

# Participant Satisfaction with Youth Justice Conferences

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## Introduction

- Youth Justice Conferencing was established in NSW through the *Young Offenders Act 1997* as one alternative among a hierarchy of sanctions designed to divert young offenders from the court system.
- A Youth Justice Conference is a meeting between the young offender and victim, and their respective families / support persons.
- The key discussion points of a conference include:
  - the offence and its consequences for the victim;
  - acceptance of responsibility by the offender for his/her behaviour;
  - restitution for the victim;
  - any course of action which can be undertaken by the offender to encourage law-abiding behaviour in the future.



Typical attendees at a Youth Justice Conference can include a conference convenor, a representative from the police, the victim, the offender and their respective support persons (e.g. family and extended family).

- A previous evaluation of NSW conferences (Trimboli, 2000) showed that most offenders and victims were satisfied with their conference.
- International research has also reported high levels of participant satisfaction with the conferencing process (Wemmers, 2002; Campbell et al., 2005; Goldsmith, Halsey, & Bamford, 2005).
- Very little research, however, has conducted any systematic follow up of victim satisfaction. It is therefore difficult to know whether the high levels of victim satisfaction being reported are sustained over time.

## Aim

- The purpose of this project was to evaluate offender and victim satisfaction with NSW Youth Justice Conferences immediately after conference participation and to re-assess victim satisfaction 4 months after the conference date.

## Method

### Participants

- All offenders and victims who were referred to a NSW Youth Justice Conference between the 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012 were invited to participate.
- Offenders and victims self-completed a survey immediately following the conference. Victims also completed a phone-based survey 4 months after the conference.

### Survey Instruments

- Three surveys were designed; one for the offender and two for the victim (the first to be completed at the end of the conference, the second to be completed 4 months after the conference).
- The surveys included questions about the:
  - satisfaction with how the case was handled;
  - fairness of the outcome plan on the offender and victim;
  - completion of the outcome plan.

