

“Do you really think that circle
diagram is useful to us?”

(or)

Adding value to evaluation using a
theoretically grounded approach

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Overview of presentation

What is this thing called theory?

What does it have to do with evaluation?

Case study:

- Evaluation of the Ucan2 program
- Support program for recently arrived refugee-background young people in Melbourne
- Brief overview of some results

The role of theory

We all know we need theory

Logic models depict theories of change

‘The term “theory” refers to general principles that provide explanations for empirical phenomena’
(Hammersley, 1995)

Research/evaluation involving refugees often concerned with addressing practical policy problems

- under theorised
- ‘broader theoretical explanations’ lead to ‘more useful public knowledge than short-term policy-oriented studies’ (Castles, 2003)

Case study: Ucan2 program

- Recently arrived young people with refugee backgrounds 16-24 (in Melbourne)
- Diverse backgrounds and experiences prior to arrival
 - Long periods in refugee camps or seeking asylum prior to resettlement
 - Often minimal or significantly disrupted formal education prior to arrival
- Aim is to provide support during early resettlement to enable young people to negotiate settlement challenges successfully

Ucan2 program

- Multi-agency partnership program (Foundation House, CMY, AMES) aimed at improving settlement outcomes
- Situated within on-arrival English language classes (one day per week over one semester)
 - psychosocial support
 - promotes broader social networks
 - employment focused curriculum
 - group activities; volunteers in the classroom; work experience; part time work opportunities; mentors for selected students

Theoretical framework for social inclusion

A Conceptual Framework Defining Core Domains of Integration



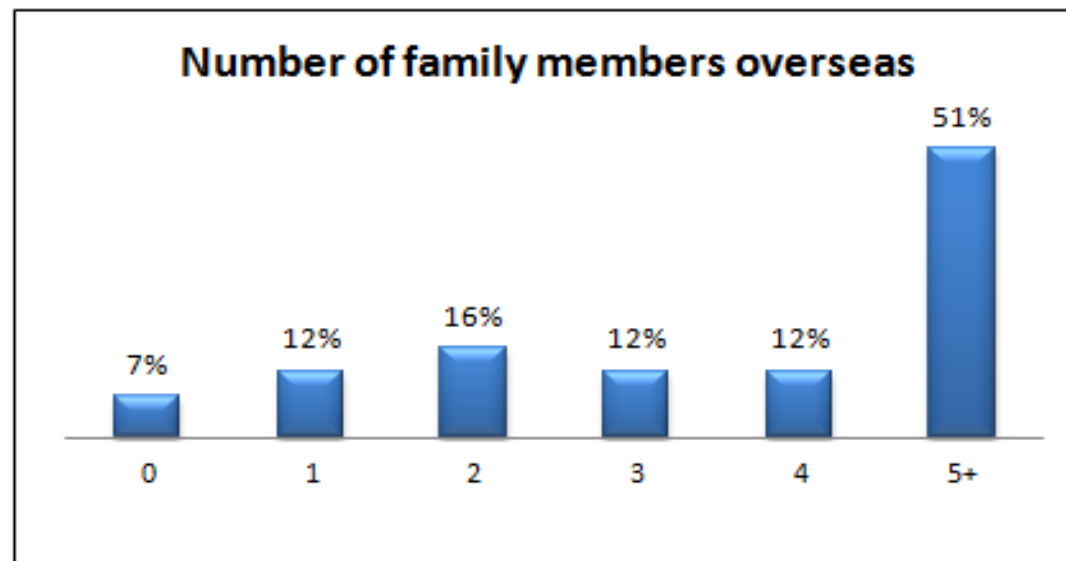
(Ager and Strang 2008)

... But is that circle diagram useful?

- Map program activities
- Guide methodology, methods
 - Participant observation
 - Social network mapping
 - Demographic and wellbeing surveys
 - Focus groups
 - Individual interviews
- Analysis - How to evaluate long term outcomes with no control group?

