



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Melbourne Research
Alliance to End Violence
Against Women and
their Children

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN



CONTENTS

From the Co-Chairs	4
From the Dean	5
Violence Against Women and their Children is Preventable	6
20 Years Preventing Family Violence	8
At a Glance	9
Excellence	9
What We Do	9
Our Supporters	9
Voices of Survivors	10
Indigenous Voices	11
Leadership	12
How Our Research Makes A Difference	14
Safer Families Centre: Transforming the Health Sector Response to Domestic Violence	16
Training the Next Generation of Practice and Research Leaders	19
Connect With Us	20

Image: Iceworks by Gav Barbey. This work is a visual representation of the philosophy behind MAEVe – to move beyond that which keeps us from working together, to explore the connections between our work, and to allow these connections to create new ideas and journeys.



FROM THE MELBOURNE RESEARCH ALLIANCE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN

Welcome to the work of the University of Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence Against Women and their Children (MAEVe).

The University has a unifying passion and commitment to the social movement to end violence against women and their children. For over 20 years we have been at the forefront of research and education in family violence prevention and response. Our aim is to develop a strong evidence base through which policy and practice can be formed to provide firmer foundations for responding to this complex and 'wicked problem'.

The increasingly uncertain and challenging times that we find ourselves in due to the COVID-19 pandemic, will almost certainly lead to a spike in family violence rates across Australia. With violence against women already at unprecedented levels in our community, addressing this important issue is now more vital than ever.

Our world-leading interdisciplinary research impacts and influences how we understand, prevent and respond to violence against women and their children. We draw together gender-based violence experts from health, social work, population health, criminology, law, education, arts and humanities from across the university. Our methodological expertise is equally diverse with specialists in big data analysis, surveys, focus groups, evaluation, action research and co-design.

Collaboration lies at the heart of our success. Central to this is working closely with survivors who are experts by experience to ensure our work makes a difference to the lives of children, women, and their families. Not only do we collaborate across the University of Melbourne, but we have valued colleagues in universities across Australia and internationally. Our academics also work with industry partners, healthcare providers, community sector organisations and policy makers, to ensure our research remains relevant and able to influence government to address and prevent violence against women.

Among our important responsibilities is developing the next generation of policy, practice and research leaders in family violence. Our PhD programs are critical to this as are our professional development programs



which are aimed to equip the current and future workforce with the skills to prevent and respond to all forms of family violence. These programs are essential to ensure the hard work we are doing now to build the evidence base and interventions required to eliminate family violence will be sustained in the long term.

We are proud to introduce our work and showcase the far-reaching impact of our efforts. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to our colleagues and collaborators who contribute in a myriad of ways to working towards ending violence against women and their children. We acknowledge the Melbourne Social Equity Institute which has provided financial support to MAEVe.

Professor Kelsey Hegarty

Co-Chair Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence Against Women and their Children
Chair Family Violence Prevention
Department of General Practice
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences and the Royal Women's Hospital

Professor Cathy Humphreys

Co-Chair Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence Against Women and their Children
Department of Social Work
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences

FROM THE DEAN MEDICINE, DENTISTRY AND HEALTH SCIENCE

The Melbourne Research Alliance to end Violence against women and their children (MAEVe) is at the forefront of research and education for family violence prevention and response.

MAEVe benefits from strong interdisciplinary collaborations across the University and wider family violence prevention sector, which includes a remarkable collection of hospitals, research institutes, community groups and government organisations.

As a consequence of work conducted by a large number of people from across the University and our partners, we are contributing substantially to building the knowledge base and working towards the prevention of violence against women and their children. It is an aspiration and inspiration for the ongoing contribution to knowledge building in this troubling area.

