

# Women with disability more at risk of domestic violence

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A new report published by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) shows that women with disability suffer higher rates of partner violence than the wider population of women.

The new research by Flinders University and UNSW Sydney calls for a more holistic approach to support services for women and [children](#) with disability who are at risk of domestic and family [violence](#) is needed to ensure families don't slip through the gaps.

However, services often lack the resourcing and training they need to successfully address the specific needs of women and children with disability when they experience domestic and family violence.

The ANROWS report, "Violence prevention and [early intervention](#) for mothers and children with disability: Building promising practice," was led by Flinders Caring Futures Institute research leader Professor Sally Robinson, with Associate Professor Kylie Valentine and Dr. BJ Newton from the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW Sydney.

Professor Robinson says services that support people with disability may have limited capacity to respond to risks of domestic and family violence, while services that support domestic and family violence may have limited capacity to addressing women and children's disability support needs.

"Services need to address the specific needs that arise from the intersection between domestic and family violence and disability," she says.

Interviews with women, children, and workers in the sector showed that many skilled practitioners felt uncertain talking with clients about disability, and expressed a lack of confidence, knowledge, and awareness in working with women and children with disability in the context of domestic and family violence.

The report recommends the creation of a framework that outlines training and workforce capacity-building to support service workers and organisations in developing more effective practice.

ANROWS chief executive Dr. Heather Nancarrow says a lack of confidence to speak about disability can have serious ramifications for the support offered to women with a disability who seek help due to domestic and family violence (DFV).

"To address specific needs, holistic support is necessary—not support that only targets one issue," Dr. Nancarrow says.

"This means support that addresses a family's immediate needs and also puts in place scaffolding to work through deeper and chronic issues over time."

The research report reflects on the direct experiences of women and children with disability who are at risk of domestic and family violence.

The women were asked about their experiences with the Family Referral Services (FRS) program in NSW which was established to enable easy access to services for families at risk of domestic or family violence.

The NSW-government funded FRS program is designed to deliver a [holistic approach](#) towards early intervention to identify risks to safety and wellbeing of parents and children before the risks escalate. Overall, it was found that experiences of the families engaged with FRS were generally positive.

Professor Robinson says a wider adoption of this type of [service](#) provision could be incredibly beneficial in responding to and preventing women and children with disability from experiencing DFV.

"Early intervention is key to preventing risks from escalating and responding to the safety priorities of women and children," she says. "Holistic support services such as FRS can help bridge the gap between disability and DFV services."

Federal Minister for Families and Social Services Anne Ruston says the Morrison Government's goal is to help every Australian woman feel safe, all of the time, and this research was one step towards that goal.

"The Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan recognises that women with disability are disproportionately affected by [family](#), domestic and sexual violence and makes addressing this one of the national priorities," she says.

"Free, accredited domestic and [family violence](#) training for frontline workers which includes a disability training stream and \$1.5 million for the Office of the eSafety Commissioner to help [women](#) with an intellectual disability protect themselves online are among our initiatives under the Action Plan and we are committed to doing more."

**More information:** Robinson, S., et al. Violence prevention and early intervention for mothers and children with disability: Building promising practice (Research report, 16/2020). Sydney: ANROWS.

[www.anrows.org.au/publication/...-promising-practice/](http://www.anrows.org.au/publication/...-promising-practice/)

Provided by Flinders University

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