The PATRICIA Project: PAThways and Research In Collaborative Inter-Agency Working

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**Background:** The collaborative relationships between statutory Child Protection, specialist D/FV services and Family Law have a checkered history. The risks and the needs of children living with D/FV violence call for intervention to support their safety and well-being. However none of these interventions systems were developed with the needs of children living with D/FV as their primary concern. Unsurprisingly, collaboration to enhance the response to children, provide support for their mothers and accountability for the perpetrators of the violence and abuse has not been straightforward.

**Research Aim:** The PATRICIA project aims to identify criteria for effective collaboration to elucidate an understanding of the barriers and facilitating factors for collaborative work across statutory child protection, women’s DFV support services, and services provided in the family law area.

**Methodology:** A mixed-method approach involves five different research strands 1) State of Knowledge - scoping review of collaborative practices; 2) Pathways – analysis of administrative child protection data in 3 states to explore the patterns of different cohorts of children and their families through the child protection system; 3) Case studies of directions for practice and policy development in five states; 4) Perpetrator accountability explored through i) documentary analysis of child protection policy and practice ii) case reading of child protection practice through detailed analysis of four files in case reading teams in five states; 5) An action research process provided through stakeholder/advisory workshops which provide guidance and direction for the project and its findings.

**Findings:** The scoping review is now published as a full State of Knowledge paper [http://media.aomx.com/anrows.org.au/s3fs-public/14_4.5%20Landscapes%20PATRICIA_E.pdf](http://media.aomx.com/anrows.org.au/s3fs-public/14_4.5%20Landscapes%20PATRICIA_E.pdf) as well as a briefing paper. 24 projects were explored against a range of governance, management and operational criteria and the evidence base on which claims to efficacy of the collaborative processes were made. The evidence base proved to be weak. However, a wide range of strategies have clearly been developed to support collaborative practices particularly between specialist family violence services and child protection. The most common was joint training. Co-location of workers, agreed criteria for assessment and risk management; new governance arrangements were also in evidence.

The training workshop with David Mandel to understand the case reading process and its application to a group of de-identified child protection files has been enthusiastically undertaken by teams from five states. The ways in which the Child Protection workers and managers in five states have galvanised their resources to facilitate the case reading training opportunity, alongside the complex process of identifying and redacting the files to be used in the case reading workshops with researchers and specialist D/FV workers has in itself provided a rich source of data on the underpinnings of collaborations in this complex space.

*More information over page*
Next Steps: The PATRICIA project is moving into the second year of research. The case reading workshops will occur in March; the Pathways analysis will continue and report; the case studies have been identified and are in process; the final action research workshop will draw out the key learnings which may identify ways to step forward with more effective and ethical strategies for service system providers intervening with children living with domestic violence.

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