DOORS app which makes screening even more efficient.
- Research collaborations are also invited to use universal risk screening with DOORS in your setting. See website for terms of use and contact details for Prof. J. McIntosh

References

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