

Concerned Significant Other's experiences of Community Reinforcement and Family Training: A qualitative study

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Introduction: Substance use can have significant emotional and social impacts on family members and friends, commonly referred to as concerned significant others (CSOs). CSOs are often overlooked within substance-use service systems, particularly in rural Australia. Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT) is an intervention designed to support CSOs by improving wellbeing, strengthening coping and communication skills, and encouraging treatment engagement by the person using substances. Despite a strong international evidence base, little research has examined CSOs' experiences of the program in rural Australian contexts. This qualitative study explored CSOs' experiences of CRAFT, including benefits, challenges, and recommendations for future implementation.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 26 participants of an RCT examining effectiveness of an online practitioner-led delivery of CRAFT to CSOs in rural Australia. Purposive sampling captured variation across the sample. Interviews were analysed using a descriptive qualitative approach.

Results: Participants ranged in age from 25 to 67 years, were predominantly female (76.9%) and white/Caucasian (84.6%). Three key themes were identified: (1) *Experiences of the CRAFT program*, highlighting the value of structured, skills-based components; (2) *Delivery of CRAFT*, emphasising the importance of practitioner-led support and online accessibility; and (3) *Outcomes experienced from CRAFT*, including improvements in CSOs' wellbeing and communication and relationships with their loved ones.

Discussions and Conclusions: Online, practitioner-led CRAFT was perceived as an acceptable and meaningful intervention for CSOs in rural Australia. Findings highlight the importance of accessible support that recognises CSOs as legitimate recipients of care within substance-use services.

Implications on communities, practice, policy and/or First Nations communities: Integrating online, practitioner-led CRAFT into rural substance-use services may help address access barriers and improve support for families affected by substance use. Recognising CSOs' needs in policy and service design may strengthen family-inclusive responses in rural communities.

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