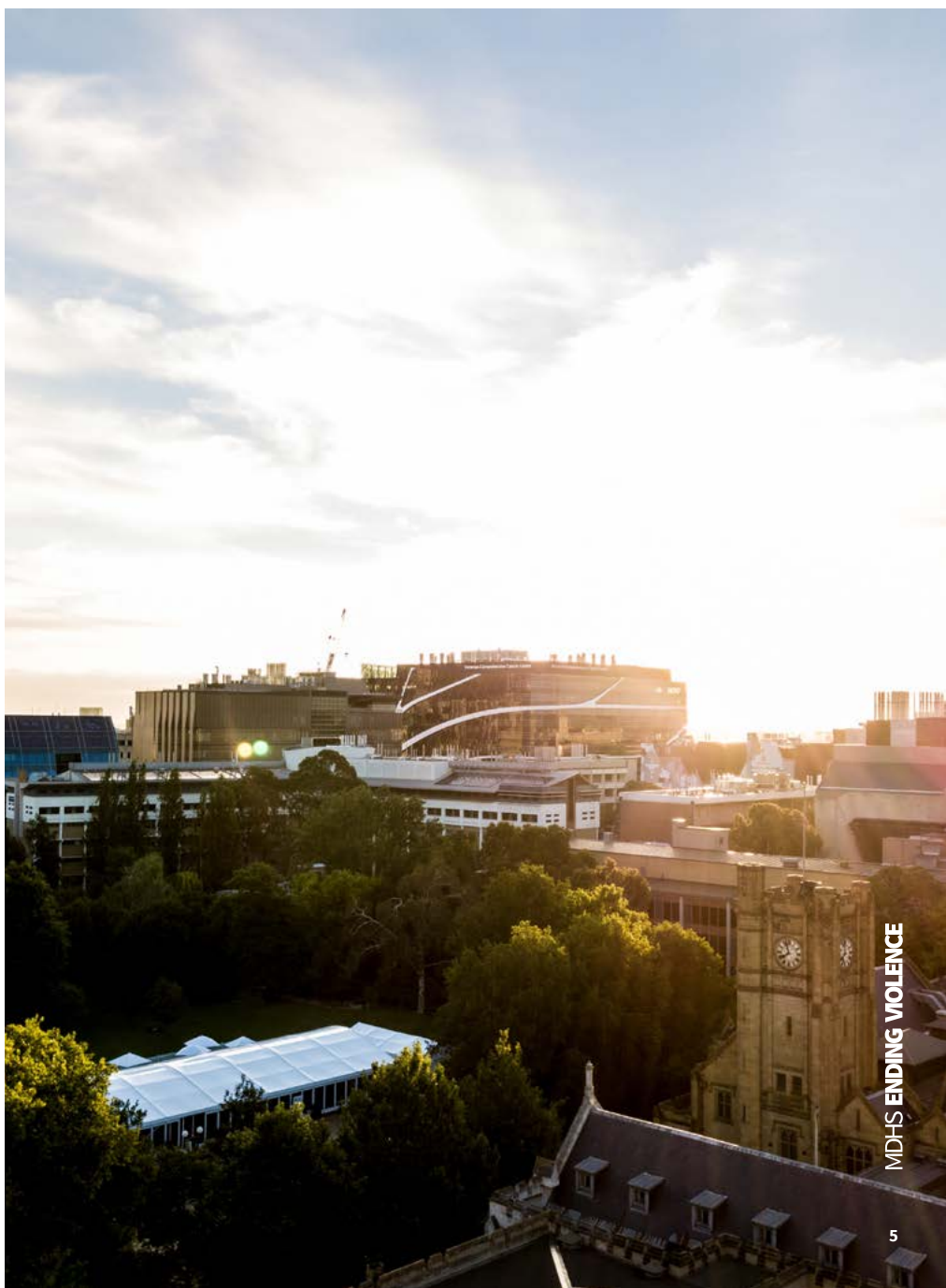
I am particularly struck by the track record in early intervention, which aims to improve health sector responses to family and sexual violence to prevent it from reoccurring. Work in this space has seen the development of impressive new tools designed to improve our responses to those affected by violence and to support women and children who have experienced violence.

This document provides a snapshot of some of the capability that exists across the MAEVe network and highlights how our world leading research is strengthening the evidence base required to design and implement new interventions to prevent and respond to family violence.

I commend, the MAEVe team on their accomplishments and look forward to seeing the positive change experienced by individuals and communities as a result of the work being undertaken.

Professor Jane Gunn

Dean and Professor of Primary Care Research
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health
Sciences



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN IS PREVENTABLE

Every day, all around Victoria and beyond, individuals and families are affected by violence inflicted by someone close to them. Women and children, in particular, suffer the consequences of domestic, family and sexual violence. Yet, ultimately this violence impacts on all of us, in communities, workplaces and other settings. If we can better understand this violence through research, and better respond through education and policy, we can contribute to a safer society for all.

