

Developing a safety culture:
The unintended consequence of a
'one size fits all' policy

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition I certify that, all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY	i
List of Tables	vi
List of Figures	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS FROM THIS RESEARCH.....	x
Peer reviewed publication.....	x
Conference Presentations	x
ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY	xi
Acronyms.....	xi
Glossary of terms and definitions	xi
ABSTRACT.....	xiv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 My motivation for undertaking the Study.....	1
1.2 Background to the Study	2
1.3. Research questions	3
1.3.1 The two Studies.....	3
1.3.2 Aim of the Study.....	4
1.3.3 Objectives	4
1.4 The Context	4
1.4.1 NSW Public Health System.....	4
1.4.2 Maternity Care in Australia and NSW	6
1.4.3 The role of government policy in safety and quality in health care.....	9
1.5 Organisation of the thesis	10
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Method.....	11
2.3 Literature review: The Service Study	11
2.3.1 Adverse events in health care	11
2.3.2 Incidence of adverse events	12
2.3.3 Adverse events in maternity services.....	13
2.3.4 Health system response to adverse events	16
2.3.5 Safety Culture	18
2.3.6 Safety culture domains.....	20
2.3.7 Implications of understanding safety culture in maternity care	25

2.3.8 Lessons from Aviation.....	25
2.3.9 Measuring safety culture.....	25
2.4 A gap in knowledge.....	26
2.5 Literature review: The Policy Study.....	27
2.5.1 What is policy?	27
2.5.2 The policy process	28
2.5.3 Vertical and horizontal dimensions framework.....	28
2.5.4 The policy cycle.....	30
2.6 Conclusion.....	33
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES.....	34
3.1 Introduction	34
3.2 Pragmatism and mixed method research	34
3.3 The Threat and Error Management Model.....	35
3.4 The Australian Policy Cycle.....	37
CHAPTER 4: DESIGN AND METHOD.....	39
4.1 Introduction	39
4.2 Study design	39
4.2.1 Mixed method research.....	39
4.2.2 Patient safety and mixed method research.....	39
4.2.3 Criticisms of mixed method research.....	40
4.2.4 Mixed method research design criteria	41
4.2.5 Concurrent triangulation design.....	42
4.2.6 Setting	43
4.2.7 Gaining access to the study sites – engagement	48
4.2.8 Ethical considerations	50
4.3 Service Study – local site data.....	51
Quantitative data collection	52
4.3.1 Participants.....	52
4.3.2 Exclusion criteria	52
4.3.3 Selection criteria	52
4.3.4 Recruitment.....	52
4.3.5 Sample size	53
4.3.6 Data collection	53
4.3.7 Consent	55
4.3.8 Survey administration	56
4.4 Data Analysis.....	57

4.4.1	Preparing data for analysis.....	57
4.4.2	Coding data by assigning codes.....	57
4.4.3	Data entry.....	57
4.4.4	Analysing the data.....	57
4.4.5	Outcome measures.....	58
4.5	Qualitative – data collection.....	58
4.5.1	Sample.....	59
4.5.2	Semi structured interviews.....	60
4.5.3	Field notes.....	61
4.5.4	Feedback.....	62
4.6	Data analysis.....	62
4.6.1	Preparing data for analysis.....	62
4.6.2	Exploring the data.....	62
4.6.3	Analysing the data.....	62
4.7	Reflexivity.....	64
4.8	Policy Study - policy audit.....	66
4.8.1	Selection strategy.....	67
4.8.2	Access strategy.....	69
4.8.3	Document organisation.....	70
4.8.4	Mapping exercise.....	70
4.8.5	Analysis of the implementation of the Planning Better Health Policy and Patient Safety and Clinical Quality Program within the Area Health Service.....	70
4.9	Conclusion.....	71
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS - THE POLICY STUDY.....		72
5.1	Introduction.....	72
5.2	Mapping exercise.....	72
5.2.1	Key events chronological timeline in the development of a national safety and quality agenda.....	72
5.2.2	Mapping NSW policy development.....	81
5.2.3	Mapping implementation of Planning Better Health and Patient Safety and Clinical Quality Policy at Area Health Service level.....	100
5.3	Conclusion.....	107
CHAPTER 6: RESULTS - THE SERVICE STUDY.....		109
6.1	Introduction.....	109
6.2	Survey results.....	109
6.2.1	Data collection.....	109

