

Dental Therapist Labour Force, 1997

This Newsletter provides information on the dental therapist labour force in Australia. Data were collected for the national dental labour force collection with all dental therapists receiving a mail questionnaire.

Data Collection

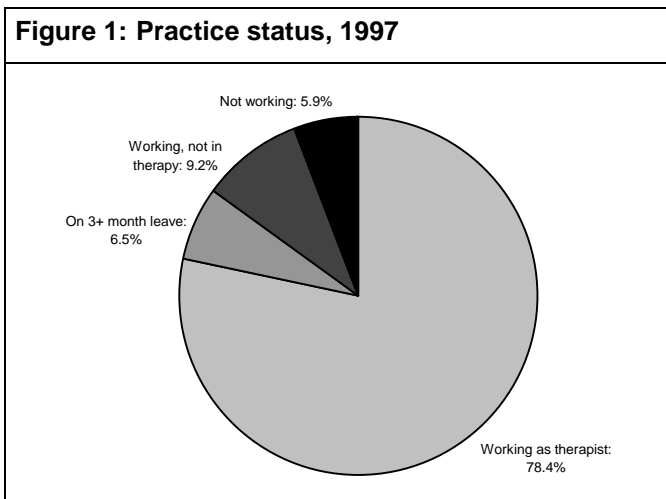
This data collection was conducted in the last quarter of 1997 and the first quarter of 1998 in all States and Territories of Australia. Dental therapists are registered in Victoria, Western Australia and the Northern Territory and these registers were used in the data collection. In the remaining States and the Australian Capital Territory, collection was conducted with the cooperation of the Dental Health section of the health authority.

The data collection was supported by the Australian Dental Therapists' Association and a response rate of 75.7% was achieved. The questionnaire included data items on practice status; demographic characteristics; education background; location, area and type of practice; hours worked and reasons if working in casual or less than full-time work.

Practice Status

Figure 1 shows that the majority (78.4%) of dental therapists are in practice in Australia with an additional 6.5% on leave for 3 months or longer.

Figure 1: Practice status, 1997



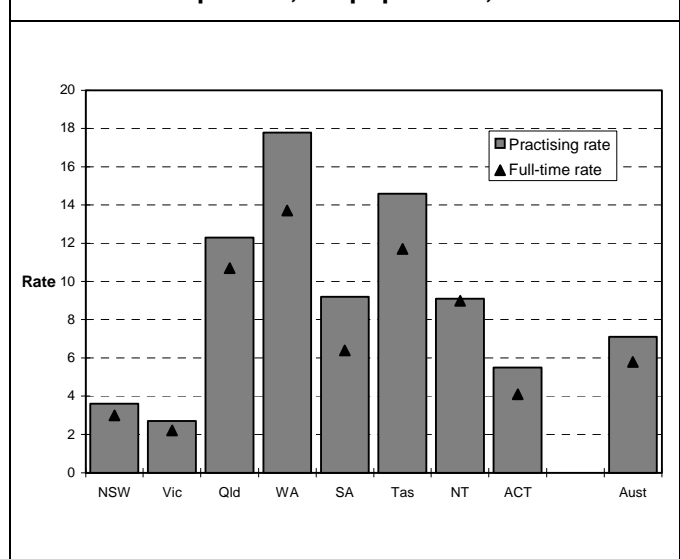
It can be seen from Table 1 and Figure 2 that Western Australia, Tasmania and Queensland have the highest rates of dental therapists per 100,000 population, while New South Wales and Victoria have the lowest rates per 100,000 population. Consequently, the national rate is between these two levels with a practising rate of 7.1 and a full-time equivalent (FTE) rate of 5.8.

Table 1: Practice status by State/Territory, 1997

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
Working:									
Dental therapist 3+ months' leave	10	16	31	27	16	6	-	3	109
Not in dental therapy	-	61	13	42	31	2	6	1	156
Not working	1	29	14	46	6	3	-	-	99
Total Practising rate	3.6	2.7	12.3	17.8	9.2	14.6	9.1	5.5	7.1
FTE rate	3.0	2.2	10.7	13.7	6.4	11.7	9.0	4.1	5.8

It can also be seen from Figure 2 that, with the exception of the Northern Territory, there is a consistent pattern between the practising rate and the FTE rate. However, in South Australia and Western Australia the practising and FTE rates differ the most, with the mean hours worked per week being well below full-time employment.