Our work aims to strengthen the evidence base through which policy and practice is developed to provide firm foundations for responding to and preventing all forms of family violence.

OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles lie at the heart of our research program and ensure that our work makes a difference to the lives of children, women and their families.

MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT AND CO-DESIGN WITH SURVIVORS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

How violence is experienced and perceived by women, their communities and society more broadly is complex and frames how women seek support, and what kind of services are available to them. We work with victims and survivors, including those from marginalised populations, to ensure they have a voice in our research.

TRANSLATION FOR LASTING SOCIAL IMPACT

We prioritise research programs where the translation of research evidence into information will help inform policy development and service delivery that will lead to a reduction in the levels of violence against women and their children.

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO RESEARCH DESIGN AND EXECUTION

Recognising that understanding, preventing and responding to family violence is a complex and multifaceted problem, our research programs draw together researchers from a wide range of disciplines including population and global health, disability, social work, social equity, criminology, law, education and gender studies.

STRONG COLLABORATION, NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

We recognise that to affect the greatest change, we need to work closely with other institutions and organisations that share our mission to reduce violence against women. Our work is informed by strong collaborations with researchers across a range of Victorian and national universities, community sector organisations and peak bodies.



20 YEARS PREVENTING FAMILY VIOLENCE

The University of Melbourne has been at the forefront of research and education for family violence prevention and response for 20 years.

In this time, we have significantly contributed to strengthening the evidence base for family violence prevention and response at local, national and international levels. We have advised the World Health Organisation and the United Nations in their efforts to address violence against women globally. Nationally, we have influenced and implemented parts of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022. At a state level, we have made a major contribution to the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the resulting Victorian reform agenda.

In 2015, the University of Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence Against Women and their Children (MAEVe) was formally established to recognise the scale and breadth of the university's family violence research.

This strengthened our research by bringing our many academics working across multiple disciplines together to coordinate activities.

We are now Australia's largest cluster for research on violence against women and their children, with over 50 academics and doctoral students currently working in the field of family violence, spanning the entire prevention spectrum. Our work is auspiced by the Melbourne Social Equity Institute across four faculties including Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences; Law; Education; and Arts; bringing different perspectives to this complex issue.

We have developed innovative practical models, equipping practitioners with training and resources to identify and respond to family violence. Upcoming interdisciplinary researchers are supported, developing expertise in this sensitive area and utilising measurement tools, such as the Composite Abuse Scale, which are used extensively across the world as an outcome of interventions.

University of Melbourne academics continue to provide specialist advisory support to the State Government on family violence policies, strategies and programs through expert groups, including the Victorian Government's Family Violence Steering Committee and the Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management Expert Advisory Group and a Multifaith Advisory Group.

As the global pandemic and its aftermath places increasing pressure on many families and exacerbates family violence issues, our academics remain committed to tackling this problem from all possible directions. We work together to develop novel solutions to enable women and children to feel safer and improve their health and well-being.



ATA GLANCE

EXCELLENCE

#1

Top ranked university
in australia

Australia's leading research cluster
for the prevention of violence against
women and their children

50+

Academics working on
family violence prevention

100+

Grants awarded
since 2015

\$20M

In funding over the past
decade

200+

Citations by the royal
commission into family
violence

250+

Peer-reviewed
publications since 2015

A major provider of accredited
educational programs for practitioners
and researchers

WHAT WE DO



Research spanning the spectrum
of family violence prevention and
response



Program evaluation



Policy and practice innovation



Education, training and professional
development



Community engagement with victim
survivors and community fellows

OUR SUPPORTERS

Our work is supported by a wide range of organisations
and community groups including:

- Australian Government, Departments of Social Services, Health and Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS)
- Australian Research Council (ARC)
- Melbourne Social Equity Institute
- National Australia Bank Foundation
- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)
- Oak Foundation

VOICES OF SURVIVORS

People with lived experience of family violence and sexual violence hold unique insights in improving systems, covering issues including the prevention of family violence, healing and after trauma support and ensuring the health, justice and policing systems do not re-traumatise victims and survivors. Ensuring that victim survivors have a voice and are included as valued co-producers of research is fundamental to our mission to end family violence and sexual violence. Below are some of the ways in which we seek to ensure that these experts by experience are respected and included in ways that enrich our research.

