

Moving towards the fire

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The issue

- Hard to identify impact of initiatives in remote communities when little baseline data available by community, especially on social welfare issues (eg family violence)
- Three target audiences (at least) – government funders, project/program officers, remote community members
- Each with different information needs and preferences

Government

- Accountability a key issue, and gauging value of investment, identifying areas for increased or decreased future investment
- Impact and effectiveness evidence important, as well as evidence of implementation progress
- Preference for numbers, quantifiable data

Project officers

- Not discussed in detail here; focus often on meeting accountability requirements and also identifying potential practice improvements
- Involvement, ownership and value congruency often important, as is acknowledgement of 'practice wisdom'

Remote community members

- Having a voice and bringing about local improvements
- Congruent with own personal experiences and knowledge
- Based on trust and leading to noticeable improvement in conditions
- Culture, languages, literacy all issues to take into account

Measuring violence and abuse

- Measures often suggested, eg arrests and convictions, restraining orders, bed stays – are ambiguous
- Could equally well reflect either negative change (increased violence) OR positive change (better awareness of and greater responsiveness to violence)
- Some issues (eg adult partner violence) more likely to be raised than sexual and child abuse issues

Another evidence gap

- Standard measures overwhelmingly negative; measure dysfunction rather than function
- Passive role for community members; as countable items rather than engaged voices

The task

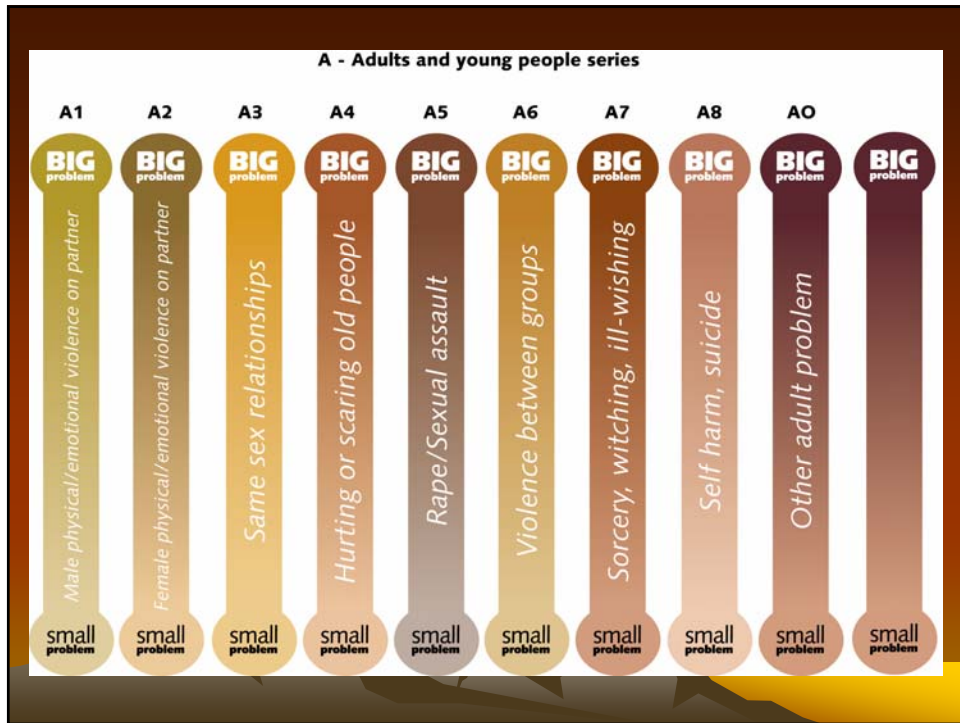
- To develop a tool capable of providing benchmarks to assess success (or not) of interventions in remote communities
- Must address government preference for quantitative data
- Must address community preference for having a voice, take into account cultural, language and literacy issues
- Challenge to create a tool usable in multiple communities and track change over time

