



Australian College of Specialist Psychologists

Specialist Registration of Psychologists: A Survey of the Profession

June 2012



Rationale and Overview

Introduction

The Australian College of Specialist Psychologists (ACSP) is a body that aims to bring together all specialties across our profession. We believe there is more that binds us than divides us and that we are a unique national body providing a voice for post graduate trained and supervised psychologists in Australia. We aim to be a college that is inclusive and forward looking. We focus on issues of common concern at a State and Federal level and provide a forum for cross discipline sharing and learning.

Except for medical practitioners and dentists (who are named in the legislation as having specialist registration), specialist registration is only available if the Ministerial Council has approved specialist recognition should operate for the health profession. The Act protects the use of specialist titles for those recognised professions and makes it an offence to misuse a specialist title, which could lead to prosecution under the Act as well as discipline through the registration board.

Currently in the psychology profession 'Endorsed Areas Of Practice' are used to indicate post graduate specialist training beyond the undergraduate degree. This is not what endorsement as outlined in the Act is meant to be used for. Endorsement is designed to 'authorise' and credential someone to work in a specific area if the training has been considered appropriate by the Board of that profession. The regulations state "A National Board may endorse the registration of a registered health practitioner registered by the board as being qualified to practise in an approved area of practice for the profession if the practitioner" holds specific qualifications (page 65 of the regulations). Unfortunately endorsement in a specific area in psychology does not protect that area of work as you can work within and endorsed area with or without specialist training. There is a disconnect in logic.



Rationale and Objectives of this Survey

In 2011 the ACSP asked members of our profession to comment on how specialists should be identified in our profession. Health Ministers will soon be considering whether psychology should have specialist registration, with titles and areas of work protected by legislation, as compared to endorsement which is the current method of identifying areas of specialty. The ACSP is active in its lobbying of ministers and politicians on issues of importance to our profession and we thought it would be important to have detailed advice and support from our profession to inform and guide our advocacy work in this area.

The objectives of the survey were two fold:

1. To ask members of our profession to tell us their thoughts on how specialism is identified in our profession currently – are they happy with endorsement? Do we even need change? If so, why? If not, why not?
2. If they feel we need a different way of identifying specialism and protecting the public, what model would they prefer and why.



Methodology

Survey Approach

An online survey was prepared for completion by respondents. The online survey was open for a 6 month period from November 2011 to May 2012. The link for the survey was sent out to all our networks of psychologists and universities.

Sample Population

Fig. 1. With over 37.5% of respondents outside of WA, the results can be interpreted as representing a national view.

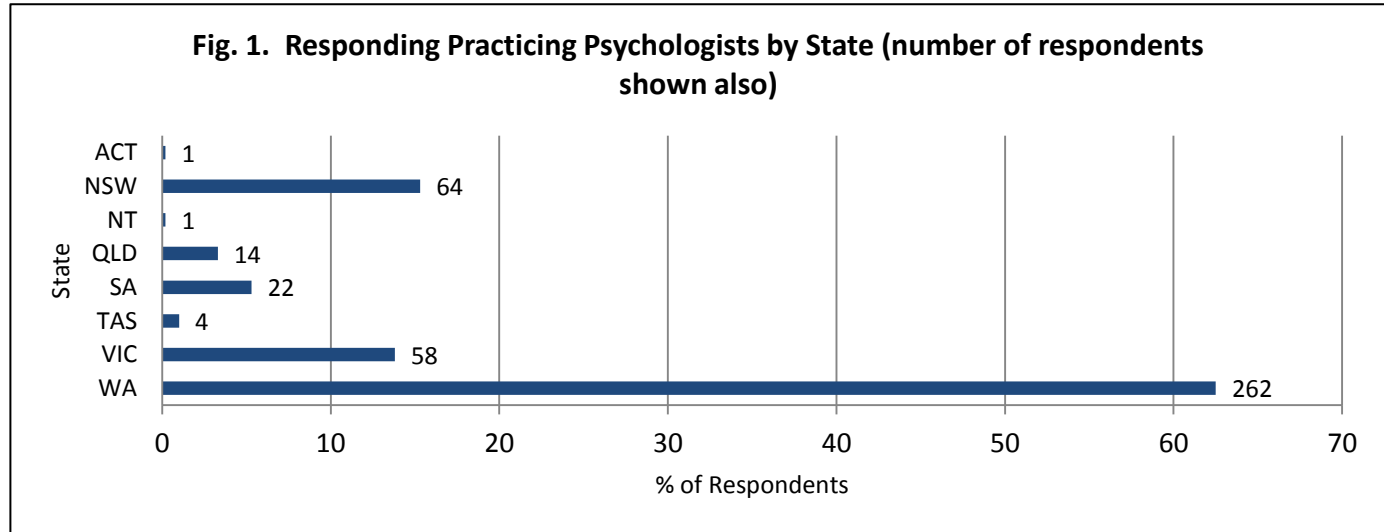
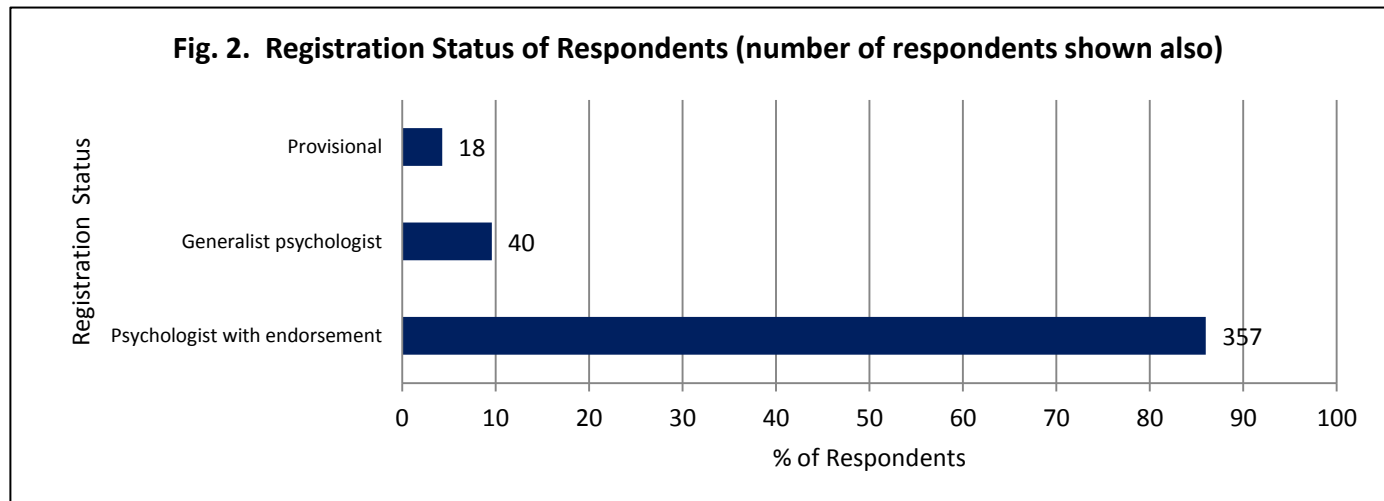


Fig. 2. With 86% of respondents registered as a psychologist with an endorsement, the views expressed are from those directly affected by the issue.





Methodology

Fig. 3. 57.3% are registered as a "specialist" provider with Medicare. Nearly a third (31.3%) do not provide any Medicare related services.