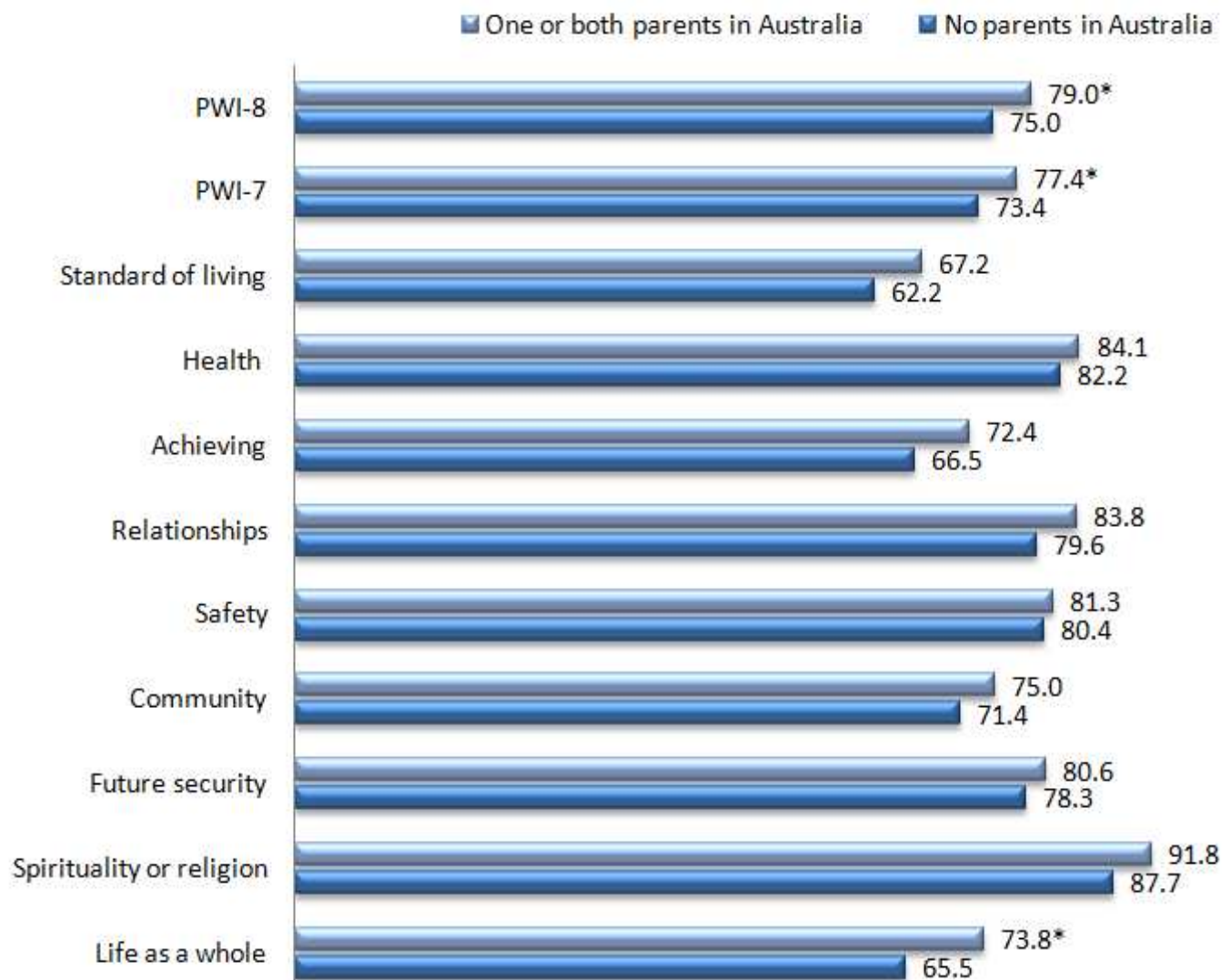
Social 'bonds' - family

- 40% of participants (n=215) had no parent living in Australia, 34% had both parents living here
- 29% listed their mother as living overseas; 16% missing
- 23% of fathers overseas, 38% missing
- 12% of Refugee Background students had no family here at all