6.2.2 Participant Demographics	110
6.2.3 Safety culture survey.....	113
6.2.4 Limitation of study results	118
6.3 Results - Interviews	118
6.4 Results of surveys and interviews by domain level.....	122
6.4.1 Safety Climate domain.....	122
6.4.2 Teamwork domain	142
6.4.3 Perceptions of Management.....	146
6.4.4 Working Conditions domain.....	150
6.4.5 Job Satisfaction domain	154
6.4.6 Stress Recognition domain	157
6.4.7 Policy Context domain.....	159
6.5 Conclusion	170
CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION.....	171
7.1 Introduction	171
7.2 What is the safety culture in one maternity service in NSW?	171
7.2.1 The Policy Context domain – triangulation of the two Studies	172
7.2.2 The safety culture within the maternity service	181
7.3 Can understanding this culture assist in the identification of strategies to improve the safety culture of maternity care in this setting?	192
7.4 What are the barriers and challenges to improving the safety culture in this setting?....	192
7.5 Discussion.....	194
7.5.1 Significance	197
7.6 Conclusion	198
REFERENCES	200
APPENDICES	215
Appendix One: Ethical Approvals.....	215
Appendix Two: Survey / interview/ participant information for Site A and Site B	218
Appendix Three: Participant consent forms	220
Appendix Four: Safety Climate Scale Survey and Safety Attitudes Questionnaire	222
Appendix Five: Interview guidelines.....	225
Appendix Six: Survey result tables, Site A and Site B.....	226
Appendix Seven: Version two of the results of template analysis from semi structured interviews.....	233

List of Tables

Table 1: A comparison of Australian and NSW Maternity demographics and birth outcomes....	8
Table 2 Summary of factors included in the six safety culture domains	24
Table 3: Study design.....	43
Table 4: Study site details	47
Table 5: List of interview participants	60
Table 6: Preliminary template - version 1.....	63
Table 7: Chronological timeline mapping the development of the national safety and quality agenda	73
Table 8: Chronological timeline mapping the development of the NSW Patient Safety and Clinical Quality Program and Planning Better Health Policy.....	82
Table 9: Chronological timeline mapping the implementation of the Planning Better Health Policy and Patient Safety and Clinical Quality Program at AHS level.....	101
Table 10: Surveys - Safety Attitude Questionnaire and Safety Climate Scale: Administration method and response rates.....	110
Table 11: Safety Attitude Questionnaire and Safety Climate Scale surveys: Participants and response rate by professional group by site and combined.	111
Table 12: Participant demographics combined for both sites.	112
Table 13: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire scores measuring safety culture domains for both sites.....	113
Table 14: Safety Climate Scale scores for both sites.	114
Table 15: Comparison of results between the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire and Safety Climate Scale for the Safety Climate Domain at both sites.	115
Table 16: SAQ open-ended responses for recommendations to improve safety at combined sites.....	116
Table 17: Description of the quality of collaboration and communication experienced at both sites.....	117
Table 18: Interview participants by classification of role	118
Table 19: Interview themes identified by template analysis.....	120
Table 20: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire results for Safety Climate domain combined sites..	122
Table 21: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire for questions measuring Safety Climate domain	123
Table 22: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire results for the Teamwork domain combined sites ..	142
Table 23: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire for questions measuring the Teamwork domain.....	143
Table 24: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire results for the Perceptions of Management domain	146
Table 25: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire measuring the Perceptions of Management domain	147
Table 26: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire results for the Working Conditions domain.....	151