THE WEAVERS

The WEAVERS are a panel of 12 women who have survived family violence and sexual violence in its many forms. The group plays an important role in the university's research by assisting researchers to set priorities, develop innovative research designs and communicating findings as 'translators' to the community.

The group was established to ensure that our research is enriched by the experiences and priorities of survivors of violence against women, for survivors to have their voices heard and for them to be valued partners in the production and dissemination of knowledge. In addition to co-producing university-led research, the WEAVERS are

supported to develop skills to explore their own research questions, carry out data collection and analysis, and write up findings.

"I felt that there was an opportunity for me to communicate my experience in a context that could bring about positive change in our society" – a member of the WEAVERS

These survivors are also important advocates for women and their children's safety and wellbeing and empower others who are experiencing, or have experienced, violence. They speak out to assist in making a difference in community attitudes to violence against women and children.

THE FAMILY VIOLENCE EXPERTS BY EXPERIENCE FRAMEWORK

The University of Melbourne and Domestic Violence Victoria have recently led the development of the Family Violence Experts by Experience Framework, which aims to enhance the ability of specialist family violence services to provide opportunities for survivor advocates to influence policy development, service planning and practice. The framework was co-produced by survivor advocates from the WEAVERS group and guided by an advisory group comprising victim survivors and organisations who work with people who have experienced family violence.

"As survivors of family violence and abuse, we need to be supported to be the writers, the creators, the directors and the producers of our own stories in our lived experience work."

– Jasmine

The Framework is a set of principles for best practice, which are intended to guide collaborative processes for engaging survivor advocates by specialist family violence services. It is accompanied by a range of practical resources and tools for both victim survivors interested in becoming involved in advocacy work and to support organisations in their planning.

The Experts by Experience Framework can be found at: dvvic.org.au/members/experts-by-experience/

THE WEAVERS NETWORK

Based on the framework, the MAEVe has developed a database of survivors willing to support teaching, research and advocacy at University of Melbourne.



INDIGENOUS VOICES

Aboriginal leaders have repeatedly stressed the importance of Aboriginal communities being empowered to identify and implement 'solutions' to family violence. Partnerships between researchers and Aboriginal community organisations and communities, capacity building, and knowledge exchange are key to this process.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are central to initiatives and research addressing violence against women and are working hard to combat the violence they experience. Data on longer-term consequences of domestic violence and abuse for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are sparse, as researchers often fail to engage with Aboriginal communities in ways that would promote their participation in research.

The research undertaken by University of Melbourne researchers, follows a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and the individuals and communities involved in the research, privileges the Indigenous voice and is conducted for the benefit of Indigenous communities. Recent projects have led to the development of Burndawan – an online resource co-created with the Wadawurrung community which used co-design to inform the development of an online Indigenous family violence resource and research design that privileges Indigenous women's voices and centres cultural practice and Indigenous methodology.

CLOAKED IN STRENGTH

An exploration of Aboriginal mothers' experiences of family violence and the role of cultural practice as a tool of engagement, resilience and resistance

The violence in the lives of Indigenous women globally has been sustained and perpetuated through generations of patriarchal and colonial subjugation. As a result, a growing and important literature on Indigenous feminist thought explores the possibilities of Indigenous women's polity, agency and collective resilient action.

The Cloaked in Strength program, led by Shawana Andrews a Palawa Trawlwoolway woman and Associate Director of the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, seeks to contribute to this discourse by exploring the lived experience of family violence of Australian urban Aboriginal women.

In Australia, Aboriginal women and their mothering have historically been targets of genocidal policy. Contemporary public policy structures continue to critically scrutinise and politicise Aboriginal mothering and spectacularly fail to recognise and meet the needs of Aboriginal mothers and their children in the context of violence. Male perpetrated family violence is a systemic Australian issue that is significantly impacting upon Aboriginal women and children. It features as a predominant reason for the over-representation of Indigenous babies and children in out of home care, and in the lives of Indigenous women who are disproportionately represented in the legal, health, welfare and criminal justice systems as victims and survivors of family violence. In the context of the policy and practice frameworks of these systems and their failure, the Cloaked in Strength study offers an account of 15 Aboriginal mothers' lived experience of family violence. It seeks to challenge the patriarchal and colonial constructs of Aboriginal mothers and focus on their gendered agency and resilience, fortified by their Indigenous specificity.