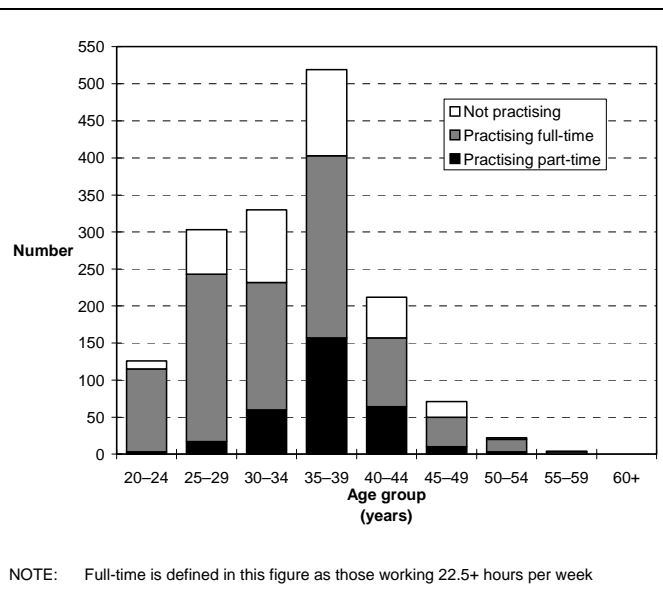
Figure 2: Practising and full-time equivalent therapists, State/Territory, rate per 100,000 population, 1997



Demographic Background and Qualifications

The majority of dental therapists in practice in Australia are aged in the range 25–44 years with a substantial group aged 35–39 years (Figure 3). It can also be seen that the largest group of dental therapists who are not in practice are also aged 25–44 years, and the largest group of part-time therapists are also aged 30–44 years.

Figure 3: Age by practice status, full- and part-time, 1997



The majority (86.3%) of therapists were born in Australia (Figure 4). In addition, it can be seen that the great majority were born in English-speaking countries. It should be noted that the majority of dental therapists were female with only 32 being male. In addition, there were twelve dental therapists who were Indigenous Australians.

Figure 4: Practising therapists, country of birth, 1997

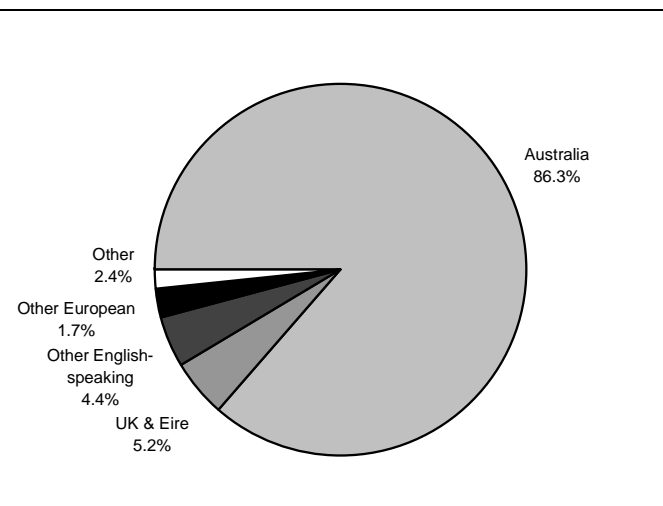


Table 2 presents the place of qualification by State and Territory. It can be seen that the majority (1447 or 85.7%) qualified within their own State. In addition, it can be seen that very few (79 or 14.7%) qualified overseas, with most of these from New Zealand.

Table 2: Place of qualification by State/Territory, 1997

Place of qualification	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Total
NSW	192	7	22	4	5	7	6	4	247
Vic	4	191	9	3	2	-	3	1	213
Qld	3	5	426	1	-	-	-	-	435
WA	4	1	2	396	-	-	4	-	407
SA	1	6	6	10	177	5	5	1	211
Tas	6	1	5	5	-	65	1	13	96
New Zealand	23	18	6	13	4	3	4	2	73
Other o/s	1	1	-	3	1	-	-	-	6
Total	234	230	476	435	189	80	23	21	1688

Practice Activity

Dental therapists practise in the public sector except for Western Australia where there is a separate registration for practice in the private sector (Table 3).

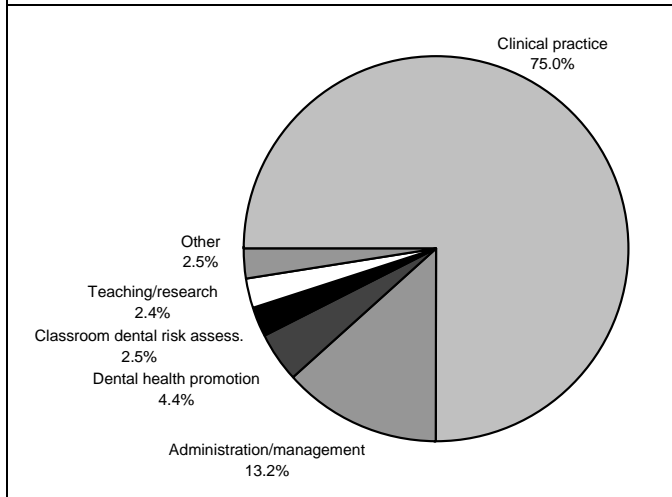
Public school clinic is the predominant site of practice throughout Australia. However, in New South Wales there were substantial numbers of dental therapists working in public community centres and hospitals. For Western Australia there were 123 (38.4%) whose main practice was in the private sector.