Fig. 3. Responding Practicing Psychologists by Medicare Registration Status (number of respondents shown also)

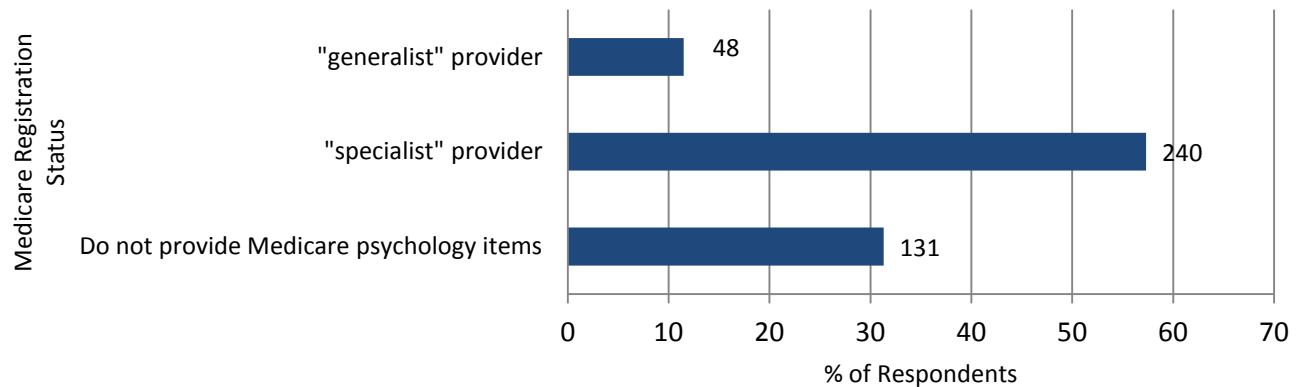
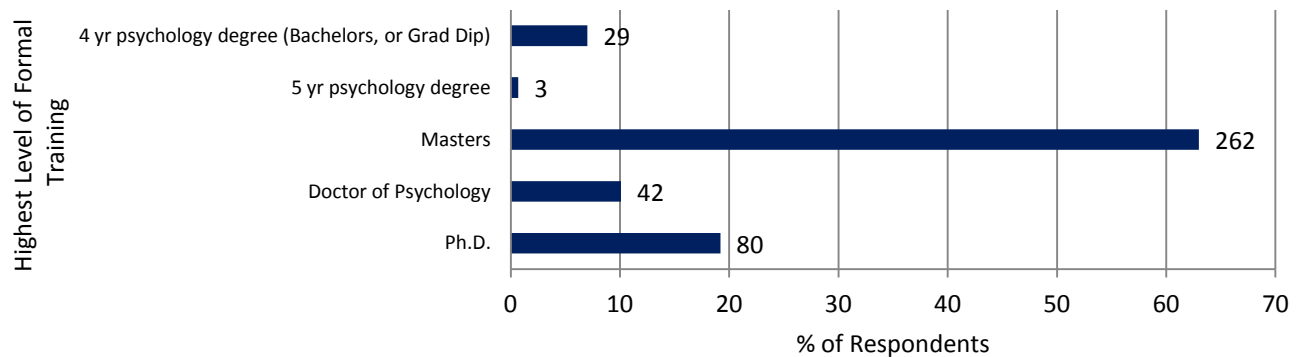


Fig. 4. 92.3% of respondents have completed post-graduate training of some kind (Masters, D.Psych or Ph.D.)

Fig. 4. Highest Level of Formal Training by Respondents (number of respondents shown also)





Methodology

Fig. 5. Almost a quarter of the respondents (22.5%) hold endorsements in areas other than Clinical Psychology. The higher number of 'clinical' respondents is not unexpected given the value placed on specialist registration for employment in Health Departments and Medicare.

Fig. 5. Responding Practicing Psychologists by Specialty or Specialties Endorsed For (number of respondents shown also)

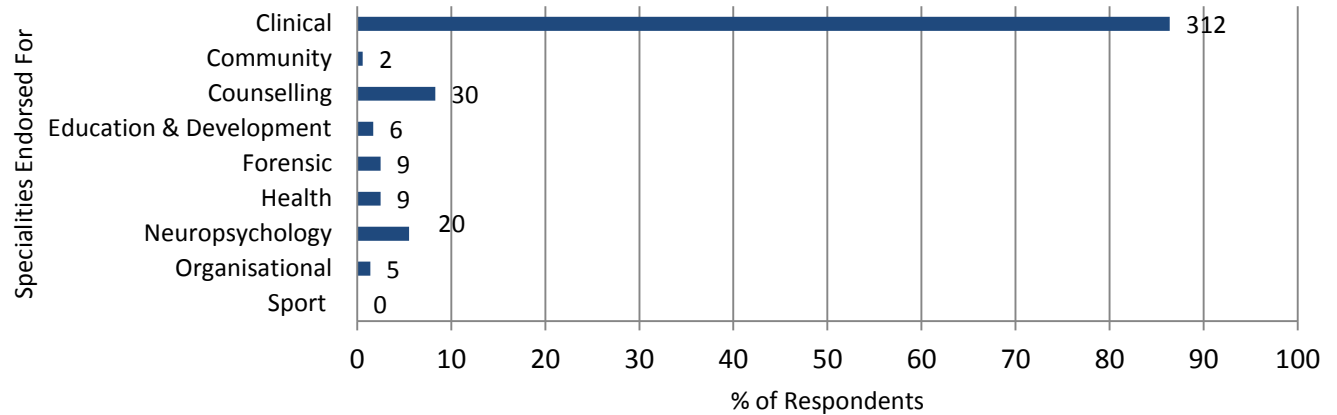
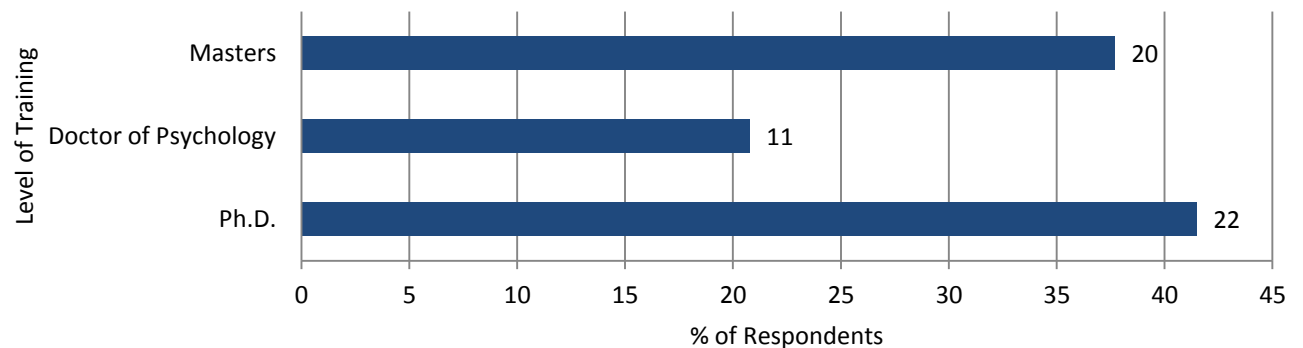


Fig. 6. Fifty-three of the respondents indicated they were currently completing further formal training in a specialist field of Psychology.

Fig. 6. Responding Psychologists Currently Completing Further Formal Training





Results

How important has your postgraduate training been to your work?

Fig. 7. An overwhelming 92.8% of respondents indicated that their postgraduate training had been very important for their work.

"It was necessary to become a 'true practitioner' ... my 4 year degree was interesting, informative but not formative. Masters gave me research skills, clinical skills, maturity, a professional identity etc"

"The practicums were fabulous opportunities to gain 'real' experience with real people that would otherwise not have occurred. However, it also provided that 'real' experience within a period of time where I was also gaining clinical and forensic knowledge within a formal setting. To me, the knowledge I was gaining was complementary to AND complemented by the practicums."

"It has been invaluable, giving me knowledge skills and experience in dealing with clients and their various forms of psychopathology. The undergraduate degree did not provide me with the specific knowledge and skills required."