In Aboriginal communities across south-eastern Australia possum skin cloaks were traditionally made in preparation for the birth of a baby, they were inscribed with family and tribal lore and imbued the wearer with cultural identity and place within the clan. The study uses possum skin cloaking to frame its engagement with and support of Aboriginal women. Cultural practices and their restoration as a process of healing and cultural continuity are undervalued and under-researched as protective factors and important mechanisms to support Aboriginal mothers' generational resilience and resistance in the context of family violence.

LEADERSHIP

The University of Melbourne's research into violence against women and their children is led by a diverse Steering Committee of world-leading experts from across many faculties, schools and departments. This allows us to explore the problem of violence through a range of perspectives, disciplines and contexts



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR KRISTIN DIEMER

Associate Professor Diemer is a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Social Work at the Melbourne School of Health Sciences

Kristin is a sociologist specialising in measurement of violence against women. Her focus is on applied social research for change in policy and practice. Kristin has led projects measuring prevalence, attitudes toward violence and evaluation of perpetrator programs and her work spans Australia, Asia and the Pacific region.



DR ANA DRAGOILOVIC

Dr Dragoilovic is a Senior Lecturer in Gender Studies at the School of Culture and Communication

Ana works at the intersection of feminist, queer, postcolonial and affect theory, and has investigated the intersection of gender and mobility regimes with a focus on how inequalities of race, class, ethnicity and nationality affect the transformation of family and gender relations, forms of care, labour, and subjecthood.



CHARLENE EDWARDS

Charlene Edwards is the Executive Officer of the Melbourne Social Equity Institute

Charlene's role is to facilitate and support interdisciplinary and community-engaged research across a range of social equity issues. She is the co-creator and Director of the Institute's successful Community Fellows Program, which supports community organisations to undertake research of importance to their organisation and the people they serve.



PROFESSOR KELSEY HEGARTY

Professor Hegarty is joint Chair in Family Violence Prevention at the University of Melbourne and the Royal Women's Hospital, and Co-Director of the Safer Families Centre of Research Excellence

Kelsey is an academic general practitioner. Her research interests include building the evidence base for educational and complex interventions around identification and response to domestic and family violence in health care settings. Kelsey also leads research on using technological tools for early engagement with men, women and children.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR KATE MCGREGOR

Associate Professor McGregor is a Lecturer in Southeast Asian History in the School of Historical and Philosophical Studies.

Kate's research interests include Indonesian historiography, memories of violence and most recently research into historical cases of gendered violence and related transnational activism on the so called 'comfort women' of the Japanese occupation of Australia. She has held multiple ARC grants in these fields of research.



PROFESSOR JULIE MCLEOD

Professor McLeod specialises in the area of Curriculum, Equity and Social Change at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, and is Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Capability)

Julie's research in the history and sociology of education encompasses curriculum, youth, gender, and processes of inequality and difference to redress inequalities.



PROFESSOR JENNIFER MORGAN

Professor Morgan specialises in the area of Criminal Law, Anti-Discrimination Law and Feminist Legal Theory

Jenny has been a member of faculty at Melbourne Law School since 1988, and Jenny's research interests are in the areas of criminal law, violence against women, homicide law reform, feminist legal theory, and law reform. Jenny's most recent work is focused on media reporting of violence against women.



DR RHIAN PARKER

Dr Parker is the Academic Convenor of the Melbourne Research Alliance to End Violence Against Women and their Children.

Rhian's work focuses on lived experience of survivors and how to change the system to support them better through codesign. She is a strong advocate for violence to be recognised as a key aspect of women's mental health.



PROFESSOR CATHY HUMPHREYS

Professor Humphreys is Professor of Social Work and Co-Director of the Safer Families Centre of Research Excellence

Cathy is an experienced social work practitioner in the mental health, domestic violence, and children, youth and families sector, and leads a program of research developing the knowledge base to support practice and policy developments in the areas of domestic and family violence and out of home care.



DR ODETTE KELEDA

Dr Keleda is a Lecturer in Creative Writing in the School of Culture and Communication

Odette’s writing focuses on marginalised voices, gender and racial literacy, and has appeared in numerous publications including the Australian Cultural History Journal, Outskirts, Postcolonial Studies and the Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature.



