

One in three mothers experience partner abuse before their child turns ten

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Credit: William Fortunato from Pexels

One in three Melbourne mothers experiences family violence before their first child's 10th birthday, according to a new study.

The study, led by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute and the University of Melbourne, also found that two-thirds of women with recent experience of [family violence](#) did not talk to their GP or mental health professional about what was happening to them.

The research tracked more than 1,500 women, with a third reporting intimate partner violence (IPV) in the first decade of motherhood and one in five in the past year.

The study, published in *PLOS ONE*, examined women's mental health in the first 10 years of motherhood, with one in four reporting clinically significant depressive, anxiety or post-traumatic stress symptoms. But for those who had experienced recent IPV, these symptoms were far more common, experienced by more than 40% of women.

Murdoch Children's Professor Stephanie Brown said there needed to be systematic change to ensure women felt safe and supported to disclose abuse. She said IPV was a major public health issue and needed to be better recognized.

"I think we've seen quite a lot of systems change, a focus on our legal systems, on the way police interact with people in relation to this issue," she said.

"I don't think we've seen the same organizational and [cultural change](#) in our [health services](#), to identify and address health consequences for women, children and families."

Professor Brown said the reluctance to talk was not the fault of women or health care workers. She said there could be many barriers stopping women from seeking support, including cost, fear of judgment and a belief they were to blame.

She said now was the perfect time to implement reform and improve health care for [women](#), children and families following the Royal Commission into Victoria's mental health system.

"We need a much greater focus at the local community level on [mental health](#) and well-being, and the role that family violence plays in the health and well-being of families," she said.

More information: Deirdre Gartland et al, Patterns of health service utilisation of mothers experiencing mental health problems and intimate partner violence: Ten-year follow-up of an Australian prospective mother and child cohort, *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0269626](#)

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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