"The difference in knowledge provided between bachelor and Masters qualifications was extreme, that is I would not want to work with a clinical population without the knowledge gained by the masters qualification and the subsequent two years supervised practice"

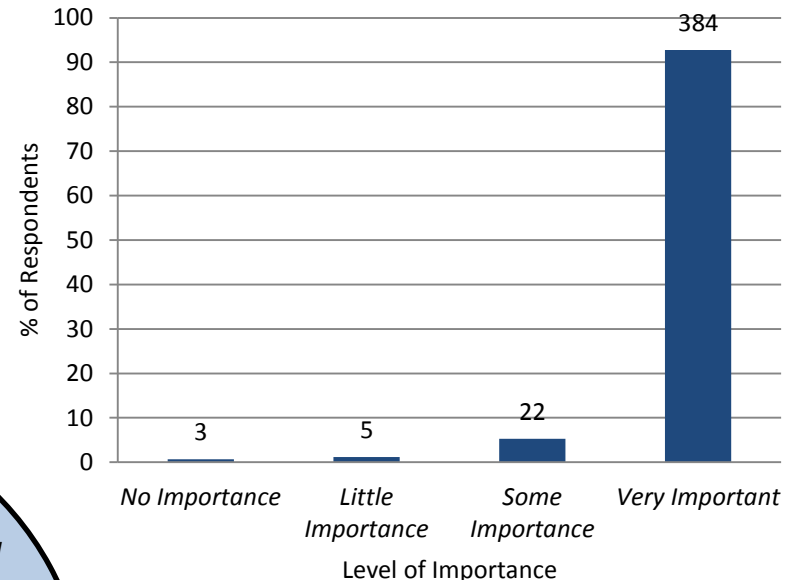
"Without this I would not have been exposed to the many skilled mentors as well as rigorous research and training that is needed for this work."

"It would be unethical, unprofessional and I think dangerous to the community to practice in the clinical setting without a Masters degree. This qualification provides essential theoretical frameworks for understanding the complexities of the human psyche, the various diagnoses & treatment options. It also provides supervised internship experience in clinical settings and insight into the role of a clinician to be a scientist-practitioner. A generalist qualification cannot possibly provide such in-depth knowledge and experience. People without this rigorous training are unaware of what knowledge they are missing: it becomes a case of a little knowledge is a dangerous thing."

"It has reinforced the need to adopt scientific-practitioner methods to my practice. The course has been highly structured and has broadened my knowledge base of organisational/ HR topics such that I feel I can practice with more confidence and consolidate my placements with well learnt theory and applications."

"Provided formal skills/competency based learning in conjunction with knowledge development and validly assessed - contrast with inferior 4+2 'apprenticeship' models."

Fig. 7. Level of Importance of Postgraduate Training in Regard to Work (Number of Responses Also Shown)





Results

Preparation as a Psychologist for Work in Mental Health Care

Fig. 8. Almost 91 % of respondents believe that four years of undergraduate study plus two years of supervision is **NOT** adequate preparation for a psychologist to provide mental health care services.

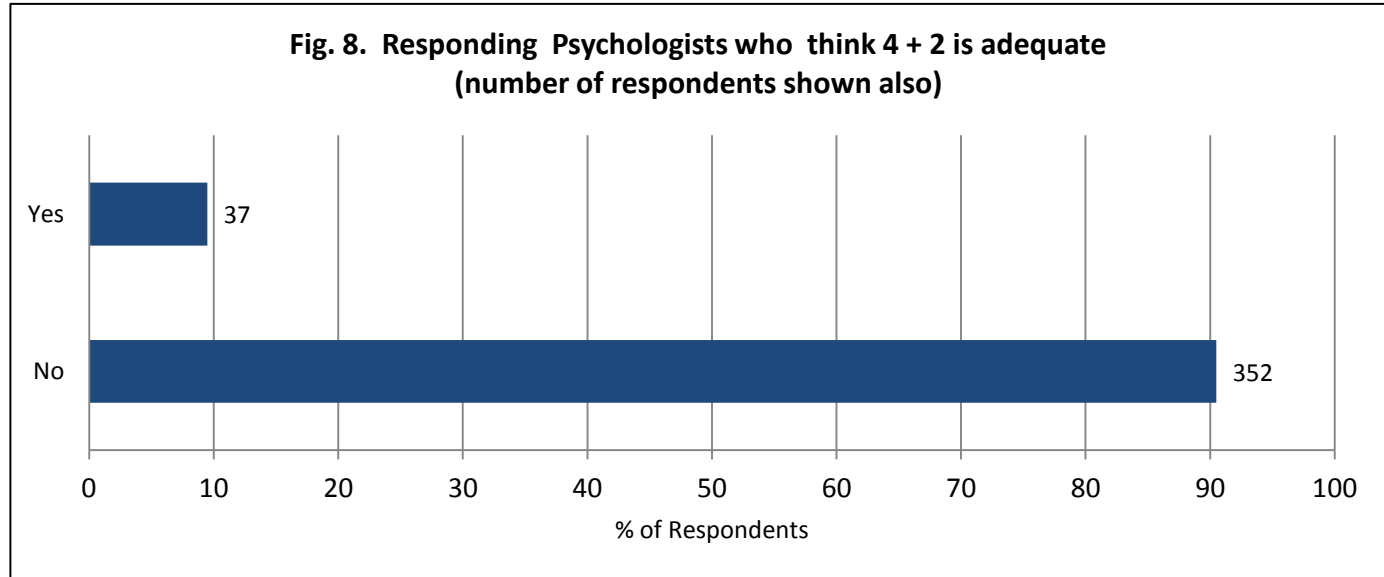
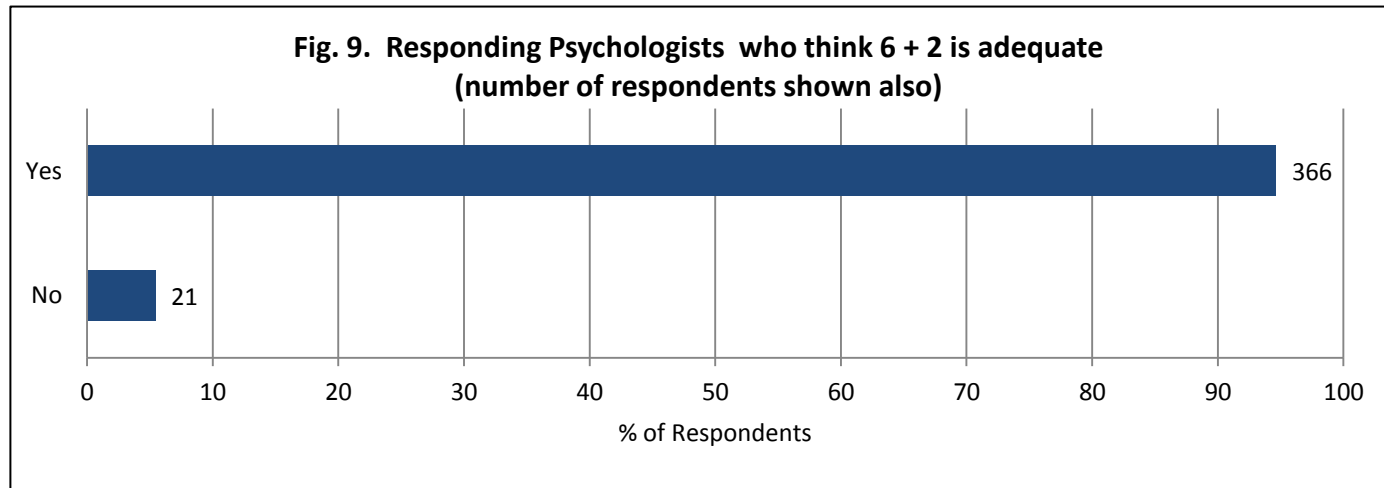


Fig. 9. Almost 95% of respondents believe that a four year undergraduate degree plus a Masters degree (or doctorate) with two years of area-specific supervision **IS** adequate preparation for a psychologist to provide mental health care services.





