

CHILD PROTECTION OUTCOMES FOLLOWING A TARGETED PARENTING PROGRAM

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Introduction and Aims: Parental substance use is a significant issue impacting on parenting capacity, child safety and child development. This pilot study assessed changes in child safety during and following completion of, Parenting with Feeling (PWF), a 10-week group intervention for substance dependent parents (and their infants) targeting parental reflective functioning, emotional availability and attachment.

Design and Methods: Demographic, psychosocial and psychometric data were collected at pre, post and six-months (n=22). Child safety was measured using the NSW Family and Community Services Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) threshold during the group and during the six-month period following the group.

Results: Parents who completed PWF had a mean age 30 years (SD±6.7), were predominantly female (73%), non-Aboriginal (76%) had low levels of education (41% <Year 10) and high unemployment (96%), traumatic childhood experiences (100%), receiving and currently on opiate substitution therapy (73%) or other ambulatory substance use treatment. Infants were aged between 2 and 22 months. Parents were 4.5 times less likely to meet the ROSH threshold during the group and 6.7 times less likely to have their child removed from their care, compared to the period after the intervention.

Discussions and Conclusions: Data analysis found that infants were safer during the period that their parents attended The Parenting with Feeling intervention. Considerations need to be made regarding graduated transition to discharge, follow-up supports and the duration of the program.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Substance dependent parents and their infants can benefit from targeted clinical group interventions. Drug and alcohol services should consider the potential for permanent inclusion of clinical interventions that assist this at-risk group.

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