DR DOLLY KIKON

Dr Kikon is a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and Development Studies at the School of Social and Political Science

Dolly has worked for over twenty years on the experiences of militarisation, state violence, land rights, extractive regimes, developmental issues, and gender justice in India. She has written widely on subjects relating to governance, political economy, human rights, indigenous movements, resource conflicts, and social movements.



PROFESSOR STUART ROSS

Professor Ross is a Melbourne Enterprise Professor in Criminology at the School of Social and Political Studies

Stuart’s research interests include sentencing decision making, criminal justice population modelling, and the evaluation of criminal justice programs. He has led research projects on procedural justice for victims of crime, and on the over-representation of indigenous offenders in the justice system, and the integrated reform of responses to family violence.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LAURA TARZIA

Associate Professor Tarzia is an ARC DECRA Senior Research Fellow in the Department of General Practice and the Centre for Family Violence Prevention at the Royal Women’s Hospital

Laura’s work focuses on sexual and domestic violence against women, including the use of technology as a form of early intervention through co-design. Laura also works across a range of projects with an emphasis on the dynamics, context and health effects of different types of sexual violence.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CATHY VAUGHAN

Associate Professor Vaughan is a researcher in the Centre for Health Equity in the Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

Cathy is an experienced global health practitioner in the areas of women’s health. Her research focuses on the role of settlement and multicultural services in responding to violence against women, sexual and gender-based violence against refugees, and building the capacity of faith leaders to prevent and respond to violence against women and family violence.

HOW OUR RESEARCH MAKES A DIFFERENCE

We share the Victorian State Government's vision to create a Victoria free from violence, where Victorians experience equality and respect in all their relationships and are empowered to speak out against violence knowing they will be supported.

Our research agenda spans the continuum of prevention and aims to strengthen the evidence base to support policy and practice in reducing violence against women and their children. Our research priorities are aligned with Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence – Free from Violence – and encompass three broad priorities 1) preventing violence before it occurs, 2) engaging early through health systems to prevent recurring violence and 3) preventing long-term harm from violence.

PREVENTING VIOLENCE BEFORE IT OCCURS

Violence is highly complex. The range of social conditions that lead to violence – rigid and stereotyped gender roles, attitudes towards women and violence, inequalities in social or economic power are not completely understood. The first step to developing effective prevention strategies is to understand the underlying causes of violence so they can be addressed at the whole-of-population level. This is one of the most important elements of our broader research agenda.

The University of Melbourne's primary prevention research ranges from building comprehensive data on community attitudes and people who use or experience violence to better understand what drives a person to commit violence against someone they are supposed to love, to developing prevention approaches and respectful relationship education in the early years.

Work that has delivered significant impact to the community include:

- National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women. Our researchers have played a critical advisory role in the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey since 2010. The survey is an important tool that allows us to track the effectiveness of prevention strategies and measures improvements in attitudes across the whole population. The survey has contributed to a growing body of evidence on community attitudes and beliefs that contribute to violence.
- Building Children's Resilience through Respectful and Equitable Relationships. This pilot explored ways to co-design, implement and evaluate a whole-of-service prevention of violence against women program in an early childhood setting.
- Gender in the everyday. Recognising that stereotyping usually starts in the early years, this project is exploring ways to engage with children to support them to share their experiences of gender norms and bias and to challenge stereotypical behaviours and ways to build respectful relationships.

EARLY ENGAGEMENT TO PREVENT RECURRING VIOLENCE

Early engagement or secondary prevention is vital to our community's efforts to end family violence. Early intervention can take place in settings wherever people experiencing violence come into contact with professionals who might be able to help them, such as general practitioners, maternal and child health nurses, community health centres, hospitals, and local community groups.

Our research has a strong emphasis on improving health sector responses to family violence and sexual violence. Our work includes the development of new approaches aimed at keeping people safe and changing behaviours and supporting individuals and groups who are at risk or exhibiting early signs of using or experiencing family violence. Our research seeks to prevent escalation and address issues arising from the experience of domestic and family violence and sexual violence.