Results

How could specialist registration assist community members?

Thematic Analysis of Written Comments

% comments	Underlying Themes
14.69 %	Specialist registration will assist community members by helping them clearly differentiate Generalist Psychologists and Specialist Psychologists. Specialists are viewed as having more specific, in-depth knowledge, training, and skills/abilities in their area of expertise & thus are better able to help with specific problems (cf. to Generalists who are perceived as having less in-depth knowledge in specialized areas).
14.37 %	Specialist registration will assist community members select which psychologist to turn to when they encounter specific issues (most appropriate service).
14.06 %	Specialist registration will assist community members as it gives them a clear indication of the level of the practitioner's skills , expertise and training - so they are clear as to what to expect – this will also indicate the area of expertise.
11.87 %	Specialist registration will assist community members – as it ensures that practitioners are providing high quality services to the public.
9.06 %	Specialist registration will assist community members by helping them clearly differentiate Generalist Psychologists and Specialist Psychologists - More specifically, Specialists are viewed as holding advanced training/education (Master's), and Generalists are seen as those with an undergraduate degree.
8.12 %	Specialist registration will assist community members as it will provide them with confidence/assurance that they are being treated by an competent practitioner who has the appropriate knowledge, skills, abilities, treatment etc in their specialist field.
6.56 %	Specialist registration will assist community members as it works to protect the community – It informs both the public & practitioner as to what fields they are allowed to practise in, so that they don't practise what they are not trained in.
6.25 %	Specialist registration will assist community members by increasing their understanding/awareness that there are different types of psychology services available. It does this by differentiating the different types of psychology. It is a common perception that the community is currently confused at these distinction.
3.75 %	The term “endorsement” is <i>not understood by the community</i> . However, “specializations” is – this will help them determine where to go when they need specific services.
3.44 %	Specialist registration will assist community members by informing them who is appropriately trained at the minimum level required to be classed as a “specialist” .
2.50 %	A specialist title that is granted after University (including post-graduate studies) is <i>useless & a mistake</i> – Experience is more pertinent in determining specializations.
1.87 %	Align Australia's Standards and International Standards in Psychological Services.



Results

How could specialist registration assist community members?

"The public have a right to know the expertise of the person they consult and an assurance of an acceptable minimum standard. The 4 + 2 system means someone can qualify with general registration with all their experience and supervision in an organisational area and then offer services to the public in a clinical area."

"Clearly identifies a level of recognised competence in a profession which has a large range of qualifications and expertise."

" "Specialist" is a term that the public are used to."

"Clarity and transparency with respect to what services are available and appropriate for specific referring concerns - and, most importantly, which practitioners are best equipped and appropriately qualified to provide such services."

"It would allow them to make an informed choice and to easily recognise a practitioner who had superior training in a specialist area. You would not see a GP for treatment of a back disc injury...you would see a neurosurgeon. Why is this different in our profession?"

"ALL 9 areas impact on mental health, if a person is being bullied or is engaged in under employment in the workforce, the org psych can help to alleviate the damaging effects on his/her wellbeing. similarly, a community psychologist impacts the mental health and wellbeing of groups and neighbourhoods. it is facile not to mention insulting to your colleagues to suggest that we do not work in areas related to mental health. Specialist registration for ALL NINE areas, is required to recognise the differences between these areas of practice but also the complimentary nature of these different area. a GP would not conduct brain surgery and yet both are recognised for their unique place in the health care system and the various fields of psychology should be no different."

"They MIGHT recognise that there are more than one type of psychologist. The large proportion and high profile of clinical psychologists means that the community tends to think there only 'clinical psychologists' and 'other psychologists'. The Medicare two-tier rebate system perpetuates this. Specialist registration is necessary but not sufficient, to expand the range of psychological services available to members of the community."

"It is a readily understood marker of professional expertise that is used widely in medical settings to distinguish levels of competence. The ordinary person knows what is implied by 'specialist': specialised training in a particular area of practice. In contrast no one understands what is implied by 'endorsement'. It is usually used to denote political advertising "endorsed by Joe Bloggs for the ALP or Liberal Party...etc" Applying it to health care is very odd."

"A post graduate plus supervision level of training ensures that we are providing a specialist level of psychological care which is expected in all developed countries. The community expects that a psychologist has a high level of training akin to other medical specialists. Who wants to go see a cardiac surgeon only to find that their level of training has been significantly reduced to the level of a GP? To 'de-skill' the area of psychological services within Australia is a marked set-back in education and professional standards and again makes us highly undesirable professionally both in Australia and securing employment in US and UK."

"Understanding areas of expertise and limits of expertise, minimise risks of professional dangerousness and harm."

"By ensuring that psychologists providing mental health care have adequate experience and training in specific mental health care practice, which is not covered in 4 year undergraduate psychology training."



Results

How would specialist registration assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists?

Thematic Analysis of Written Comments

% comments	Underlying Themes
16.04 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by better informing the practitioner and thus resulting in correct referrals to an appropriate psych – i.e. specialist title will inform practitioner of the psych’s skills & thus able to match it to the presenting problem (i.e. correct referrals).
13.65 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by clearly indicating the psychologist’s area of specialisation – such that it is easy to identify and thus makes the referral system clearer .
12.63 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by increasing the practitioner’s confidence that they have referred their clients to the correct psychologist who has the appropriate skills, knowledge, training (etc.) to treat the client .
11.26 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by indicating to them which psychologist has more knowledge/ training (i.e. specialists, with post-graduate degrees) in comparison to those who are less knowledgeable (i.e. generalist – with undergraduate degree) . Specialists are therefore seen as more able to take on more complex cases.
10.58 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by informing them of the psychologist’s level of training (e.g. specialist vs. generalist). This helps them identify those who have speciality training/expertise in certain areas (i.e. higher level training etc.)
5.46 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by ensuring that quality services are offered – such that specialist = better knowledge/skills etc = better treatment.
5.12 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by clarifying that there are different areas of psychology/types of psychology (increasing awareness of this/ drawing a distinction between the different types) . At current time, there appears to be a confusion amongst GP’s as to the different types thus resulting in wrong referrals.
3.07 %	Specialist registration will assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists by ensuring that at the least, the psychologist has the minimal training/education required to practice in their area of expertise .
2.05 %	Some respondents believed that the giving a University graduate (including post-graduate) a <i>specialist title</i> straight after uni is a mistake – experience is pertinent to the title specialist .
1.37 %	It wouldn’t help...



Results

How would specialist registration assist health practitioners in referring clients to psychologists?

"Although variability in terms of competency and capacity will continue to exist within specialities, the specialist registration will at least provide a base line level of guarantee about core training and a period of specific, focussed, specialist oriented supervision."

"Specialist registration differentiates the skill level of practitioners and makes it easier for practitioners to identify appropriate referrals"

"It is a clearly recognisable term that denotes special training and special expertise. It therefore helps the referring practitioner to know she/ he is referring to a specialist in the area needed."

"A clearer understanding for health professionals and community members of which psychologists are specialised in certain areas. A generalist title can create ambiguity and confusion as not all psychologists have the same expert knowledge and skills."

"as above- if we are all going to be called 'psychologists' it's difficult to distinguish who has post grad specialist training"

"It would educate GPs and other referrers to the training, experience and skills of many psychologists, other than just Clinical psychologists. Again, this would give them more options as to whom they refer to, and shorter waiting times for the patients they are referring."

"Again, specialist registration helps other practitioners identify the specialty that is most useful for them in their treatment planning. The current system doesn't clearly identify who's a sports psychologist or a clinical psychologist. If I was a GP or a footy coach, I would want to be able to easily identify the difference and to ensure the correct interventions in order to provide the best level of care possible."

