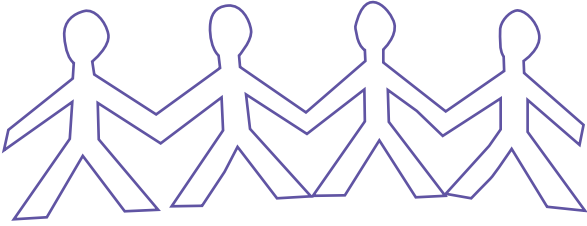


# THESE ARE



# OUR KIDS

Despite the number of children and young people exposed to family violence and the extensive evidence base highlighting the short- and long- term impacts of family violence on children and young people, they are still largely overlooked in public conversations about family violence.

## Children are invisible or silent victims of family violence

In 2016, the **Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence (RCFV)** found that:

- Family violence disproportionately affects children (and women)
- Children are often invisible and overlooked in public discourse about family violence
- We need more resources and better support for children and young people who have experienced family violence
- Current policies do not pay sufficient attention to the impact of violence on children.<sup>1</sup>

### Many Australian children & young people have experienced and are still experiencing family violence

The **Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS)** is Australia's first national study examining the extent of childhood maltreatment and its impacts.<sup>2</sup> The study is groundbreaking, revealing the high prevalence of family violence amongst children and young people alongside other forms of maltreatment.

ACMS researchers heard from **8500 randomly selected Australians** (aged 16-65+) including **3500 young people** (16-24).

The ACMS study identified five different kinds of maltreatment:

- 39.6% of participants in the study experienced exposure to family violence
- 32% experienced physical abuse
- 30.9% experienced emotional abuse
- 28.5% experienced sexual abuse
- 8.9% experienced neglect.

These different forms of maltreatment are intersecting and complex. While girls and boys experience comparable levels of exposure to domestic violence and physical abuse, girls are far more likely to experience sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect.

The study shows that one in four children experience 3-5 types of maltreatment, with most children who experience multi-type maltreatments also experiencing exposure to domestic violence.

1. Victorian Government. (2016). Report and recommendations. Royal Commission into Family Violence.

2. Higgins, D., & Matthews, B. et al. (2023). The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report. Australian Child Maltreatment Study, Queensland University of Technology.

## Family violence has lasting mental health impacts for children and young people.

The ACMS shows that maltreatment, including family violence, is strongly associated with **mental health disorders** in Australia.

Australians who experience maltreatment as children are:

- 2.8 times more likely to have a mental disorder
- 3.9x more likely to have self-harmed in last 12 months
- 4.5x more likely to have attempted suicide in the past 12 months.

These findings are consistent with the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People's (CCYP) Child Death Inquiries. In examining 35 cases where children known to Child Protection died by suicide between April 2007 and April 2019, CCYP found that **94 per cent of the children were reported to have experienced family violence.**<sup>3</sup>

## Family violence is connected to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in the child protection system

In 2015, the Taskforce 1000 inquiry undertaken by the Aboriginal Commissioner for Children and Young People, found that family violence was a key factor leading to Aboriginal children being placed in out-of-home care in Victoria.<sup>4</sup> Among the 980 children whose cases were reviewed, **88 percent were impacted by family violence.** Service responses to family violence experienced by First Nations children need to ensure these children and young people are connected to family, culture, and community.

## Current family violence responses are not adequate for children and young people

Research with young victim survivors of family violence highlights the gaps in service provision but also the opportunities for improving current practice.<sup>5</sup> As part of the study, Monash University and Family Safety Victoria engaged children and young people in Victoria aged 10-25 with lived experience of family violence. Findings from the study included the need for:

- A service system that is more accessible to and easier to navigate for children
- Service spaces that are suitable for children
- Age-appropriate help and language, with responses that suit children's needs
- Practice that is trauma-informed
- Greater consistency in mandatory reporting.

Following the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the government established a Victim Survivors' Advisory Council, which includes children and young people. The Council provides formal advice to the Minister for Prevention of Family Violence and others involved in family violence service design and policy.

These various inquiries and reports highlight the urgent need to increase the visibility and prevalence of children's experiences of family violence, raise awareness about the profound impacts that can result from their exposure to family violence, incorporate children's expertise in the form of lived experience in shaping policy and practice, and develop systemic, evidence-informed models and approaches to support children and young people in their time of need, which may be life-long.

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3. Commission for Children and Young People. (2019). Lost, not forgotten: Inquiry into children who died by suicide and were known to Child Protection. Melbourne: Commission for Children and Young People.
  4. Commission for Children and Young People. (2016). Always was always will be Koori children: Systemic inquiry into services provided to Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria.
  5. Fitz-Gibbon, et al. (2023). I believe you: Children and young people's experiences of seeking help, securing help and navigating the family violence system. Monash University. Report.