Table 27: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire for questions measuring Working Conditions domain.....	151
Table 28: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire results for the Job Satisfaction domain.....	155
Table 29: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire questions measuring Job Satisfaction domain	155
Table 30: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire results for the Stress Recognition domain	157
Table 31: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire for questions measuring Stress Recognition domain.....	158
Table 32: Triangulation matrix – Policy and Service Studies results of the influence of the Planning Better Health and Patient Safety and Clinical Quality Programs on the study sites.....	173
Table 33: Triangulation summary of survey and interview results and including the Policy Context domain from the Service Study.	183
Table 34: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire respondent demographics Site A	226
Table 35: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire sample respondent demographics Site B	227
Table 36: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire scores measuring safety culture domains at Site A.	228
Table 37: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire scores measuring safety culture domains for Site B.....	228
Table 38: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire description of the quality of collaboration and communication experienced at Site A.....	229
Table 39: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire description of the quality of collaboration and communication experienced at Site B.....	230
Table 40: Template used for analysis of open-ended responses in the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire for recommendations to improve safety	231
Table 41: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire open-ended responses for recommendations to improve safety at Site A.....	232
Table 42: Safety Attitudes Questionnaire open-ended responses for recommendations to improve safety at Site B	232
Table 43: Version two template analysis from the Service Study semi-structured interviews.	233

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of NSW Health Area Health Services	5
Figure 2: NSW Health Sydney (Metropolitan) Area Health Services	6
Figure 3: The Australian Policy Cycle.....	31
Figure 4: Results of the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire by safety culture domains for both sites.....	114
Figure 5: Model of safety culture identified at the study sites with seven safety culture domains	187

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PEER REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS AND CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS FROM THIS RESEARCH

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Peer reviewed publication

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Conference Presentations

Allen S, Homer C, Understanding safety culture in maternity services, a window to improving safety in maternity care. *Change Champions Improving the Delivery of Maternity Care: Sharing the Lessons Learnt*, Perth, February 2009.

Allen S, Homer C, Chiarella M. Understanding the safety culture in Australian maternity services. *International Forum on Quality and Safety in Health Care*, Paris, April 2008.

Allen S, Homer C. Understanding the safety culture in an Australian maternity service. *International Confederation of Midwives*, Glasgow, June 2008.

Allen S, Homer C. Understanding the safety culture in a maternity service. *15th Biennial Conference Australian College of Midwives*, Canberra, September 2007.

Allen S, Homer C, Chiarella M. Understanding the safety culture of a maternity service. *5th Australasian Conference on Safety and Quality in Health Care*, Brisbane 2006. (Poster)

ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

Acronyms

ACSQHC	Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care
AHMC	Australian Health Ministers Conference
AHS	Area Health Service
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CEC	NSW Clinical Excellence Commission
DoH	NSW Department of Health
ICE	Institute of Clinical Excellence
IIMS	Incident Information Management System
NSW	New South Wales
PSCQP	Patient Safety and Clinical Quality Program
RCA	Root Cause Analysis
RIB	Reportable Incident Brief
SAC	Severity Assessment Code
SAQ	Safety Attitudes Questionnaire
SCS	Safety Climate Scale
SIP	Safety Improvement Program
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
UTS	University of Technology Sydney
VMO	Visiting Medical Officer

Glossary of terms and definitions

For the purpose of this thesis the following terms and definitions apply:

Access block	Access block relates to overcrowding in emergency departments and where the length of stay of an admitted hospital patient in the emergency department is greater than eight hours (ACEM, 2004).
Adverse events	‘An injury resulting from a medical intervention not due to the underlying condition of the patient’ (Kohn, Corrigan, & Donaldson, 2001p.4).
Antenatal period	The period before giving birth.

