



Australian  
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# Chapter 3: Sample characteristics

'The answers were there before white man  
come in'

Stories of strength and resilience for responding to violence In Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander communities

# CHAPTER 3

## SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

This chapter presents a summary of the characteristics of the participants in the CMS, the SPS, focus groups and interviews with community members and service providers.

### Community member survey

The 18 participating communities from New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory contributed to CMS data, with an average of 90 participants in each community completing a total of 1,626 surveys. Of these, 42 were ineligible,<sup>23</sup> resulting in a final sample of 1,584 participants. The smallest number of respondents for a community was 62, and the largest was 105. Two communities (12% of all participants, n=197) were classified as major cities; four (22%, n=343) as inner regional; five (27%, n=431) as outer regional; three (16%, n=254) as remote; and four (23%, n=359) as very remote (Table 1). Level of remoteness for both the CMS and the SPS was coded according to the ASGS Remoteness Structure.<sup>(22)</sup>

Participants ranged in age from 16 to 84 years, with a mean age of 38 years (Table 2). For analysis purposes, participants were categorised into the following age groups: 16–17 years; 18–24 years; 25–39 years; 40–49 years; 50 years and older; and range not specified but 18 years and older.<sup>24</sup> Not specified, over 18 years included participants who did not provide a specific age or select an age range but who completed an adult (rather than youth) consent form, demonstrating that they were at least 18 years of age. The 25–39 years age group was the largest age group (28% of the total sample), followed by participants aged 50 years or more (24%), 40–49 years (19%), 18–24 years (15%) and not specified but 18 and older (9%); the 16 to 17 years age group was the smallest age group (5%), but still contained 79 participants and so enabled analysis of outcomes within this important age group.

The sample group was 58% females, 42% males and less than one percent who did not identify as either male or female.<sup>25</sup> The vast majority of participants identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (96%); the remaining 4% had Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander family. The latter group was included because the aim of the study is to understand and address violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, and that includes non-Indigenous people who are part of these families and who are living in these communities. The FaCtS community researchers invited non-Indigenous people to participate, based on their assessment that these individuals were considered part of the community. In most cases, the non-Indigenous participants in the study are partners of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

The study sample showed diversity in terms of family financial security. Thirty-one percent had a lot of savings or were able to save now and then. Over one-third of participants (37%) had just enough money to get through to their next payday. Nearly one-quarter (23%) ran out of money before payday or spent more than they received.

When asked about their highest formal education qualification, 39% of participants reported having completed Year 12 (High School, Leaving Certificate, College), a Certificate/Diploma (such as Child Care or Mechanic) or a University degree. Half (49%) had completed Year 10 (School or Intermediate Certificate), and 10% had completed less than Year 10. The remaining 2% did not answer the question.

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23 Eligibility criteria included: participant must be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, or a family member of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person; consent form completed by the participant; majority of survey questions completed.

24. We know that those who did not state their exact age were 18 years or older because of the difference in the consent process for those under 18 years of age and those aged 18 years or older.

25. As indicated previously, an option for responses to the question on gender in the FaCtS study was 'Other'. Following feedback from one of the three communities visited to date (as noted above, other community visits were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic), we have changed the wording in the way we report this variable for the small proportion of participants (<1% ) who did not identify as male or female.

Thirty-six percent of participants were in paid employment, which included full time, part time, casual work, self-employed and paid carer; 51% of participants were not in paid employment, including those who were participating in the Community Development Program (CDP) or work for the dole program.<sup>26</sup> Four percent were studying full or part time; 3% were classified as other, and 6% as missing. Patterns of employment were similar across the levels of remoteness, with 36% of participants in major cities in paid employment (55% not in paid employment), 35% in regional areas in paid employment (52% not in paid employment), and 38% of participants from remote areas in paid employment (49% not in paid employment).

The CMS sample was not intended to be representative of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Rather, it was designed to capture a diversity of experiences across Australia. Accordingly, we note that the distribution of remoteness, gender and age in the CMS sample does not align with the distribution in the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. For example, the percentage of CMS participants in remote areas exceeds that of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and the percentage of CMS participants in major cities is lower than the percentage in the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.<sup>(23)</sup> Further, females are overrepresented (and males underrepresented) in the CMS sample, compared with the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.<sup>(23)</sup> The study sample did not include participants under 16 years of age, and no participants were aged 85 years or over.

