

Supporting children after trauma

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A new report, [RECOVER: Reconnecting mothers and children after family violence](#), reveals that a child-parent psychotherapy (CPP) program was effective in re-establishing a positive mother-child relationship after trauma, in the 15 families who participated in the study.

Lead researcher, Dr. Leesa Hooker from La Trobe University, said a mother's emotional connection to her child is often disrupted during [family violence](#)—but it is critical that it be re-established.

"Perpetrators often drive a wedge between mother and child, and women's poor mental and [physical health](#) as a result of the violence can also impair their parenting capacity," Dr. Hooker said.

"CPP involves bringing the child and mother together for weekly therapy sessions, with the idea being that the mother-child relationship is central to the recovery of the child."

As part of the pilot, researchers studied the feasibility of implementing CPP, an evidence-based intervention aimed at pre-school aged [children](#) and their mothers impacted by family violence.

After an average of six months, researchers found the program was accepted by women, clinicians and service managers.

Importantly, the program increased parental warmth to the child, improved child emotions and behaviors, and family violence appeared to decrease post intervention.

"The importance of this model is that it can be applied Australia-wide to intervene early and prevent long term impacts of family violence on children," Dr. Hooker said.

"Our study reveals the changes needed to help services and workforces be more responsive to the [mental health](#) and wellbeing needs of this population."

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) CEO, Padma Raman said the research shows the critical

importance of supporting the ongoing mental health and wellbeing of children impacted by intimate partner violence.

"With children and [young people](#) the top priority of Australia's National Research Agenda to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, this research highlights the importance of the evidence base underpinning the potential of holistic interventions," Ms Raman said.

Key topics covered during CPP sessions—either with the child, or the mother alone—included coordinating care and establishing safety, normalizing trauma responses, providing information about normal child development, and supporting mothers and children to talk about and make sense of their experiences.

One in four children are exposed to family violence, and of the women who experience family violence, more than 50% have children in their care. Family violence affects [mothers](#) and children's physical and mental wellbeing, child development and schooling, and is the leading cause of homelessness in Australia, according to the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Currently in Australia there are very few services to support the mental health of very [young children](#) experiencing family [violence](#) or aimed at re-establishing a connection between mother and child.

Provided by La Trobe University

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