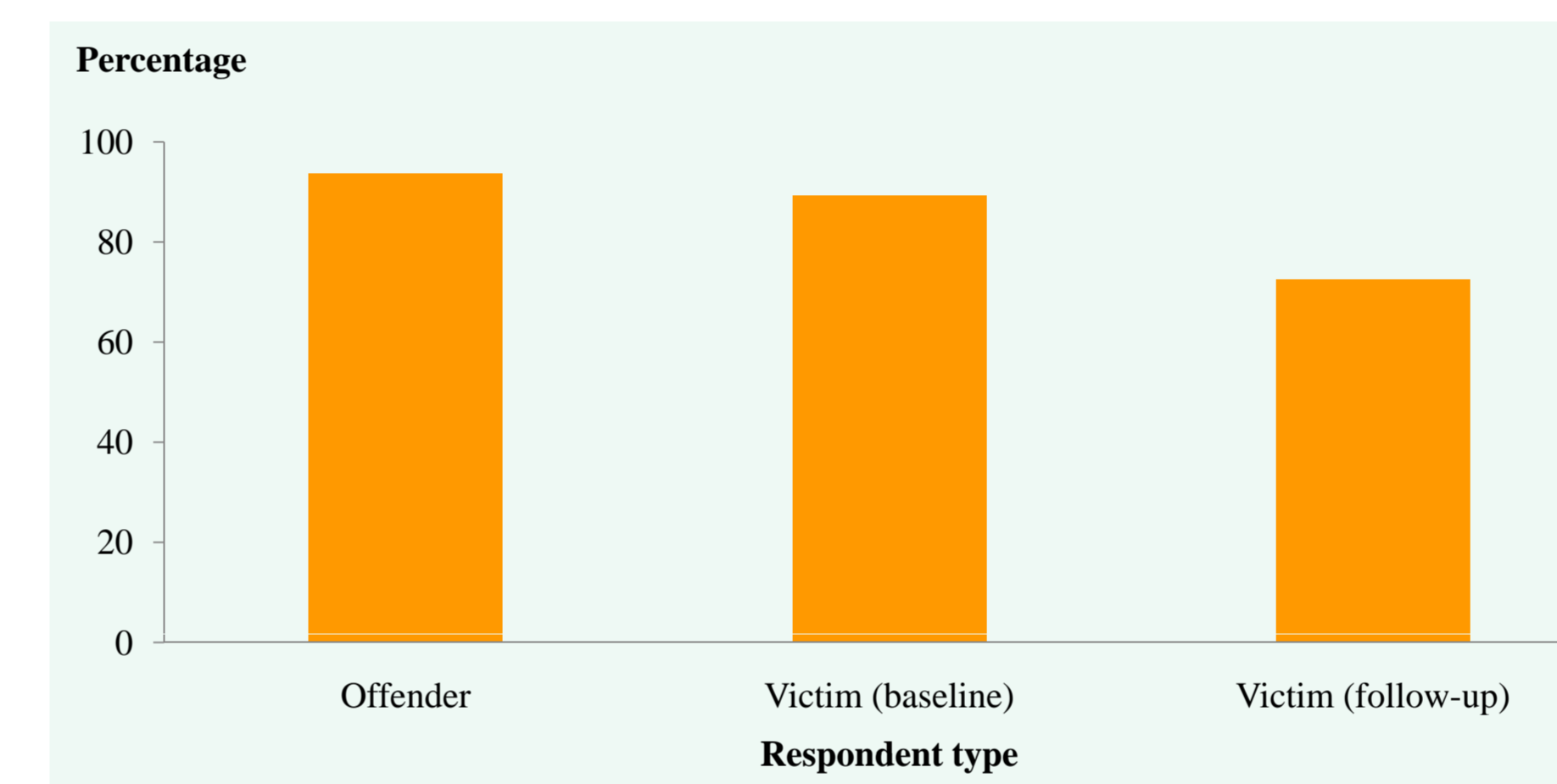
### Response Rate

- Of the 338 conferences referred between 1<sup>st</sup> March and the 31<sup>st</sup> May 2012, there were 223 conferences for which at least one offender and / or victim completed a survey. This represents a response rate of 66.0 per cent.
- A total of 263 offenders and 141 victims participated in the baseline survey.
- Of the 141 victims who participated in the baseline, 96 victims also completed the follow-up survey 4 months after the conference.