Area Health Service	Corporations with a role in the provision of the planning, delivery and coordination of NSW public health services within their geographical service boundaries. These services are provided in the acute and community settings. Area Health Services are accountable to the NSW Department of Health.
Blame	‘To hold at fault’ (Runciman, 2006, p. S42).
Closing the loop	Processes by which institutions and individuals learn from mistakes and take action to prevent similar events in the future (Department of Health UK, 2000a).
Error	‘Unintentionally being wrong in conduct or judgement. Errors may occur by doing the wrong thing (Commission) or by failing to do the right thing (omission)’ (Runciman, 2006, p. S42).
Iatrogenic injury	Injury ‘arising from or associated with health care rather than an underlying disease or injury’ (Runciman, 2006, p. S42).
Near miss	‘Incidents which have the potential to result in harm but have not caused actual harm’ (NSW Health, 2006c).
Patient Safety	‘Is the avoidance, prevention and amelioration of adverse outcomes or injury from the process of health care’ (Vincent, Taylor-Adams, & Stanhope, 1998).
Quality	The degree to which health services increase the likelihood of desired outcomes and are consistent with the current professional knowledge (IOM, 2001).
Role Delineation	The classification used for NSW public hospitals to determine the level of staff experience profile, support services and minimum safety standards required for these services. The delineation also identifies the level of clinical complexity and acuity of services undertaken at each service (NSW Health, 2002).

Safety	‘Freedom from hazard’ (Runciman, 2006, p. S42).
Safety culture	‘A product of individual and group values, attitudes, perceptions, competencies and patterns of behaviour that determine the commitment to, and the style and proficiency of an organisation’s health and safety management’ (Sexton, Helmreich et al., 2006).
Safety culture domain	The domains or dimensions that are considered to be an important influence on patient safety culture.
Sentinel Event	Events in which death or serious harm to a patient has occurred (ACSQHC, 2005d).

ABSTRACT

Developing a safety culture: The unintended consequence of a 'one size fits all' policy.

Background

Adverse events in maternity care are relatively common but often avoidable. Evidence suggests it is necessary to understand the safety culture of an organisation to make improvements to patient safety. The safety domains that are thought to influence safety culture in health care include: Safety Climate; Teamwork; Working Conditions; Perceptions of Management; Job Satisfaction; and Stress Recognition. Little is known about the safety culture in the Australian maternity setting, which was the impetus for this Study. This thesis reports an examination of the safety culture in a maternity service in New South Wales (NSW).

Setting

The Study took place in one maternity service located in two public hospitals in NSW, Australia. Concurrently, both hospitals were undergoing an organisational restructure.

Design

This mixed method research study used a concurrent triangulation design and included two Studies. The Policy Study explored the policy context in which the maternity service was situated; and, the Service Study examined the safety culture within the maternity service.

Data collection included:

- A policy audit and chronological mapping of the key policies influencing safety culture within the maternity service.
- Safety culture surveys, the Safety Attitudes Questionnaire and Safety Climate Scale (59/210, 28% response rate) that measured the following six safety culture domains; Safety climate; Teamwork climate; Job Satisfaction; Perceptions of management; Stress recognition and Working conditions (Sexton et al., 2004).
- Semi-structured interviews (15) with key maternity, clinical governance and policy stakeholders.

Results

The safety culture was found to be lacking across all six safety domains. The key finding was that the overarching policy context created unintended consequences for the maternity service and adversely influenced their capacity to have a positive safety culture. These unintended consequences reduced their available infrastructure and capacity to respond to adverse events;

and created a lack of leadership at all levels to drive the safety and quality agenda. The safety culture was also influenced by inadequate communication during the escalation of care; inadequate supervision of junior medical staff; difficulty ensuring the right staffing and skill mix, and low staff morale.

Conclusion

The safety culture in this maternity setting was complex, context-specific but importantly, influenced by the broader policy context in which it was situated. This Study provides evidence that the policy context needs to be included as a seventh safety culture domain in health care. This Study has demonstrated the importance of policy on the capacity to ensure patient safety.

Implications

The policy context has not been previously identified as being important when addressing the safety culture in health care. Considering the influence of the policy context in relation to safety culture is an important step to develop strategies to improve patient safety in other settings. This is an area for future research.