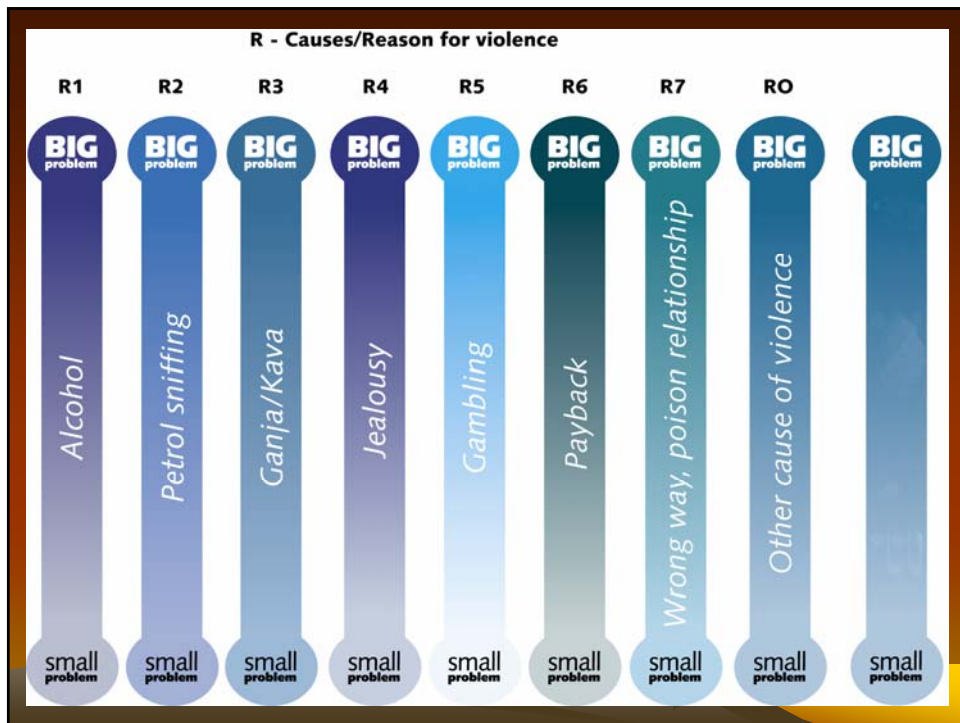
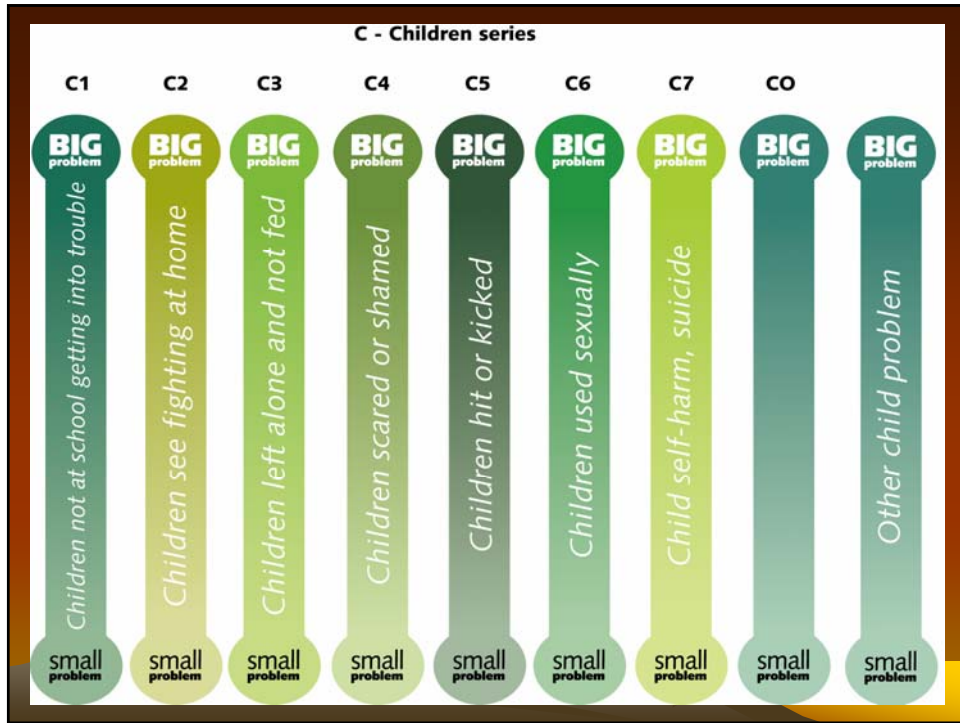
Tool development - process