The distribution of age group, gender and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification was generally similar across levels of remoteness. Participants living in major cities generally had higher levels of socioeconomic advantage, based on family economic situation and level of education, than those in regional or remote areas (Table 3).

## Service provider survey

The SPS included 98 individuals who were working as service providers<sup>27</sup> in an area relevant to family and community safety across the 18 participating communities. The sample included representation from each of the 18 sites. Overall, approximately 19% of service provider participants were in major cities, 51% in regional areas, and 30% in remote areas (Table 4). Level of remoteness was coded according to the ASGS Remoteness Structure,<sup>(22)</sup> based on the postcode of the service where the respondent was located.

Not all services were targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but all SPS participants were working at services that support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Not all service provider respondents included in the study identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander themselves. More than one-third (38%) of responding service providers identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (See Table 4). Two-thirds (67%) were female and one-third (33%) male. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 75 years, with a mean age of 47 years; 76% percent of service providers were aged 40 years or over. For analysis purposes, participants were categorised into five age groups: 20–29 years, 30–39 years, 40–49 years, 50–59 years and 60 years and older.

Fifty-five percent of participants had a University degree, and nearly one-third (29%) had a Certificate and/or Diploma. Year 10 was the highest level of education for 9% of service providers. Twenty-nine percent of participants identified as being a manager, 10% as a CEO/deputy CEO and 20% as a co-ordinator or team leader. The sample also included case or support workers (10%), health professionals (9%), administrative support staff (6%), Aboriginal Health Workers (4%) and engagement or liaison officers (3%).

Participants worked with organisations that provided a range of services: family support services (26%); women's services (20%); family violence services (16%); youth services (16%); counselling and mental health services (13%); homelessness services (12%); health services (11%); men's services (9%); police services (6%); justice or correctional services (6%); alcohol and other drug rehabilitation and detoxification/withdrawal-related services (6%); shelters, refuges and hostels (6%); housing services (5%); legal services (5%); night patrol or community patrol (4%); neighbourhood centres (3%); and Land Councils or Homeland Associations (1%).

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26. The Community Development Program (CDP) is a remote-area Work for the Dole Scheme. Around 84% of participants are Aboriginal or Strait Islander people. CDP supports around 30,000 people. CDP was introduced on 1 July 2015 to replace the Remote Jobs and Communities Program, which, in turn, replaced the Community Development and Employment Projects (CDEP) program. CDP requires job seekers aged 18 to 49 years to participate in work-like activities for 20 hours a week as a condition of continuing to receive income support. CDP helps to support job seekers to enhance their skills, by addressing the barriers to employment, and enables participants to contribute to their community.

The Work for the Dole program is a Federal Government initiative which places job seekers in not-for-profit or government agencies for six months of the year as a condition of continuing to receive income support. Participants aged 18–45 years are required to work 50 hours a fortnight; participants aged 50–59 years are required to work 30 hours a fortnight; and those aged over 60 years are required to work 10 hours per fortnight, up to the pension age. The program promotes skills building and encourages participants to contribute to their community.

27. Where we use the term 'service provider', it denotes a person who works as a service provider, rather than an organisation.

The vast majority (85%) of service providers indicated that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were the primary focus for their service, with all services supporting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Some of these services were not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific services; rather, they were total population services that targeted Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Two-thirds (66%) of service providers stated that more than half of their clients/patients were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with almost half (45%) reporting that more than 90% of their clients/patients were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Most service providers reported that their service supported women (82%), young people (70%), children (68%), men (68%) and people with a disability (42%). Almost all service providers reported having frequent contact with community members who had experienced or used physical, sexual or emotional violence (Table 5).

## Focus groups and interviews

Qualitative data were collected from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and service providers in the 18 participating communities, through both focus groups (n=56) and interviews (n=96). There was an average of eight audio recordings taken in each community, with a range of 3–13. Transcripts were omitted if they were later deemed not to meet study eligibility requirements (n=13). There were 54 focus group and 90 in-depth interview transcripts available for analysis. Focus groups were conducted with groups of females (19), males (17), youth males and females combined (9), youth females (2), youth males (2) and Elders (5). Forty-six percent of these focus groups were conducted in remote settings, 46% regional and 7% urban. In-depth interviews were conducted with 41 service providers and 22 female community members, 17 males and 10 youth. Thirty percent of these interviews were conducted with participants from remote areas, 58% from regional areas and 12% from urban areas.

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