



Summary Report

'Talking Families'

Examining cultural differences in the role of family and community-level risk and protective factors on parental empowerment, informal and formal help seeking

Prepared for:

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1. Methodology

1.1 Talking Families Survey

This research uses survey data from the Talking Families Campaign commissioned by the Queensland Family and Child Commission. For the purpose of this report we analyse data derived from the 2015-2016 Talking Families Survey, which was conducted by Ipsos Australia with participants from metropolitan, inner and outer regional areas, as well as remote to very remote areas in Queensland. The Talking Families Survey captured experiences relating to parenting, coping, help seeking and engagement in a culturally diverse sample (Ipsos Social Research, 2016).

Ipsos previously examined and reported a number of significant bivariate findings with regards to parental empowerment and efficacy, as well as help seeking (both formal and informal), amongst other outcome measures (Ipsos Social Research, 2016). We build on the existing Ipsos research by undertaking a series of multivariate analyses, with a particular focus on the role of domestic and family violence, community and neighbourhood factors and cultural differences in parental empowerment and efficacy, help seeking and engagement. We examine the role of individual characteristics and risk factors along with family- and community-level risk and protective factors. For the purpose of this report we generate findings for the overall parent sample and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific subsample of parents.

1.2 Focus

The focus of this research was to generate knowledge on parental help seeking and engagement. In order to do this, we examine a number of risk and protective factors that affect parents' perceptions of efficacy and empowerment, along with their likelihood of seeking informal and formal support in relation to parenting. We include the role of parental empowerment and efficacy because research has highlighted its relevance in understanding and fostering parental engagement with different sources of support (Dempsey & Dunst, 2004; Minnes, Perry & Weiss, 2014; Nachshen & Minnes, 2005; Vuorenmaa, Perälä, Halme, Kaunonen & Åstedt-Kurki, 2015). We are interested in whether differences in parental empowerment and help-seeking behaviours are associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status and speaking a language other than English. While we examine the role of various risk and protective factors associated with our outcome variables from a theoretical perspective (i.e. parental empowerment and help-seeking literature), we are particularly interested in the role of DFV and family and neighbourhood/ community support and connectedness on these outcomes. Further, looking specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, we examine the extent to which cultural connectedness influences parental empowerment and help-seeking behaviours for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. The following research questions guide our analysis:

- Are there differences in parental efficacy and empowerment, informal and formal help seeking for Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants and English language and non-English language speakers?
- How do experiences of DFV influence parental efficacy and empowerment, informal and formal help seeking?
- How does informal (family and friends) support influence parental efficacy and empowerment, informal and formal help seeking?
- How do neighbourhood social support factors influence parental efficacy and empowerment, informal and formal help seeking?

- How does cultural connectedness influence parental efficacy and empowerment and help-seeking behaviours for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents?

1.3 Sample

For our analyses we use the parent subsample of the Talking Families Survey. This sample comprises 1,991 participants who have a dependant under the age of 18 years in their care, either part or all of the time. For detailed sample characteristics please refer to the full report (Meyer & Wickes, 2016). We provide an in-depth analysis of parental empowerment and help-seeking behaviours in the overall parent sample and the subsample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents (n=510) specifically.

With regards to examining if and how findings around parental empowerment and efficacy, informal and formal help seeking differ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents we need to note some limitations regarding the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent subsample. From our examination of the socio-demographic characteristics of this subsample, it is clear that it is not representative of Australia's overall Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Ninety-six percent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents captured in the parent subsample reside in major cities with the remaining four percent residing in inner and outer regional locations and only one respondent identifying as residing in a remote community. This residential distribution therefore under-represents those residing in regional, rural and remote communities. Australian Census data for example shows that in 2011, only around one third (34.8%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in major cities (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2013a).

Further, the subsample was not representative with regards to educational attainment. Nearly 70% of the Talking Families Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent sample had at least completed year 12, compared to an average of nearly 25% in the overall population captured in the 2006 census data (Australia Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2008). The current sample further shows an underrepresentation of single parent households in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subsample, with 39.4% reporting single parent status compared to around 75% in the overall population (AHRC, 2008). Findings relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are therefore limited to this particular survey sample and cannot be generalised to the broader population¹.

1.4 Analysis

We use step-wise regression models to examine the role of socio-demographic factors (step 1), individual risk factors (step 2), family and friend support measures (step 3) and neighbourhood social support measures (step 4) in understanding variation in parental efficacy and empowerment, informal (family and friend) support and formal help seeking. We then use the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent subsample and consider the association between connection to culture and our outcome variables. We note that the original sample is based on probability and non-probability techniques, and although the non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sample is largely representative of the population from which it is drawn this does not apply to the Aboriginal and

¹ Overall survey data used by Ipsos in their report based on the full survey sample (N=4,261) was weighted. Data used for this report has not been weighted based on the fact that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subsample is a non-random sample, which is not representative of the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. From a methodological point of view, data can therefore not be weighted because it does not allow the generation of generalizable characteristics within this non-random, non-representative sample.

Torres Strait Islander sample. Any inferences from our analyses are therefore only attributable to the sample and not the wider population. For more details on the analytical techniques and models, please refer to the full report (Meyer & Wickes, 2016).

1.5 Variables

Our variables are grouped into several categories: (1) socio-demographic characteristics (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ancestry and Non-English Speaking background); (2) individual risk factors (including experiences of DFV); (3) family and friends support factors; and (4) neighbourhood social support factors. For a detailed overview and description of variable, please refer to the full report (Meyer & Wickes, 2016).

