

The voice of the client. Key findings from a national outcome evaluation of relationship counselling and mediation services.

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In 2000 a national counselling and mediation organization undertook an intensive investigation into the outcomes of over 1,400 clients attending counselling and mediation services in 78 locations throughout Australia. Clients were interviewed by an independent research organization 3 to 6 months after completing their contact with the agency. The results give a rich insight into the processes and outcomes of therapy and mediation, as experienced by a diverse range of individuals, intact couples and separating couples. A study of this size and complexity investigating client outcomes in couple counselling is unprecedented in the literature. Variables assessed and analyzed include: Expectations, presenting goals, focus of counselling/mediation, perceptions of counsellor and mediator skills, impact on presenting relationship, impact upon self, impact upon relationship skills, knowledge acquisition, and substantive outcomes (agreements). In a large sub-sample, both members of the couple dyad participated in the research, providing a rare bifocal perspective into the mediation and counselling processes. Significant differences were found between the experiences and expectations of men and women in both mediation and counselling samples. A selection of clinically informative outcomes will be presented and their subsequent impact upon service delivery discussed.