Network predictors of wellbeing

Levels of satisfaction according to whether any parents
are living in Australia



*Differences are statistically significant

Qualitative findings - bonding connections

You know...if you are with your family or if you have any relation with you then you are better... But I [for me] it's too hard – not [just] Australia... even heaven, [is] too hard alone! (African female 25)

Awesome! It's as simple as that. Very beautiful country, people nice, everything organised well, humanitarian, democratic. Everything 100% perfect for me. Perfect! (African male 19)

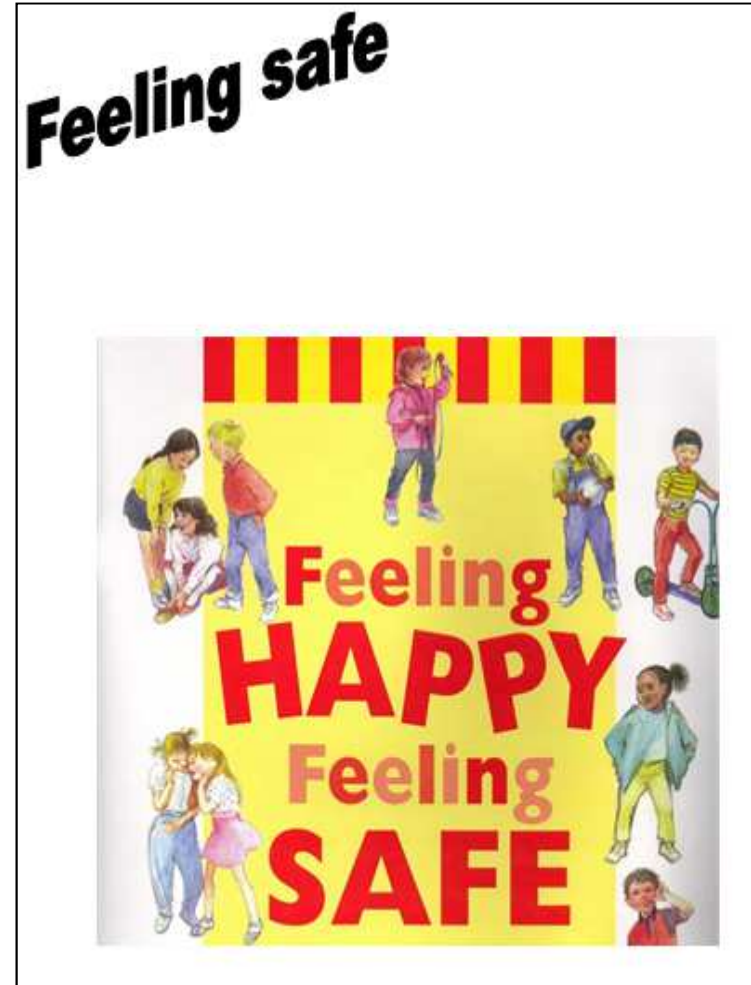
Family and friends



Safety, stability and mental health

Ucan2 is like my new family

Before, I have a lot of problem you know. I have a lot of thinking about my family you know. Yeah my father... he's dead, but I came to Ucan2 and got a lot of friends came, talk and speak like that... Before I come I can't laugh - because I can't. After I come to Ucan2, yeah I can laugh with my friends (Afghan male 26)



... So is that circle diagram useful?

Complex or 'wicked' social issues

- Theory recognised as helping to answer 'Why?' questions
- Also useful for understanding 'What?'
 - What interventions?
 - What is the likely long term impact of intervening (or failing to intervene)?
- Replicability and transferability
- 'Learning organisation'