"Health care practitioners need to be able identify those clinicians that can best meet the needs of individual patients. Again this would appear to be an ethical imperative. It is not dissimilar from identification of other specialist medical training as opposed to a general practitioner."

"It is my impression that Medical Practitioners already possess a clear understanding of the advanced clinical skills and knowledge possessed by 6+2 Clinical Psychologists and can clearly differentiate between them and 4+2 Generalist Psychologists (unlike the APS). I am not so sure that the other specialty areas are clearly understood by GPs. However, permitting access to specialist titles gives a clear label of what each area of practice specialises in - except maybe for Clinical versus Health. Specialist registration makes it easier for GPs to win over patients to accepting referral to address psychological problems. Specialist registration and title gives a solid face validity to the profession."

"As stated above, specialist registration would assist referrers in regards to who might be the best person for their client / patient to see. It is very disheartening to people to see numerous professionals before they finally find someone who is adequately trained to help them (and sometimes people don't actually find the help they need.. especially if they see a professional who is not adequately trained who does more damage and leaves the person distrustful that all psychologists work that way and no-one can help them). Not only is this process ineffective and troublesome for the consumer, but also extremely costly."



Results

Preparation as a Psychologist for Work in the Community or Organisations

Fig. 10. Just over two thirds of respondents believe that four years of undergraduate study plus two years of supervision is **NOT** adequate preparation for a psychologist to work in sport, the community or an organisation.

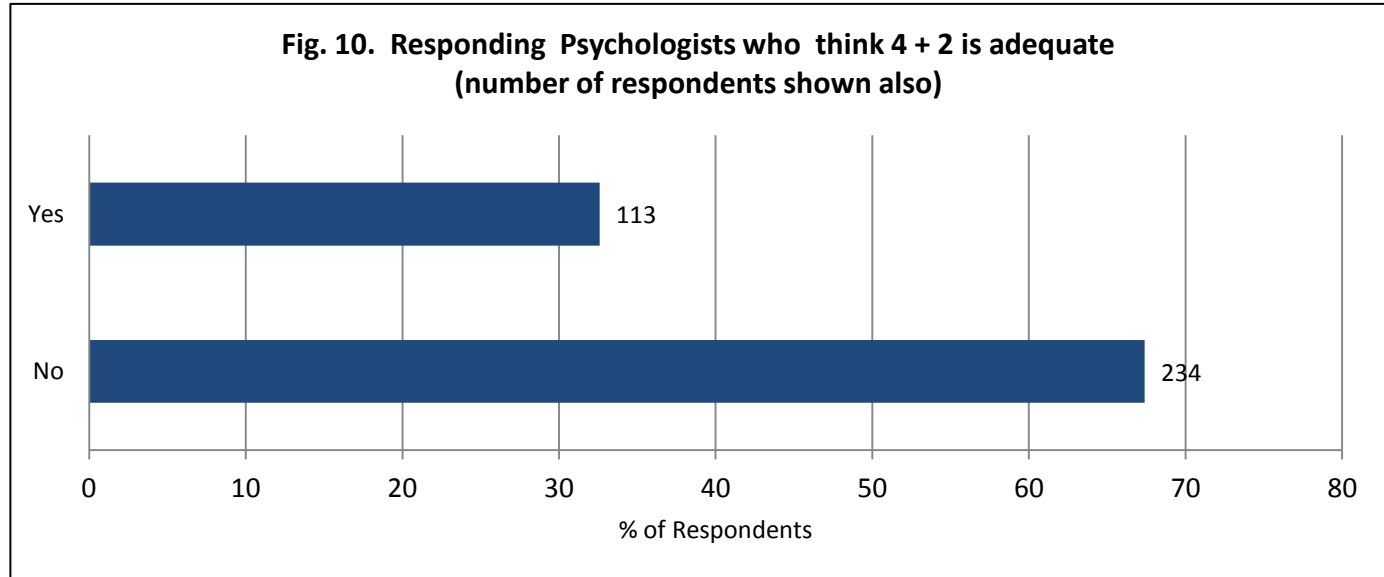
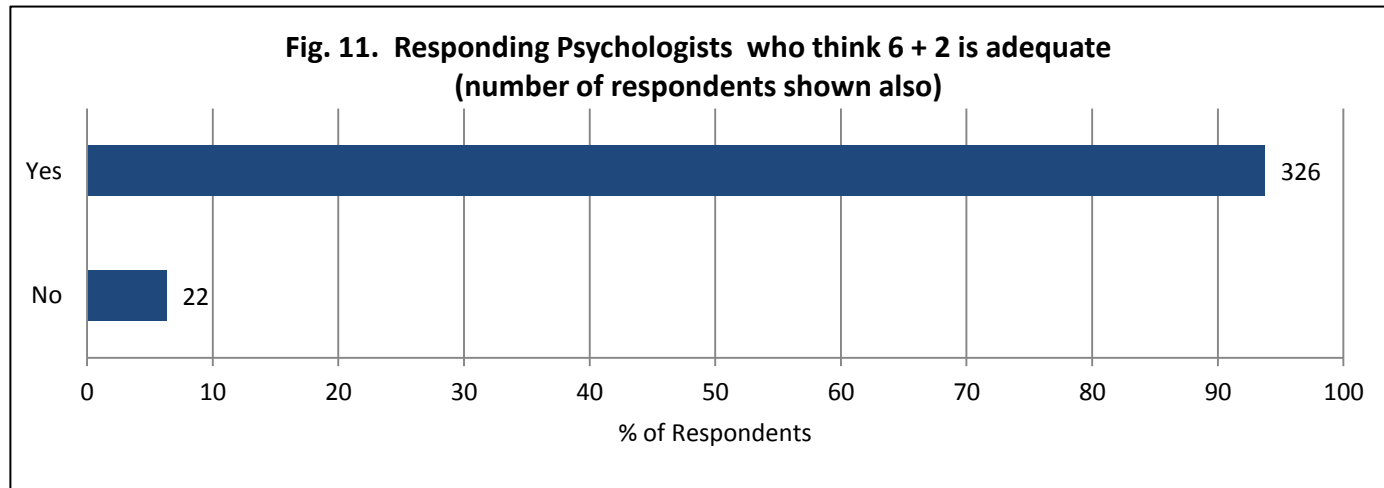


Fig. 11. Almost 94% of respondents believe that a four year undergraduate degree plus a Masters degree (or doctorate) with two years of area-specific supervision **IS** adequate preparation for a psychologist to work in sport, the community or an organisation.





Results

How could specialist registration assist organisations and communities?

Thematic Analysis of Written Comments

% comments	Underlying Themes
16.50 %	Specialist registration would help org's and communities to differentiate the level and area of expertise of the psychologist – thus informing organisations and communities of the psych's level of education, training & area of specialisation. This provides clarity to the organisations in terms of what to expect from a psych
13.59 %	Specialist registration will provide organisations with psychologists whom have highly specialised knowledge & skills in the area of interest (e.g. org psych or community psych); and thus are better able to help them.
13.59 %	Specialist registration will help organisations and communities by making it easier for them to identify psychologists with the appropriate skills, education, training (etc.) that is needed to serve their specific needs.
9.71 %	Specialist registration will help organisations and communities as it ensures that post-graduate studies have been completed (i.e. proper education/training) - implying greater knowledge and expertise in the specific area. This will help organisations differentiate those with undergraduate studies (generalist) who have less specialist knowledge.
5.83 %	Specialist registration will ensure quality services to communities & organisations – as a specialist implies higher education, training (etc.) and thus better services.
5.83 %	Specialist registration will help organisations and communities by setting a standard that is applicable internationally – this assures them that they are receiving adequate services.
4.86 %	Specialist registration will help organisations and communities identify psych's who are appropriately qualified and trained to be classed as a specialist – it will assure them that the minimum requirements (education, trainingetc.) have been met.
4.85 %	No benefits to these fields (only mental health requires specialist).
4.85 %	Org psych/community psych not the respondent's field – does not feel comfortable answering the question (unsure).
3.40 %	Specialist registration is misleading – A graduate (including post-graduate) should not be classed as a "specialist"- experience is pertinent (need to earn the title with proven track record).
2.43 %	Special registration will provide organisations and communities with confidence/assurance that the psychologist will be able to effectively deal with the issue at hand as they are appropriately trained.
1.94 %	Special registration will help raise public awareness that there are different types of psychology services that can be offered. At current time, there appears to be a lack of public awareness of the different types.