Table 3: Practising therapists, site of main practice by State/Territory, 1997

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
Public clinic:									
School	106	102	398	183	128	60	17	5	999
Community centre	61	7	3	1	3	2	-	12	89
Hospital	46	5	2	5	4	2	-	-	64
Public:									
Teaching institution	2	2	9	5	1	-	-	-	19
Other	8	8	6	3	-	5	-	-	30
Private	-	-	-	123	-	-	-	-	123
Total	223	124	418	320	136	69	17	17	1324

Each respondent specified the estimated hours spent in a range of areas of practice. The majority of hours (74.9%) were spent in clinical practice (Figure 5) with 13.2% spent in administration/management and small amounts spent in the remaining areas of practice. In New South Wales therapists reported that 12.4% of the hours were spent in that State working in the area of classroom dental risk assessment.

Figure 5: Practising therapists, area of practice, 1997



From Table 4 it can be seen that the largest group of therapists (550) practise for 30–39 hours per week. There were relatively few (40) working <10 hours per week. The mean hours per week was 30.6 hours.

The Northern Territory reported the highest mean hours (37.2 hours per week) and there was little difference between the eastern States. In Queensland there was a substantial number (182) working 40+ hours per week. The lowest mean hours per week were reported in Western Australia (28.9 hours), the Australian Capital Territory (27.8 hours) and South Australia (26.2 hours).

Table 4: Practising therapists, hours worked by State/Territory, 1997

Hours per week	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
<10	7	3	6	20	3	–	–	1	40
10–19	27	25	57	70	34	10	–	1	224
20–29	43	15	67	33	34	20	–	8	220
30–39	78	72	106	173	62	38	16	5	550
40+	68	9	182	24	3	1	1	2	290
Total	223	124	418	320	136	69	17	17	1324
Mean	31.8	31.0	32.6	28.9	26.2	30.1	37.2	27.8	30.6

Of those therapists reporting that they were looking for work (Table 5) the majority (82 of the 146) were seeking part-time work only. There was 10.5% of the

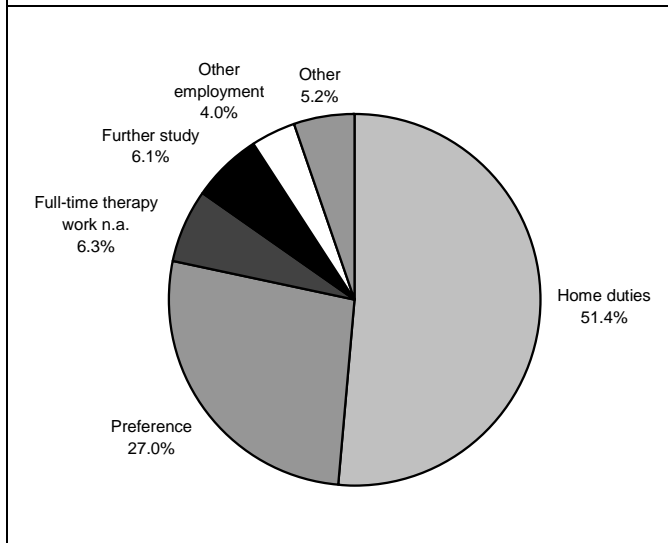
Table 5: Therapists looking for full- or part-time work, 1997

Looking for work:	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
Full-time	10	4	6	5	5	1	2	1	34
Full- or part-time	–	7	8	4	8	2	1	–	30
Part-time	8	17	11	25	17	3	–	1	82
Total	18	28	25	34	30	6	3	2	146
% labour force	8.0	19.9	5.8	10.2	20.0	8.6	15.0	11.8	10.5

dental therapy labour force looking for work. The highest levels were reported in South Australia (20.0%), Victoria (19.9%) and the Northern Territory (15.0%).

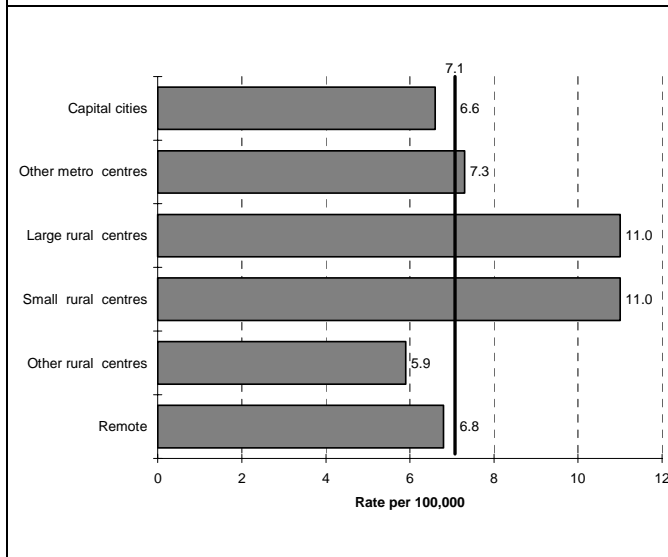
Respondents who worked on a casual basis or less than 35 hours per week were asked to provide the reasons for doing so (Figure 6). Of the 608 (45.9%) who answered this question, there were 886 responses with home duties (51.4%) and preference (27.0%) the main reasons provided, followed by full-time therapy work not available (6.3%).