2. Key Findings and Implications

In this summary report we focus on the key findings and their implications as they relate to our original research questions. For a full overview of findings presented for each statistical model, please refer to the full report (Meyer & Wickes, 2016). Findings are summarised under the following themes:

- The role of DFV with regards to parental efficacy and empowerment, informal and formal help seeking
- The role of informal support (family and friends) with regards to parental efficacy and empowerment, informal and formal help seeking
- The role of neighbourhood social support factors with regards to parental efficacy and empowerment, informal and formal help seeking
- Culturally specific observations with regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people

2.1 The role of DFV

The role of DFV was of particular interest to us, given its often isolating effect on victims, especially with regards to help seeking (Evans & Feder, 2016; Meyer, 2012). Interestingly, DFV plays a very small role in predicting parental engagement and empowerment in this survey sample. In the overall sample, the presence of DFV predicts lower levels of parental empowerment and efficacy. However, once we control for informal support and neighbourhood social support variables, this relationship is no longer significant. This suggests that the effect of DFV on parental efficacy and empowerment can be mediated by protective factors at the family, friends and community level. Those with strong connections to family, friends and neighbours experience significantly higher parental efficacy and empowerment. In addition, the presence or absence of DFV has no predictive power with regards to parental empowerment and help seeking in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subsample. While this may partly be due to the nature of this subsample it may also suggest that even in communities and populations exposed to disproportionately high levels of DFV, other individual, informal support and neighbourhood social support factors can act as protective factors to ensure the engagement and help seeking of parents, including those affected by DFV.

The challenge arising here is that a number of studies have highlighted the level of social isolation suffered by many victims affected by DFV. In some instances perpetrators strategically isolate victims from informal and formal support sources (Meyer, 2012). In other instances, the shame and self-blame

associated with DFV simply prevents victims from disclosing these experiences (Evans & Feder, 2016). Increasing individual and community awareness and education around DFV, its complex nature and the challenges associated with help seeking for many victims are therefore crucial factors in strengthening connectedness, engagement and help seeking of those affected by DFV (Meyer, 2012).

2.2 The role of informal (family and friends) support

In the context of our overall sample as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subsample, informal family and friends support played a significant role in parents' empowerment and efficacy, help seeking and engagement with formal parenting services; in many cases above and beyond the explanations offered by socio-demographic variables and individual level risk factors. With regards to parental efficacy and empowerment, being connected to family and friends mediated the negative effect of DFV, along with other individual level variables. Having a special person in one's life along with access to quality support by family and friends in general significantly increases parents' sense of efficacy and empowerment and their likelihood of seeking informal and to some extent formal support. In the context of this sample, this is true for the overall sample as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subsample. This finding is important as it clearly points towards the role of family and friends in the lives of parents, especially those experiencing a number of risk factors. Similar to the implications discussed around parental empowerment and efficacy, implications point towards the importance of public and community awareness around social support, help seeking and parental risk and protective factors to build capacity for parents to become and remain engaged and connected.

2.3 The role of neighbourhood social support

In our analyses, community social support factors were highly significant across all three outcome variables. Recent contact with one's neighbours acted as a protective factor across a number of models and predicted an increase in parental empowerment and efficacy as well as engagement in formal parental support and education. These findings were observed for the overall sample as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subsample, highlighting the importance of connectedness at the individual neighbour level across cultural contexts. Given the positive impact observed for regular neighbour connectedness, implications point towards greater capacity building at the community level. It is important for people to understand the value of social connectedness at this level, especially in contemporary society with increasing levels of social disconnectedness and anonymity (Jorgensen, Fallov & Knudsen, 2011). Implications therefore point towards the role of community education, awareness raising and skill building to foster neighbourhood social support and strengthen individual responses to improve outcomes for parents and their children (Reece, Staudt & Ogle, 2013).

2.4 Culturally specific observations with regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

We note some interesting and significant findings regarding the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents. A number of similarities were observed between the overall and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subsample. These include the role of individual factors, such as financial hardship, in lowering parental efficacy and empowerment. Connectedness to friends, family and neighbours on the other hand increases parental efficacy and empowerment along with the likelihood of informal help seeking and formal engagement. Findings observed in the Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander subsample highlight the role of extended family and neighbourhood level measures as protective factors. Despite the accumulation of risk for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents, connectedness at the family and community level contributes substantially to greater parental efficacy and empowerment and encourages help seeking and engagement.

We were also interested in the role of cultural connectedness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. A number of studies have highlighted the positive effects of cultural connectedness on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing (Gee et al, 2014; Tsey et al, 2010). Findings derived from this research support this growing body of literature. For this sample, cultural connectedness is of significant importance for parental efficacy and empowerment, informal parental help seeking and engagement with formal parenting services. For respondents with a strong sense of cultural identity and/ or those connected to country and engaging in multiple cultural activities, such as fishing, hunting, traditional storytelling, attending cultural or spiritual ceremonies fared significantly better across all three outcome variables.

Findings derived from the analysis of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent subsample point towards the role of culturally specific education and capacity building at the community level. Illustrating to parents the benefits of connectedness at the general family and friends and community social support level as well as a cultural level can have positive effects on parental help seeking and engagement. In line with past research recommendations, community education and capacity building must take a bottom up approach and be developed and implemented together with the relevant communities in order to be effective (Cheers et al, 2006).

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