Results

How could specialist registration assist organisations and communities?

"Again, the public can know that the psychologist has particular knowledge in the area required, since psychology is such a broad field of study."

"Providing transparency: everyone knows what they are getting!"

"Improving levels of expertise, minimising risks of professional dangerousness and harm. Psychology deals with matters of emotional wellbeing and mental health regardless of whether a client presents with a diagnosis or in a setting other than a mental health clinic."

"Specialist psychologists should have the same recognition as all other medical specialists. This would assist organisations and communities to recognize that hard work pays off in the end because the psychologist has a 'tool-box' of practical techniques, therapies and strategies to realistically treat people in the community. The eight years of training by a specialist psychologist should be recognized by the communities and appreciated because specialist psychologists give back to the community in so many ways. Specialist registration can assist organisations and communities by heading up training courses, treating the mentally unwell as well as the worried well, and taking lead positions in the community."

"A organisation or community that required some training / coaching / intervention in an area of concern or interest such as the development of a Community Based Board (eg for sport, individual sport, or community based issue such as alcohol abuse or school truancy) would require a person with education and training beyond the generalist focus as well as 'book learning' of an undergraduate course. Moreover, a person with clinical, health and some other interests would, perhaps should be seen as working beyond their competency. An oncologist, or even a GP, is not trained to do the work of a dentist even though all three work in the same area of health & medicine."

"I have worked in organisations for many years and a four year degree is not adequate. Specialist registration again provides the theoretical foundations, experience and training to deal with organisations and communities. Organisations and communities want people who have a thorough understanding of their individual needs and who have knowledge and theory to back the approaches that will need to be implemented."

"As previous answers. AND - it's important for psychologists to be clear about their role delineation, too. As a clinical psychologist, I would never presume to know what an specialist organisational psychologist does nor could I do what they do. It's important for organisations and communities to have the right person on the job."

"Specialised training can assist organisations and communities to function optimally."



Results

Specialist Registration - If you had to choose for the field of psychology, would you prefer “area of practice” endorsements or specialist registration with title protection?

Fig. 12. Overwhelmingly, almost 90% of the respondents expressed a preference for the concept of holding specialist registration with title protection.

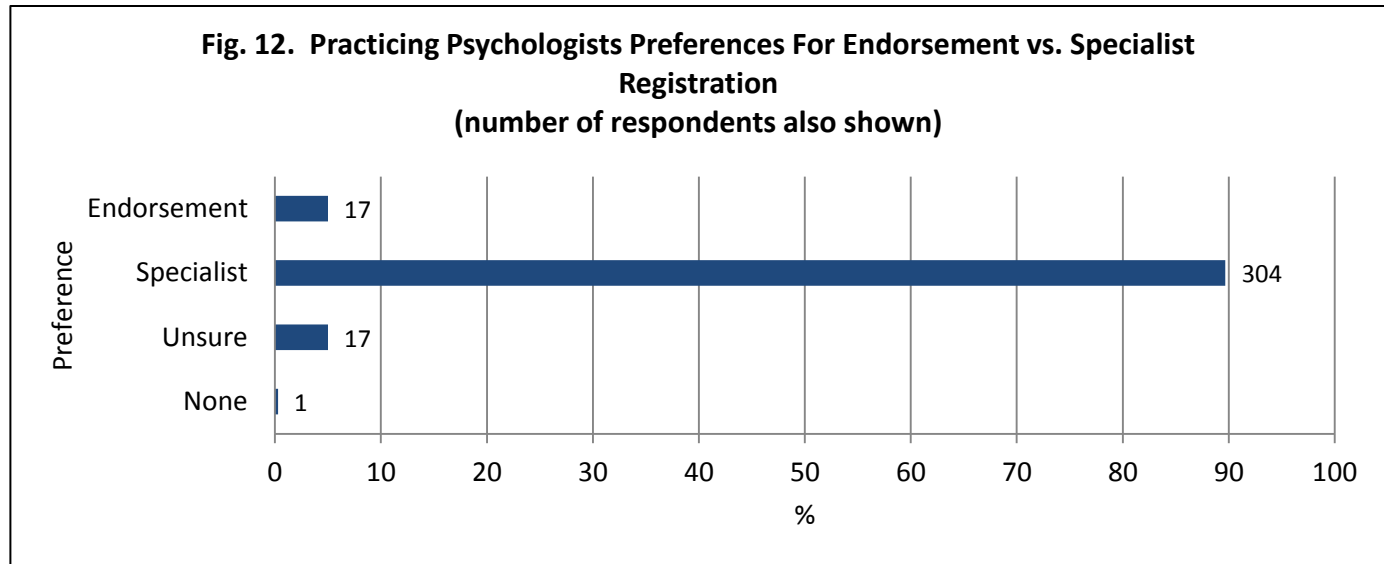
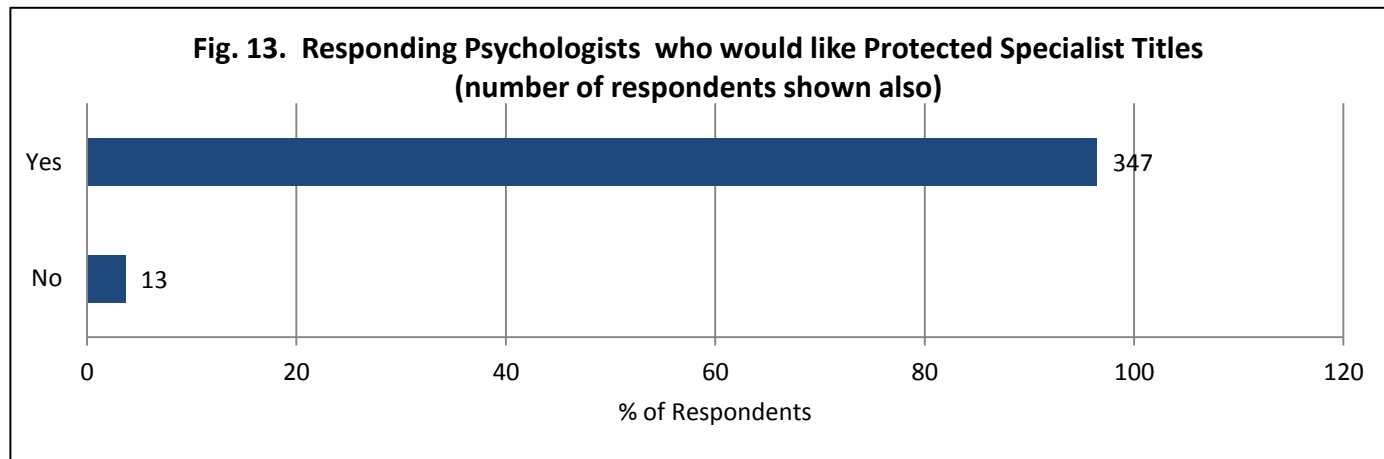


Fig. 13. Almost 97% of respondents would like the use of specialist titles to be restricted and protected under law.





Results

If you had to choose for the field of psychology, would you prefer “area of practice” endorsements or specialist registration with title protection?