## Results

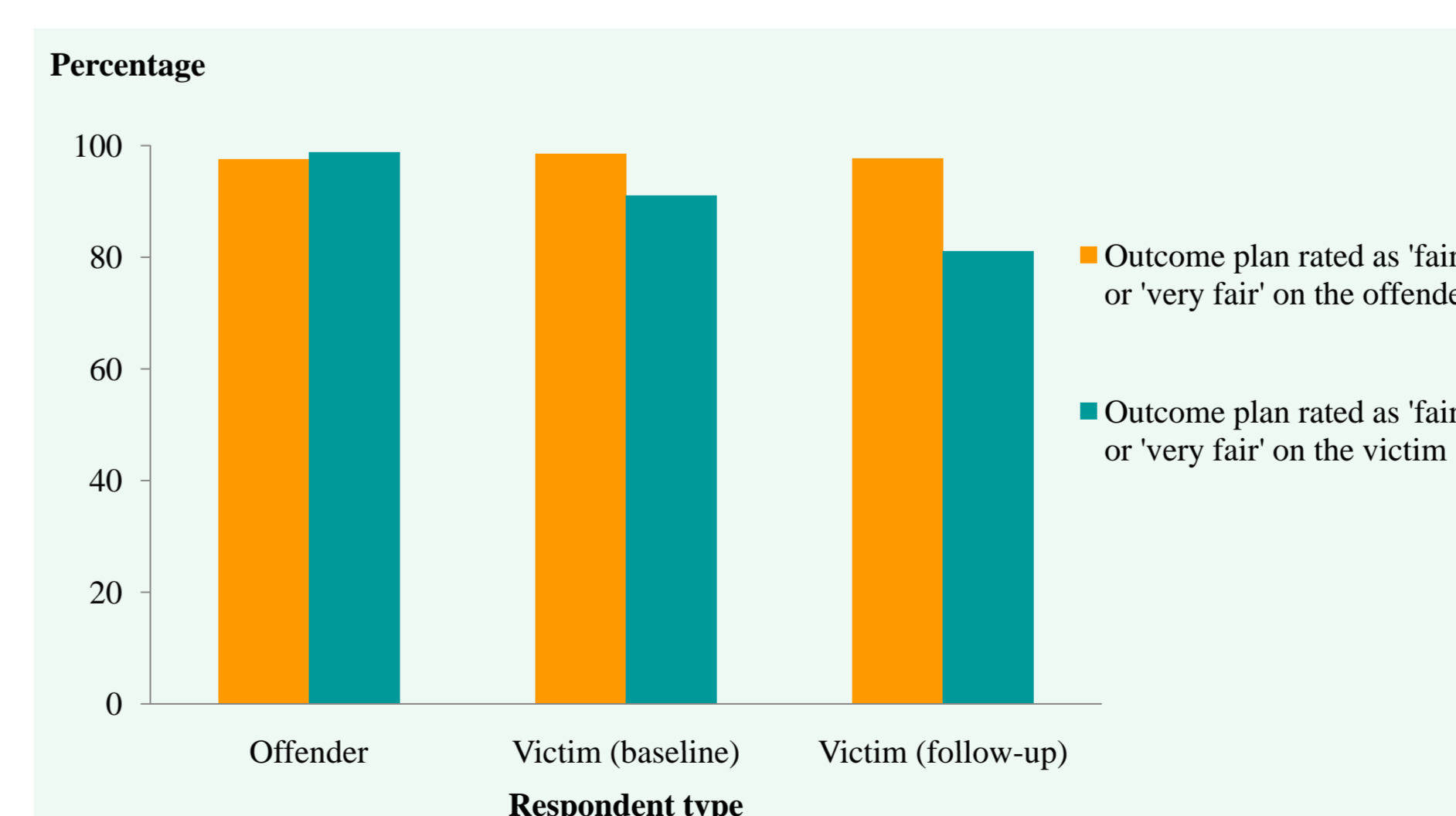
- As shown in Figure 1 ratings of satisfaction with how the case was handled were high. Immediately following the conference, over 89 per cent of all offenders and victims reported they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied'. At the 4-month follow-up, however, a significantly smaller percentage (73%) of victims reported they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' ( $\chi^2 = 8.89$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Figure 1. The percentage of offenders and victims who reported they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with how their case was handled.



