

8. Whether research was part of a degree program

Research conducted by students as part of a formal university degree program made up a substantial proportion of the projects submitted to the audit (39%), but this is still a potential area for growth, given the number of students doing honours, higher degree by research or professional masters/doctorates that include substantial research components. It will need to be supported, however, to encourage academics to engage partnerships and other opportunities to link their research students into evaluations of programs or other critical areas of research in the field of child protection.

Although the number of honours students in Australia is likely to be much higher than the number of doctoral students, the distribution of research submitted to the audit shows the reverse pattern: more doctoral students responded to the audit than did honours or masters students. This may reflect the greater ease of identifying larger doctoral research projects compared with those conducted as part of honours or masters research programs, especially in relation to projects undertaken up to a decade earlier.

Degree program	Frequency	
	<i>n</i> *	%**
Not applicable	83	61
Professional doctorates and PhDs	33	24
Masters	14	10
Honours	5	4

* Number of projects where degree program was indicated
**Number of degree programs as a percentage of the total projects submitted

C. Type of research/methodology

9. Discipline area

Child protection and child abuse prevention is a truly interdisciplinary field. Health, education and social service professionals perform the practice elements. Research into child protection and child abuse prevention was undertaken by professionals from these and related disciplines. The multi-disciplinary nature of child protection and child abuse prevention is reflected in the breakdown of discipline areas identified by audit respondents.

The highest number of research projects was conducted in the field of social work, followed closely by social policy and psychology (see Table 11).

Discipline area	Frequency	
	<i>n</i> *	%**
Social work	40	37
Social policy	37	27
Psychology	33	24
Education	7	5
Sociology	5	4
Law	2	1
Other (includes health science, humanities, business)	11	8

* Number of projects indicating a nominated discipline area
** Number of discipline areas as a percentage of the total projects submitted

10. Sample type

Table 12 shows the source of data or 'informants' in each research project. Parents were the source of data in the largest proportion of projects (31%), followed by professionals – other than child protection workers or welfare/family support workers (29%). Children were the next largest group of informants, followed by child protection workers, then welfare/family support workers. There was also little focus

on research on individuals or families who were in groups that were high-risk for abuse and neglect (e.g., drug or alcohol dependent parents). This is problematic, given that this is an area where child abuse and neglect prevention efforts are most needed and are likely to have a more significant impact.

Table 12: Types and frequencies of sample type

Sample type	Frequency	
	n*	%**
Community sample of parents	42	31
Other professionals	39	29
Community sample of children	32	24
Welfare/family support workers	31	23
Child protection workers	29	21
Child protection clients	25	19
Other	21	16
Clinical intervention sample	16	12
Community	16	12
High-risk	11	8

* Number of projects where sample type was represented (projects can include multiple sample types)
 **Number of sample types represented as a percentage of the total projects submitted

11. Sample size

Respondents were given four categories of sample size, and asked to indicate to which category their project belonged. From audit responses where sample size was listed ($n = 81$), most projects were medium, small or very small. Only 15% of projects with valid audit responses to this question had a large sample size (500 or more participants).

Table 13: Sample sizes

Sample size	Frequency* (n)	As a proportion of the 81 responses
Very Small 1-19	14% (19)	23%
Small 20-99	20% (27)	33%
Medium 100-499	17% (23)	28%
Large 500+	9% (12)	15%
No sample size listed	40% (54)	

* Number of sample sizes represented as a percentage of the total projects submitted

12. Number of projects that had ethics approvals

As Table 14 shows, just over half of the projects reportedly had received approval from an institutional ethics committee (56%). Six projects (4%) noted that ethics approval was not required (e.g., for policy analysis, internal quality assurance processes, or some methodological studies that did not involve people as direct research participants). This is similar to the findings of Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004): just over half (55%) respondents to their audit of out-of-home care research had ethics approval. The fact that 40% of those submitting a project to the audit did not respond to this question, suggests that there is a need for education about the nature of research. This is particularly problematic, given that respondents were given the option of indicating that their project did not require formal ethics approval, yet many respondents did not select this response.

Particularly in agencies where there may not be an internal ethics review process, it is important to increase the understanding of ethical obligations of researchers, and the importance of adhering to rigorous guidelines set by ARC and NH&MRC concerning the role of institutional ethics review boards in order to protect research participants and ensure high quality research.

Quality assurance and internal audits may not require ethics approval. Requirements regarding ethics approval have evolved in the past decade. Greater attention is now paid to the complex

issues involved, with some agencies developing their own protocols or ethics committees. For example, Uniting Care Burnside—a major non-government child and family welfare agency—has developed a code of ethics for researchers, designed to protect the clients of non-government child and family welfare organisations in collaboration with University of Wollongong. (Burnside’s Research Code of Ethics can be accessed at: <http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/ethics/human/policy.htm>)

Did the project receive formal ethics approval?	Percentage	n
Yes	56%	75
Pending	0%	0
Did not seek approval	0%	0
Not applicable	4%	6
No response	40%	54

13. Multiple site projects

There were 57 projects identified in the current audit as having been conducted across multiple sites. Multi-site research was self-defined. Respondents were simply asked to respond ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question: “Was the project conducted across multiple sites?” Although these data are informative, it could include research that is conducted at different sites within the same agency, in different areas within one jurisdiction (e.g., rural/regional/metro), across different states/territories, or across different agencies. Details on the nature of the multiple sites would need to be examined individually in each of these studies.

Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) emphasised the importance of multiple site research, as well as clearinghouses, research centres and collaborative networking arrangements between organisations and between states, to assist the development of a cohesive approach to research in out-of-home care. Such cross-jurisdictional or multi-site research is the most likely way of being able to engage in large-scale projects to assess the effectiveness of different child abuse and neglect prevention programs, or of different approaches to child protection practice.

Universities had the highest level of multi-site research with a total of 45 individual projects identified. Of these, 28 projects were conducted exclusively across multiple sites of the same university, whereas just two projects involved cross-university collaboration. University and government agencies accounted for nine multiple site collaborations; university and non-statutory agencies accounted for eight; four projects where the research was conducted across a university, non-statutory agency and an institute; and one was a collaboration between a university, government agency and a research institute.

Government agencies showed the second highest level of multiple site research with a total of 18 projects. Half (9) of these were in collaboration with universities; five (5) across multiple sites of the one department; four (4) across multiple government bodies, with two (2) of these involving inter-state collaboration; and four (4) in collaboration with non-statutory agencies. As with the universities, government bodies were involved in a total of five (5) projects where the collaboration was not just over multiple sites but also across more than two separate organisations.

D. Productivity/output

14. Frequency of different publication types

It is a difficult task to accurately summarise the research outputs (in terms of publications) from the projects submitted to the audit. One difficulty is that at the time of the audit, some projects were completed (and are therefore more likely to have a publication as a finished product), whereas other projects were still underway (and therefore were less likely to have published results). Accordingly, the number of each different type of publication output is described separately for ‘completed’ and ‘ongoing’ projects (see Table 15). Results can also be viewed in two ways: the number of projects that had a particular publication type (listed under ‘projects’), as well as the total number of outputs for that