Figure 6: Practising therapists in casual or less than full-time work, main reason, 1997



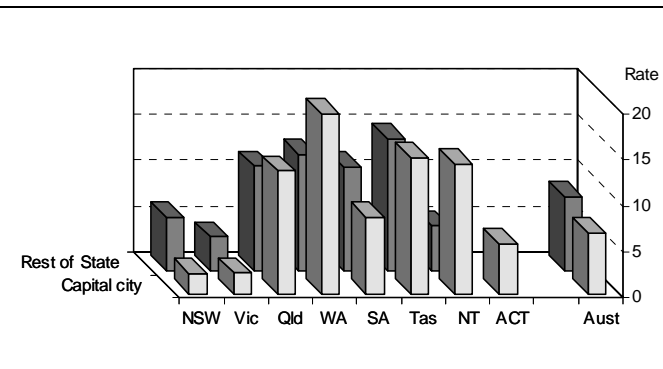
The distribution of the rate of practising therapists per 100,000 population by geographic area is presented in Figure 7. It can be seen that the two rural centre categories have the highest rate (both 11.0) while there is no geographic area that is substantially below the national rate of 7.1 per 100,000.

Figure 7: Practising therapists, geographic area, rate per 100,000 population, 1997



The geographic distribution of practising therapists in Australia by capital city/rest of State is presented in Figure 8. There are clear differences in the rate per 100,000 population between the capital cities with Perth (19.6), Hobart (14.8), Darwin (14.2) and Brisbane (13.4) far higher than all others. It can also be seen that the non-capital city regions have a rate (8.1) that is higher than the rate for the capital cities (6.6).

Figure 8: Practising therapists, geographic region of main practice location by State/Territory, rate per 100,000 population, 1997



Rest of State	5.9	3.7	11.4	12.7	11.3	14.4	4.9	8.1
Capital city	2.2	2.3	13.4	19.6	8.4	14.8	14.2	5.5

Summary

From the 1997 national dental therapist labour force data collection it can be seen that:

- the majority are working as therapists (78.4%);
- nationally there is a rate of 7.1 practising therapists per 100,000 population;
- most are aged below 40 years with a substantial group aged 35–39 years;
- the greatest proportion were born in English-speaking countries with 86.2% Australian-born;
- the majority were female with only 32 (1.9%) male dental therapists;
- there were twelve dental therapists who were Indigenous Australians;

- 85.7% qualified in their own State;
- public school clinic is the main site of practice (999 or 75.5%);
- Western Australia is the only State/Territory where dental therapists are in private practice. There were 123 (38.4% of Western Australian therapists) in private practice;
- clinical practice dominates the area of practice;
- there were differences in the level of activity (mean hours per week) between the States/Territories with the Northern Territory the highest (37.2 hours per week) and Western Australia (28.9 hours), the Australian Capital Territory (27.8 hours) and South Australia (26.2 hours) the lowest;
- 10.5% of the labour force were looking for work with the highest levels in South Australia (20.0%), Victoria (19.9%) and the Northern Territory (15.0%);
- of those looking for work most (82 of 146) were seeking part-time work only;
- home duties (51.4%) and preference (27.0%) were the main reasons provided by those who were in casual employment or who worked less than 35 hours per week;
- non-capital city areas have a higher rate of therapists per 100,000 population compared to the capital cities (8.1 compared to 6.6);
- large and small rural centres (each with 11.0 per 100,000) were the regions with the highest rate; and
- Perth (19.6 per 100,000), Hobart (14.8), Darwin (14.2) and Brisbane (13.4) are the capital cities in Australia with the highest rate of therapists per 100,000 population.

Acknowledgements

The 1997 national dental therapist labour force data collection was supported by the Australian Dental Therapists' Association. The assistance of the responding dental therapists is greatly appreciated.

The AIHW Dental Statistics and Research Unit (DSRU) is a collaborative unit of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare established in 1988 at The University of Adelaide. The DSRU aims to improve the oral health of Australians through the collection, analysis and reporting of dental statistics and research on dental health status, use of dental services, provision of dental services and the dental workforce.

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