In addition to our work with the health sector through the Safer Families Centre, we have developed and tested a suite of e-relationship tools to provide support for women who are experiencing violence or men who choose to use violence in their relationships. These include:


- I-DECIDE About my Relationship, which assists women to self-reflect on the health of their relationship, become more informed about what might help them, and plan for their safety and well-being. The I-DECIDE website is a safe, private, space for women to self-inform, self-reflect and self-manage. Women can assess their relationship, weigh up their priorities, and plan for a safer future.
- The BETTER MAN Program, an innovative digital intervention designed to strengthen healthy relationships, enhance communication skills and promote positive values with men who choose to use violence in their intimate relationships. A successful pilot of the program demonstrated that the BETTER MAN website is acceptable to men and helps them to connect with services such as men's behaviour change programs.
- My Safety, an interactive website for students experiencing or using dating or sexual violence, or students concerned about a friend. The website aims to raise awareness about unhealthy relationship behaviours (including dating violence) and sexual assault, help students to decide on a course of action and refer them to appropriate services on and off campus.

PREVENTING LONG TERM HARM FROM VIOLENCE

Responding to the impact of domestic and family violence is a central aspect of our research agenda. If more can be learned about how to support recovery, healing and preventing further violence and abuse, this knowledge can be used to inform new interventions and policies aimed at helping families impacted by violence.

UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL GENDERED VIOLENCE

Our work includes humanities based analysis from historical and anthropological perspectives of cases of gendered violence across diverse societies.



Our work in this space spans several priority areas which include engaging with fathers who use violence, strengthening the relationship between mothers and children, and responding to child abuse in the context of domestic and family violence. Some of our recent projects include:

- **Invisible Practices.** Attention to the fathering practices of men who use violence has been a missing development in responding to domestic and family violence. The Invisible Practices project aimed to provide an evidence base for intervening with fathers who use domestic and family violence, in order to enhance support for women and children living with violence. This work has led to the publication of an evidence-based practice guide for practitioners to support them in working with fathers who use violence.
- **Evaluation of the Children and Mothers in Mind Program.** Children and Mothers in Mind is an Australian-first program designed for mothers and young children, who have experienced trauma such as family violence, childhood abuse or sexual assault. A team of researchers from the University have recently completed an independent evaluation of the program in order to assess the effectiveness of the program including the extent to which it changes mothers' understanding about the impact of domestic and family violence on parenting and how effectively it improves mother-child relationships. Evaluations such as this are a valuable tool for strengthening the quality of program services and improve outcomes for participants.
- **Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework.** In response to the Royal Commission into family violence in Victoria, the University is consulting on a program of work to support the redevelopment of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework for risk assessment in Victoria. This work aims to increase the safety and wellbeing of Victorians by ensuring that all parts of the service system have a shared understanding of risk assessment and management, professionals have the skills and a framework to guide appropriate risk management action and that there is a clear understanding of the responsibilities of other parts of the system to implement safety planning.

SAFER FAMILIES CENTRE: TRANSFORMING THE HEALTH SECTOR RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Domestic and family violence have a significant impact on the health and well-being of women both in the immediate and longer term, and this often continues even after the relationship has ended. The psychological consequences of violence can be as serious as the physical effects. General practitioners and other health providers often see the families experiencing domestic violence and are in an opportune position to identify and respond.

The Safer Families Centre researches and collaborates to transform the health sector response to domestic violence. We do this by building innovative, sustainable programs and tools for health practitioners and individuals that promote and support early engagement of families through the health sector.

ABOUT US

The Safer Families Centre is a partnership between the University of Melbourne, Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI), LaTrobe University and the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute. The Centre is co-directed by Professors Kelsey Hegarty, Cathy Humphreys and Stephanie Brown.

We are the first dedicated Centre to lead research into the health effects of domestic violence and the health sector responses needed to improve the safety, health and well-being of women, children and young people. Safer Families Centre is funded by the NHMRC and is supported by strong national and international collaborations between researchers, survivors, families, practitioners, policymakers, and a wide range of community services.

OUR FOCUS


Our focus is a future where health services can effectively support any member of a family affected by domestic violence. We work in partnership with survivors to create change within policy and practice and better equip health services to identify and respond to families and link them to pathways of safety and healing.

OUR RESEARCH

The Safer Families Centre research spans three priority areas: 1) understanding the dynamics of abuse and resilience, 2) testing early identification of abuse and first line responses and 3) developing and testing child, parent and carer programs for safety and resilience.

One example is Dr Laura Tarzia's research into understanding women's experiences of sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner, identifying their help seeking needs, and exploring and developing online tools for support. This project, called Beyond Silence, will provide women with an evidence-based, trauma-informed website that will help them name the abuse, provide initial support, and promote help-seeking to improve their safety, quality of life and connection to the community. To do this the team are undertaking a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with victims focusing on understanding their lived experience of violence.