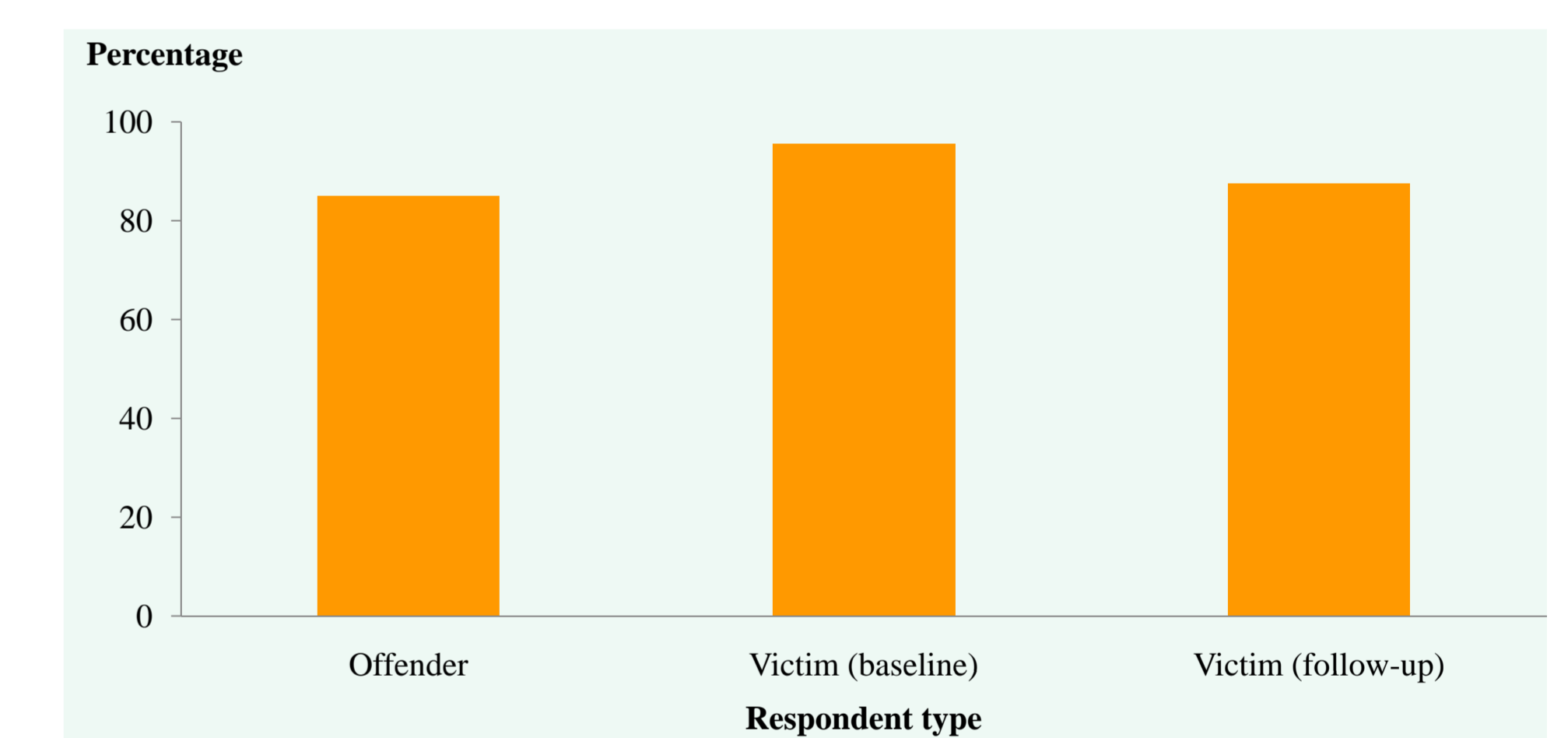
- As shown in Figure 2, ratings of the fairness of the outcome plan were high. More than 97 per cent of offenders and victims (at baseline and follow-up) rated the outcome plan as 'fair' or 'very fair' on the offender. With regards to the fairness of the outcome plan on the victim, however, significantly less victims (91%) than offenders (99%) rated the outcome plan as 'fair' or 'very fair' at the baseline time-point ( $\chi^2 = 12.10$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Moreover, compared to the baseline time-point, at the 4-month follow-up significantly less victims (81%) reported that the outcome plan was 'fair' or 'very fair' to the victim ( $\chi^2 = 5.33$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .04$ ).

Figure 2. The percentage of offenders and victims who rated the outcome plan as 'fair' or 'very fair'



- Despite 90 per cent of victims reporting that it was important for the youth to complete the outcome plan, less than half of the victims surveyed at the 4-month follow-up had received any feedback about its completion.
- Less than half of victims at the 4-month follow-up were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the amount of information they received about the completion of the outcome plan.
- As shown in Figure 3 most offenders and victims would recommend conferencing to other offenders and victims respectively. In the baseline survey, significantly more victims (96%) than offenders (85%) reported they would recommend conferencing ( $\chi^2 = 10.04$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Compared to the baseline time-point, however, at the 4-month follow-up significantly less victims (88%) reported they would recommend conferencing ( $\chi^2 = 5.44$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = .04$ ).

Figure 3. The percentage of offenders and victims who would recommend conferencing to other offenders and victims respectively



## Conclusion

- Most offenders and victims reported that they were satisfied with the conferencing process and considered it to be fair to both the offender and victim.
- The aspect of conferencing that victims reported least satisfaction with was the level of feedback from conference staff about the offender's completion of the outcome plan.
- Even 4 months after the conference, victim satisfaction was high although some ratings of satisfaction and fairness were significantly lower than baseline.

## Acknowledgements

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