

INPLASY

What's Wrong and What's at Risk? A Scoping Review and Content Analysis of Family Court Reports in Australia

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ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Support - Nil.

Review Stage at time of this submission - Preliminary searches.

Conflicts of interest - None declared.

INPLASY registration number: INPLASY202450123

Amendments - This protocol was registered with the International Platform of Registered Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis Protocols (INPLASY) on 27 May 2024 and was last updated on 27 May 2024.

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective 1. Through a scoping review, explore the extent, range, and nature of available literature on family court report methodologies in Australia, focusing on the challenges and strengths of current practices, and experiences of the process.
2. On the basis of content analysis of research findings, determine how the literature characterises the strengths, challenges, and best practices in family report writing, and how poor quality court reports impact family safety and wellbeing.
3. Discuss how the scoping review findings and results of the content analysis contribute to a greater overall understanding of the topic and the implications for future research, policy, and practice.

Rationale The aim of this study is to understand the impact of family court report quality on the safety and wellbeing of families navigating family court in Australia.

The objective of this study to explore and synthesise the available evidence on the quality of family court reports in Australia and understand the contributing factors and consequences for family safety and wellbeing associated with poor quality reports.

Condition being studied The aim of this study is to understand the impact of family court report quality on the safety and wellbeing of families navigating family court in Australia.

METHODS

Search strategy PsycINFO, Scopus, PubMed, CINAHL, Web of Science, CINAHL, AustLII, Westlaw/LexisNexis, OpenGrey, GreyNet ("family report*" OR "family assessment*" OR "child custody evaluation*" OR "family court report" OR "expert report") AND ("forensic process" OR quality OR "client satisfaction" OR "assessment tool*" OR cross-examination OR "writing process*" OR "parental alienation" OR

“best practice*” OR methodology OR impartial OR unbiased)

AND (“separating parent*” OR divorce OR *custody OR *separation OR post-separation OR contact* OR “parenting matters”) AND (“domestic violence” OR “intimate partner violence” OR “coercive control” OR abusive* OR “abusive fathers” OR “family violence” OR abuse OR conflict OR high-risk) AND (“children's safety” OR “child protection” OR “trauma-informed” OR “risk assessment” OR “best interests of the child” OR “children's wishes”) AND (safety OR risk OR *outcomes OR experiences OR wellbeing) AND (Australia) AND PubYear > 2009 AND Limit to Language: (English).

Participant or population Families using court services for separation in Australia; legal professionals including lawyers, judges; family report writers, in Australia.

Intervention Nil.

Comparator Nil.

Study designs to be included • Published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies).

Eligibility criteria

- Published in or after 1995. This date range was chosen to capture impacts of the Family Law Reform Act (1995) which saw a shift towards protecting children (Hardy, 2016).
- Contains information pertaining to family court report writing methodology in the context of legal proceedings in family courts in Australia.
- Published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies).
- Grey literature (e.g., government reports, government policies, conference proceedings, graduate dissertations, legal reports, advocates). Grey literature consists of literature not formally published in sources such as journal articles or books (Higgins et al., 2023). In this study, it was critical to capturing the regular and radical shifts in policy and reforms in response to changes in societal attitudes in Australia (Young, 2016).
- Published in English and in Australia.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Studies that focused on pre-court procedures such as mediation and family dispute resolution as the focus of this study is on family court in Australia.
- Secondary reviews such as systematic reviews.

Information sources PsycINFO, Scopus, PubMed, CINAHL, Web of Science, CINAHL,

AustLII, Westlaw/LexisNexis, OpenGrey, GreyNet etc

• Published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies).

• Grey literature (e.g., government reports, government policies, conference proceedings, graduate dissertations, legal reports, advocates). Grey literature consists of literature not formally published in sources such as journal articles or books (Higgins et al., 2023).

Hand searching.

Main outcome(s) 1. Through a scoping review, explore the extent, range, and nature of available literature on family court report methodologies in Australia, focusing on the challenges and strengths of current practices, and experiences of the process.

2. On the basis of content analysis of research findings, determine how the literature characterises the strengths, challenges, and best practices in family report writing, and how poor quality court reports impact family safety and wellbeing.

3. Discuss how the scoping review findings and results of the content analysis contribute to a greater overall understanding of the topic and the implications for future research, policy, and practice.

Data management EndNote20.

Quality assessment / Risk of bias analysis JBI Critical Appraisal Tools.

Strategy of data synthesis Phase 1 (title and abstract) and phase 2 (full text) screening. The full screening and eligibility process will be performed by two independent reviewers. All inconsistencies and disagreements will be resolved through discussion and consensus.

Based on the JBI template source of evidence information, characteristics, and results extraction instrument (<https://jbi-global-wiki.refined.site/space/MANUAL/4687579>) a data extraction template will be created.

Subgroup analysis Nil.

Sensitivity analysis Nil.

Language restriction English.

Country(ies) involved Australia.

Keywords family court reports; Australia; scoping review; parenting matters; court report writer; domestic violence.

Dissemination plans Intended audience is legal and mental health professionals who provide services to divorcing parents and should be alerted to the unique dynamics and aftermath of DFV.

Contributions of each author

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