In another project, PhD candidate Jacqueline Kurrupu has been working to understand how general practitioners and primary care nurses respond to child abuse and neglect in primary care settings. This study aims to determine the factors that influence primary care practitioners' decision to report and what would support them in responding to suspected child maltreatment. To do this, the team will conduct a series of in-depth interviews with GPs and primary care nurses, and focus groups with young people who have experiences child maltreatment. The findings from this study will be used to create an intervention model for primary care practitioners to support them in their response to abuse, neglect or maltreatment.

OUR FUTURE

With the Australian Government's plans to roll out a National Domestic and Family Violence Training program for the primary health care workforce, the spotlight on strengthening the capacity of the health sector to respond to domestic violence will be greater than ever. As research leaders in this space, the Safer Families team is generating evidence to mobilise further innovation for governments and health services to address domestic violence. Emerging areas include research with culturally and linguistically diverse populations and men who use violence, as well as research into psychological violence. With strong connections locally and globally, the Centre understands the complexities and has access to contemporary research, tools and practice from across the world to make an international impact in the area of domestic violence.





TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PRACTICE AND RESEARCH LEADERS

Developing the next generation of policy, practice and research leaders in the field of family violence prevention is one of our most important responsibilities. It ensures the hard work we are doing now to build the evidence base and interventions required to eliminate family violence will be sustained over the long term.

TRAINING AND UPSKILLING FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES PRACTITIONERS

The University of Melbourne makes a significant contribution to the training and development across the specialist family violence, primary prevention and health sectors. Our programs are delivered by world-leading experts in the family violence field and incorporate the latest research and evidence-based approaches to intervention.

We offer a wide range of courses and programs aimed to equip the workforce of the future with the skills to prevent and respond to all forms of family violence and individuals who use it. Our programs span the following:

- foundational knowledge and understanding in domestic and family violence and the interventions for workers in the health and human services sector
- training for health care professionals to identify and respond to domestic and family violence
- research skills development to equip students with skills to collect data and conduct research evaluation with women who have experienced violence.

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE RESEARCH LEADERS

We are helping to develop a new generation of highly skilled research leaders in areas that are vital to sustain the legacy of family violence prevention, response and policy. Our students benefit from being part of a large community of graduate researchers focused specifically on family violence.

Our current PhD cohort includes over 30 students who are researching some of the most important questions related to the family violence field, including:

- What would enable and support health professionals in responding to suspected child maltreatment?
- Is the use of technology an acceptable method for family violence interventions within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations?
- What are the most effective methods of translating information and research about domestic violence?
- What role do socio-cultural factors play in family homicide?

MAKING A GLOBAL IMPACT: STRENGTHENING CAPACITY TO MEASURE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN THROUGHOUT ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Addressing violence against women is an urgent public health, human rights, economic and public policy priority globally. Access to reliable data on violence against women is essential to the development of more effective policy and programme responses to prevent and end violence against women. Violence against women is an extremely sensitive topic that requires specialised research methods to ensure both the quality of the data collected and the safety of the researchers and interviewees. However, many countries in the Asia-Pacific region still lack data on the prevalence of violence against women – and many governments do not yet have the ability to measure it accurately.

To help address this University of Melbourne researchers Associate Professors Kristin Diemer and Associate Professor Cathy Vaughn, have partnered with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to establish the kNOwVAWdata initiative.

The initiative aims to help countries in the Asia Pacific region to measure the incidence of violence against women, by supporting and training national institutions across the region to collect and analyse data on its prevalence. To date the initiative has provided technical support and capacity building for over 10 countries which are planning or have recently completed prevalence surveys in the region including in Fiji, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Pakistan, and Indonesia.

CONNECT WITH US

Contact the Melbourne Research Alliance
to End Violence Against Women and their
Children

Prof Kelsey Hegarty

Co-chair

✉ k.hegarty@unimelb.edu.au

Prof Cathy Humphreys

Co-chair

✉ cathy.humphreys@unimelb.edu.au

Dr Rhian Parker

Academic convenor

✉ r.parker@unimelb.edu.au

🐦 [@MAEVe_Unimelb](https://twitter.com/MAEVe_Unimelb)

✉ maeve-admin@unimelb.edu.au
