

Family Violence Risk Screening and Case Management Pathways in the Australian Family Courts

A Cluster-Controlled Comparison



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Who is this research relevant to?



This research is relevant to **families** navigating separation in the family law system, particularly when domestic and family violence or child safety concerns are present.

It has implications for **legal professionals** (e.g., judicial officers, lawyers, statutory and support workers) and is relevant to **policy and decision-makers** responsible for improving safety within the family law system.

What did we do?

This study explored the impact of **Lighthouse**, a triage process initially piloted in the **Brisbane, Adelaide, and Parramatta** registries of the **Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia (the Courts)**. This innovative approach, which has since been expanded nationally, involves early family violence risk screening and specialised case management pathways.



Parenting matters involved in the **Lighthouse pilot (n=335)** were compared with matters from **non-pilot registries (i.e., registries operating as usual; n=639)**.



335

Lighthouse
pilot

compared
with



639

non-pilot
registries

The study used court-linked data from **high-risk matters** filed between **September 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022**, to examine patterns and differences in:

1

timing and type of court events,

2

safety-oriented actions of the Courts, and

3

timing and mode of matter finalisation.

What did we find?

The study found that matters involved in the Lighthouse pilot (i.e. those exposed to structured, early risk screening and differentiated case management pathways) were associated with improved identification and management of family violence and related risks within the Courts. This was evidenced by:

- 1 **More rapid, risk-responsive court management of** family law matters involving safety concerns.
- 2 **Increased attention to children's risk status**, suggesting a stronger focus on child safety within court responses;
- 3 **Differences in the use of court-conducted dispute resolution**, indicating that risk screening and triage may better inform appropriateness of dispute resolution;

What does this mean?



Early and accurate detection of family violence risk may strengthen court safety responses, supporting more tailored, timely and safety-oriented responses to complex family matters.



Child-centred, risk-informed approaches are important in family law proceedings, ensuring children's safety and wellbeing are considered in decision-making and case pathways.



Integrated screening, triage, and differentiated case management models warrant continued evaluation, including research examining long-term outcomes, survivor experiences, and impacts across diverse family groups.



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