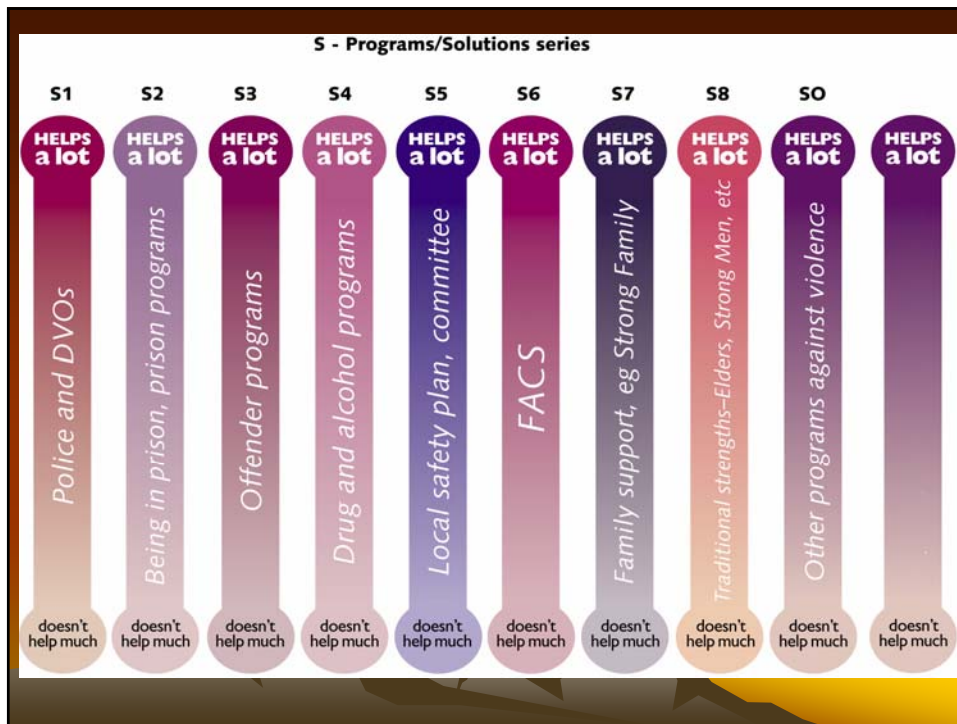
- Initiative commenced in government with officers wanting to document effectiveness of intervention
- Workshopping with dozens of remote community members on both content and format
- Cycle of field testing and refinement, overseen by independent evaluation team

What resulted

- Community 'thermometers', with scales on back, words on front
- Four sets, one on adult violence issues, one on children's issues, one on triggers for violence and another on potential solutions for violence
- Brown hands, or male and female figures used to indicate score on scale







Content, format learnings

- Graphics worked well with skilled facilitator, but large and heavy to carry
- Special efforts required to not get all results at top of scale
- Difficult to get right balance between flexibility (customised for each community) and comparability between communities and over time

Process learnings

- Need to build up trusting relationship before honest discussion is possible (MOST of tool success depends on this)
- Ensure attendance by right mix of community members
- Often best discussed in gendered groups, can take at least half a day (community barbeque a good accompanying event)

Process learnings, cont'd

- Discussion of terms on language helpful – can expose different assumptions, eg what abuse is, or definition of 'child' in terms of sexual contact
- Often leads to fairly frank discussion but just a start – and unless followed by action, of little use
- Some communities wanted to display local results; need for mini-version with results

Changes for group tool

- Desire to document positive elements of community and not just size of problem
- Link more closely to follow-up action
- Use Indigenous imagery, eg fire
- Make more flexible and lighter to carry around; easier to administer
- Some wording changes, eg 'singing, cursing' in place of 'sorcery, witchcraft'

Next stage – individual feedback

- New service initiative for families; wanted client voice, remote workers to be empowered in evaluation
- Ongoing internal evaluation (with training and support); workers to track impact of work with individual clients and families
- Adapted tool developed for communities to use with individual families

Learnings to date

- Some of the group categories work well for evaluating practice with individual families and clients; others need to be changed
- Greater support required for remote workers to administer tool and to use results
- Some tension between desire to document success and the increasingly rich information about problems that can arise with greater trust

Next steps

- Field tests in September and October with new 'fire-centred' tool, based on Faye Parriman poster
- Tests will occur at both group and individual/family level in NT communities
- Results of modified tool to be presented in November in Perth

THE END
(for now)