Thematic Analysis of Written Comments

% comments	Underlying Themes for Specialist Registration with Title Protection
14.19 %	Specialist Registration is a better system as it clearly indicates to the public that the psychologist (who is a specialist) has extra years of training, skills and is an expert in the field.
8.71 %	A Specialist Registration system will protect the public; as it prevents psychologists from practising in a field that they are unfamiliar with/are not qualified to. (Endorsements is unclear, thus may result in psych’s practitioners practising beyond their own area).
8.39 %	Specialist Registration will make it clear to the public (and practitioners) of what service the psychologist is offering, level of training & whether they are correctly qualified for it.
7.10 %	The Specialist Registration system has been implemented and effective in WA for the past 30 years – it has worked well; why fix something that isn’t broken? Endorsement system is going backwards.
6.77 %	Specialist Registration allows for the recognition/ acknowledgement of all the training/education (e.g. post-graduate studies etc.) a psych has undergone – Psychologists work hard for their specialist title & want it recognised/ acknowledged.
6.77 %	Specialist Registration is a better system as “specialist” is a term that has a clear meaning; and is understood by the public.
4.19 %	Specialist Registration is a better system as the term ‘endorsement’ is confusing the public doesn’t understand it.
2.90 %	Specialist Registration is a better system because “endorsements” is useless/ confusing – it doesn’t reflect the amount of training/qualifications one has (Postgraduate = specialist, generalist = undergrad; this not reflected in endorsement title).
2.58 %	Specialist Registration is a better system as it is consistent with other professions & is recognised internationally – this makes it easier to understand & allows for world-wide standards.
0.65%	Endorsement does not mean the same thing as a specialist.
34.19 %	No additional comments provided



Results

If you had to choose for the field of psychology, would you prefer “area of practice” endorsements or specialist registration with title protection? -
Specialist Registration

“Clients and patients have indicated that they do not understand what “endorsed” means. However, they have a complete understanding and awareness of what a specialist title means as they adopt the medical analogy with which they are totally familiar.”

“Endorsed areas of practice is less than clear in its implications, even for professionals. I am concerned about the risk for clients and the public if this continues.”

“The absence of title protection makes the “title” meaningless and unsafe for the community and all service providers. The conveyance of information to the broader community depends on simplicity. Specialist title is simple to communicate and understand. Descriptions such as “Endorsed Areas of Practice” lose understanding in the vagueness.”

“Over the years of practicing psychology you develop a particular identity that reflects who you are. It helps with communication with other professionals as well as clients.”

“Because it is the same principle as any medical professional who has undertaken specialist training, it must be respected as such and protected in the same manner as other professional. as i said earlier, a GP (or other specialist) would not practice or make recommendations for treatment outside of their area of competence and the same must be true for psychology. ALL psychologists work in the broad domain of mental health, but within that domain NINE specialist areas exist and these require respect and protection”

“Because I earned this title, it differentiates me from those who have not trained as much, but also differentiates me from other specialties, allowing the public to know that I have no training in forensic or neuropsych etc”

“4+2 is inadequate for any practicing psychologist who works with people, organisations and communities. Registration as Specialist with Title Protection ensures that the public can trust that a practitioner using the Specialist Title does in fact have the necessary qualifications.”

“This would legally protect the level of practice in the field more effectively than the endorsed areas of practice.”

“30 years of specialist title in WA proved to be a clear, effective and safe way to protect the public”

“This holds greatest protection for the public, especially those with mental health problems who are vulnerable”



Results

If you had to choose for the field of psychology, would you prefer “area of practice” endorsements or specialist registration with title protection?

Thematic Analysis of Written Comments

% comments	Underlying Themes for “Area of Practice” Endorsements
16.67 %	Field of psych has become divided (with clinical feeling they are better than the rest) – specialist title enforces this division; endorsement will encourage a united front.
16.67 %	Endorsement allows one to practice in more areas – they are not tied down to one specific topic (do not need to undergo further study etc).
11.11 %	Miscellaneous
55.56 %	No additional comments provided

Thematic Analysis of Written Comments

% comments	Underlying Themes for Don’t Know or Unsure
15.78 %	Specialist title good in terms of informing public what area a person specialises in; but bad because it restricts those who want to be generalists (practise in many fields/be flexible in area of focus e.g. Org Psych – various areas possible).
15.78 %	Both systems trying to prevent people working outside their area of speciality (so is good).
10.53 %	Specialist term misused in Psychology.
15.78 %	Miscellaneous
42.11 %	No additional comments provided



Results

If you had to choose for the field of psychology, would you prefer “area of practice” endorsements or specialist registration with title protection? - *Endorsement/ Don't know, Unsure*

“We have enough division and antagonism within the profession as it is - we should be presenting a reasonably united front - moreover, specialist titles could mean a clinical psychologist couldn't work in a school and a counselling psychologist couldn't respond to a mental health problem or, as has happened in WA in the past, a women's health service couldn't employ the psychologist of their choice because they didn't carry a specialist title that gives no indication of expertise in women's health practice- what nonsense! Endorsement that indicates a person's additional training is more than adequate for protection of the public, which is the PsyBA's role.”

“I agree with specialist title to indicate a level of training and qualification. I think it gets very difficult if it means defining what area a person can practise in.”

“It's simpler and clearer to talk about specialist titles with protection of these than Endorsed areas of practice. However, I wouldn't want to see neuropsychology subsumed into any other specialist branch, as it is highly distinct and I think there is a lot of scope for poor practice when people offer 'neuropsychological' services without having the necessary training and extensive supervised experience.”

“Specialist psychologists in WA has been used in an unfortunate way e.g. clinical psychologists in health department. Other psychologists have been excluded from working for equal pay in the Health Department WA even though they have equivalent training and skills. Has caused bad feeling within the profession. A better system would be if the psychologist has the skills and experience - not linked to a specialist or endorsed area.”

“Difficult to say as both have advantages and disadvantages. The public understand the term specialist better than the term endorsed so specialist is preferable in that sense. Both offer title protection under the legislation but specialist has the extra protection of 'specialist' as well as 'organisational psychologist' etc so specialist is also preferable in that way. However specialist registration would restrict practice to only that area of practice which is fine for practitioners who only work in a specialised area but those that want the flexibility to work in more than one area would also have to maintain general registration and would presumably have to pay double fees to maintain two registration types.”

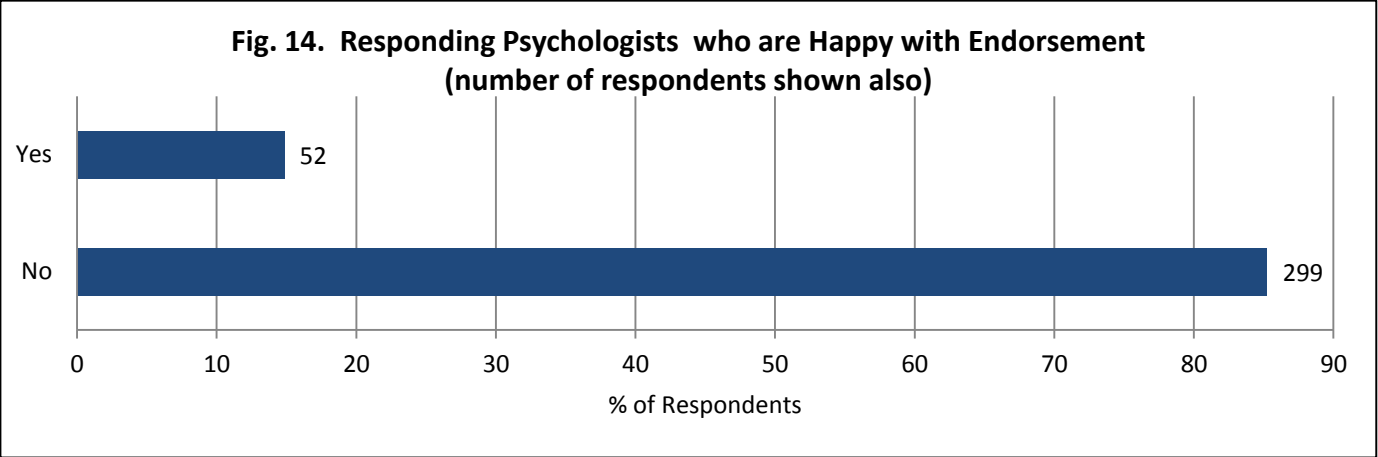
“I would not like to be precluded from one form of practice that I may subsequently be trained in or have expertise in through supervised practise. Also I am not sure what protected by law" really means in this area when even under the guise of clinical psychologist there are vast differences in knowledge base, quality of service, commitment to clients and service/commitment back to the psychological community.”



