

Results from the Client Survey by the Australian Association of Psychologists Inc.

In order to test the claims from some 'clinical' psychologists that registered psychologists were:- 'clinically untrained', 'incompetent', 'unsafe' and 'dangerous' to clients, the AAPi decided to conduct a survey of client's attitudes on these dimensions. The views of 390 clients were anonymously sampled via a client survey (the questions of which can be seen in Table 1). The data was entered and collated by a second year law student, and statistically analysed by Dr Brendan Lloyd, PhD. As the survey was anonymous, the completed forms are available for scrutiny by any interested party if they wish to conduct their own analysis.

As can be seen in Table 1, the vast majority of clients sampled indicated that:-

- They were satisfied that their registered psychologist provided them with services in a *capable and professional manner*.
- They were satisfied that their registered psychologist helped them to *achieve the goals* which they set for themselves in attending the service.
- They were satisfied that their registered psychologist had *obtained the relevant education, training and experience* to provide the psychological service.
- They were satisfied that the service provided by their registered psychologist was conducted in a *safe and competent manner*.

Table 1. Overall views of clients in regards to services provided by registered psychologists.

Questionnaire item	Sample size	Overall % agreement	Strongly agree	agree
1) I believe the registered psychologist who provided me with services did so in a capable and professional manner	N=390	99.2%	87.4%	11.8%
2) I am satisfied that the registered psychologist helped me to achieve the goals that I set for myself in attending the service	N= 389	98.7%	77.7%	21.0%
3) I am satisfied that the registered psychologist who I saw has obtained the relevant education, training and experience to provide the psychological service.	N=390	98.7%	84.6%	14.1%
4) I believe that the service provided to me by the registered psychologist was conducted in a safe and competent manner.	N= 390	99.0%	90.0%	9.0

Despite these types of findings, Nick Allen, a Melbourne University psychology professor and exemplar of the extreme views typical of the 'clinical' psychologists who have lambasted their 'generalist' colleagues, told *The Australian* on May 29th 2010 "there's this

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large number of poorly trained psychologists (ie. registered psychologists) who are representing themselves as the solution to the problem.... with [only] an undergraduate degree in psychology, which includes almost no adequate training in psychopathology, diagnosis and treatment”. Putting the factual errors in Allen’s statement aside for a moment, in consideration of the robust findings presented here, it is difficult to find any support for the view expressed by some ‘clinical’ psychologists that services provided by registered psychologists are in any way inadequate.

Perhaps the current results were simply gathered from people who presented with less serious psychological problems? The Two-tiered Medicare rebate system is predicated on the notion that only ‘clinical’ psychologists are able to provide services for the more serious mental health problems, as only they are permitted to conduct ‘psychological therapies’.

In order to assess this possibility, clients were asked to indicate the presenting problems which brought them to the services of a registered psychologist. As can be seen in Table 2, the presenting problems of clients in this sample were the same as the predominant problems reported in the recent Better Access Evaluation, ie. depression and anxiety being the highest frequency. Table 2 also shows the levels of satisfaction (as per the survey questions) in relation to each of the presenting problems.

Table 2. Clients responses to Questionnaire items as per presenting problems.

Presenting problem	Sample size	Overall agreement to Q 1	Overall agreement to Q 2	Overall agreement to Q 3	Overall agreement to Q 4	Overall agreement to Q5
Depression	N=202	98.9%	98.7%	98.5%	99.0%	98.5%
Anxiety	N=199	99.0%	99.0%	98.5%	98.5%	98.9%
Trauma	N=73	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Substances	N=24	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
R’ships	N=390	99.2%	98.7%	98.7%	99.0%	98.5%
Childhood abuse	N=31	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Grief	N=63	95.2%	98.4%	98.4%	98.4%	98.4%
Chronic pain	N=45	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Suicidal feelings/self harm	N=44	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

As can be seen in Table 2, clients in this sample expressed a similarly high level of satisfaction across all of the presenting problem categories. It is clear that clients in this sample were as highly satisfied by the services provided, regardless of their presenting problem.

Discussion

These findings need to be viewed in conjunction with the findings of the Better Access Evaluation , commissioned by the Federal Government and released in March 2011. There was no attempt to compare services provided by registered and clinical psychologists in this survey, as such data was already being gathered by the Melbourne university research group that conducted the sample of psychologists and their clients in the Better Access Evaluation. It is clear from the Better Access evaluation that registered psychologists are working with a client group that are as badly afflicted as are 'clinical' psychologists, and are getting at least the same results in terms of client outcomes. In fact, the outcome measures for registered psychologists are more impressive than are those for 'clinical' psychologists, however the researchers have chosen to not reply to requests for details about levels of significance of these differences. (There may be political reasons for the non disclosure of significance levels?) Table 3 shows some of the results of the Better Access evaluation that are relevant to this discussion.

Table 3. Measures of clinical effectiveness- registered psychologists compared to 'clinical' psychologists, as reported in the Better Access program Evaluation, March 2011.

Measure of effectiveness	Reg. psychologists	'Clin' psychologists	Differences in favour of Reg. Psychologists
Client improvements in K-10 scores	10.58	9.53	+1.05
Improvements in DASS-dep. scores	11.46	11.37	+0.09
Improvements in DASS-Anxiety scores	8.74	7.17	+1.57
Improvements in DASS- Stress scores	11.69	9.93	+1.76
Client evaluation-satisfied, constructive advice/care	44%	39%	+5%
Client perception of mental health improvement	49%	44%	+5%
Client improvements-health, lifestyle and sleep perception of	7%	3%	+4%

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Where there are *any* clients at all who are demonstrably doing well as a result of their involvement with a registered psychologist, who place a high level of value on the service they received, and state that registered psychologists helped them to achieve their goals, the claims of some 'clinical' psychologists like Nick Allen are obviously questionable. When there are *large* numbers of clients of registered psychologists who also value the service provided (as seen in this survey), it is apparent that the claims of some 'clinical' psychologists are simply spurious and not befitting of social scientists. When a random sample of highly representative clients and psychologists (as seen in the Better Access evaluation) show that the only difference between the quality of services provided by registered and 'clinical' psychologists is in favour of registered psychologists (statistical significance?), then it becomes even clearer that the criticisms levelled at registered psychologists are simply irrational. There is a level of anti-evidence/anti-scientific hysteria coming from some 'clinical' psychologists in this discussion (see ABC Radio National Life Matters chat room relating to the discussion titled 'Psychology Blues') which is more befitting of religious fundamentalists, 'flat earthers' or climate change sceptics than it is of psychologists with a healthy interest in the evidence.

The current survey, in conjunction with the Evaluation of the Better Access program make it abundantly clear that registered psychologists are providing very high quality, effective and well appreciated services to the Australian public. Far from being clinically 'un-trained', 'unsafe' or 'dangerous', registered psychologists are perceived by their service consumers to be highly competent, well trained and experienced, safe and helpful in assisting clients to achieve their therapeutic goals.

In answering the final question of the client survey ("I would like to see access to psychological services in the community provided by registered psychologists to be expanded so as to become accessible to more people".), 98.5% of clients sampled agreed in total with this statement (87.2% strongly agreed, while 11.3% agreed: N= 390).

Who is more likely to have a well considered view of the value of services provided by registered psychologists? Those who have used their services, or the self appointed 'elite' few who appear to have more interest in their own finances, careers and status than in the well being of the Australian public?

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