Results

Are you happy with endorsement as the way we determine specialism in psychology?

Fig. 14. Just over 85% of respondents expressed their unhappiness with endorsement as the way specialism is determined for psychologists.



"Lack of consistency as individuals vary widely in their level of education and training yet receive endorsement. Specialists in medicine do additional study/training and are recognized as experts in their area based on this. Strict standards are maintained and this is important for the profession and delivery of the service."

"It is a token effort that minimises the length of post-graduate study and the level of higher education that is necessary and in the long term this may see a decline in take-up at the higher level and thus a weakening of the specialist services that can be provided through the smaller number of psychologists who pursue post-graduate studies at a doctoral level. There is no real recognition for someone such as myself who has completed 4 years undergraduate plus 4 years postgraduate studies."

"Specialism means that one has made the specific choice to be extra qualified and a specialist in the required / selected field. Why should general psychologists be given this privilege if they have not done the training. The specialist courses are available and can be selected to undertake. One can't decide not to do the specialist training and then expect to be awarded the same endorsement that someone who has done the more specialised study."

"Because it de-values our profession - puts us all in some muddy mix of allied health practitioners"

"what does endorsement mean to the average person on the street? nothing - sounds like it's something we've 'bought into", not a title we have earned through training and experience. people understand what a 'specialist' is from the medical model - go with what people know."

"Endorsement is an ambiguous term which does not provide other health practitioners or the community any clear indication of the level of expertise of the psychologist. Endorsement also diminishes the value of postgraduate study as the "authorisation" process does not appear to require an individual to hold a post graduate qualification thus placing the community at risk of not receiving the level of expertise their mental health issues may require."

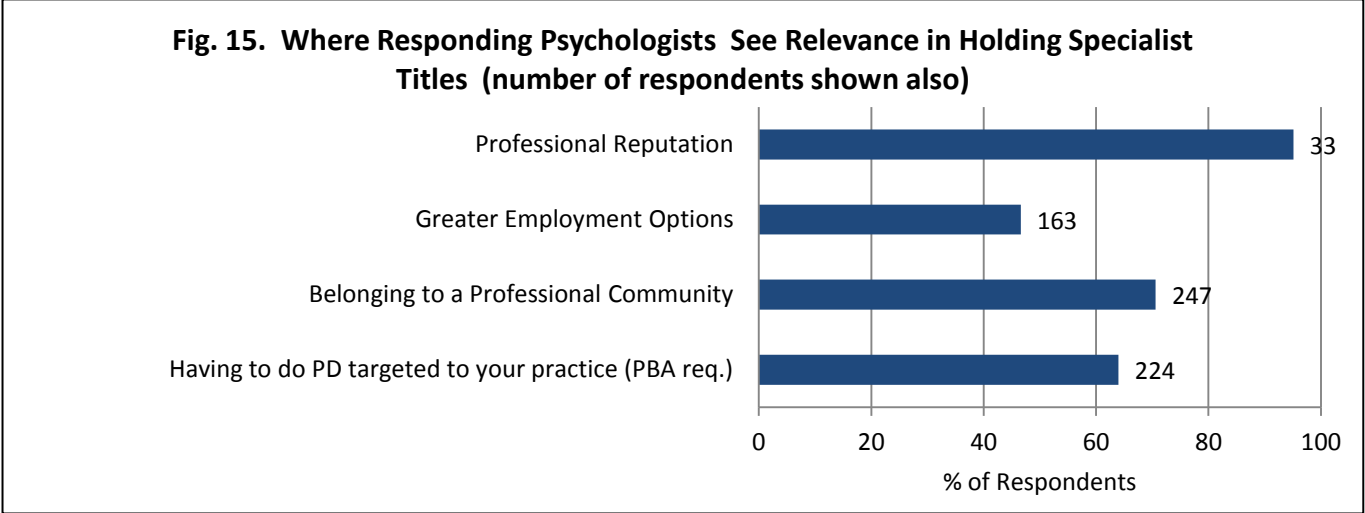
"I don't believe that all psychological degrees and training are equal. Specialist title distinguishes the length and depth of training that the holder has undertaken"



Results

What relevance, if any, do you see in holding specialist titles?

Fig. 15. Almost all respondents felt that Specialist Titles contribute to perceptions of professional reputation. They provide an sense of identity and link to a professional community and professional development.



"It publically formalises the distinction between Generalists and Specialists and Specialist Disciplines."

"Respectful acknowledgement within the profession of the central areas of expertise that various specialists possess and a recognition for some of the common ground we share."

"Specialist registration means aiming high and attaining high. It is about excellence. It is about professional pride in being at the top of one's game and staying there. It implies an attitude of engaged practice, of passionately caring about one's area of expertise. This is a work force issue of such great importance and government appears impervious. Why should Australia seek to meet international standards of care for the mentally ill? If Australia wants to be on the world stage then it needs to have some concern about the fact that it has the lowest level of training for psychology in the western world. Excellence takes time effort and money and those who attain it are entitled to have it recognised, otherwise where is the incentive? You take the pride away from people and the impact will be an erosion of standards."

"Protection of the public, monitoring of quality of training and skills"

"International recognition and transferability"

"Safety - stringent regulations protects the community and service users from being mistreated. Protection of the profession - stringent regulations protects the profession from being misused by others. Recognition - Individuals who have completed post graduate degrees in psychology have (until now) and deserve to be recognised for the qualifications they have gained."

"Maintaining a higher standard of psychologists within Australia, and a comparative standard with other western world countries."



Conclusions

1. Postgraduate Training is Critical for Competent and Safe Mental Health, Organisational and Community Services
 - The majority of psychologists responding to this survey believe that postgraduate training is critical to the delivery of professional and competent services to the community and organisations. The majority of respondents felt that the 4+2 apprenticeship model (4yr undergraduate degree plus 2yrs of on-the-job supervision) is insufficient to enable competent and professional services to be delivered in mental health, organisations or communities.

2. Specialist Registration is preferable to Endorsement
 - Across the country and specialty areas, there is a strong desire for specialist registration rather than endorsement.
 - Respondents would like specialist titles to be restricted and protected by law.
 - Specialist registration is seen as a way of reinforcing a professional reputation, provides a sense of belonging to a professional community and by requiring professional development in the area of specialty ensures up-to-date, best practice and evidence-based work.

The Australian College of Specialist Psychologists unequivocally supports specialist registration for our profession, for all those who have completed specialist training at a minimum of two years Masters level, plus two years of supervision. We believe specialist registration is essential because registration legally requires that the practitioner **must** have this training and supervision in order to practice and utilise the specialist skills. At present we only have generalist (undergraduate) training registered, which indicates that this is sufficient and the only essential training standard, in order to practice in our profession in any area of psychology. This level of training does not meet international training standards. The endorsement process makes the post graduate training an “optional extra” that people can choose to do or not. It could be argued that over time this could readily lead to the down grading of our professional training, as why would people spend time and money doing post graduate training if it is not deemed anywhere as essential. We also believe from the reading of the National Registration Legislation that the endorsement process was never designed to capture specialist training of this level, but was designed to allow people to do additional training of interest to them, to add on skills and have them credentialed.