

ANROWS

AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL RESEARCH
ORGANISATION FOR WOMEN'S SAFETY
to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children

MEDIA RELEASE

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Approximately 30% of children who experience domestic and family violence are children with disability

Children with disability require urgent policy attention and trauma-informed responses to their experiences of domestic and family violence (DFV).

ANROWS research led by Sally Robinson from Flinders University provides evidence on the prevalence of children and young people with disability experiencing DFV.

[“Connecting the dots: Understanding the DFV experiences of children and young people with disability within and across sectors”](#) examines the perspectives of children, their families and workers to understand their priorities and service needs. This research identifies how policies and systems can be more child informed to create better responses for children with disability experiencing domestic and family violence.

The new research which included an analysis of state-linked data in Western Australia found that approximately 30% of children who experience domestic violence are children with disability. Children with disability were far more likely than children without disability to have contact with the child protection system and to enter out-of-home care; and twice as likely to have a mother hospitalised due to a DFV assault (8% compared to 4%).

Researchers also spoke directly to children, young people, families, and practitioners, who disclosed the destabilising and isolating effects of DFV on children and young people with disability and how DFV impacts their sense of safety.

Children and young people showed signs of trauma as a result of their experiences of DFV and were found to know more about the violence they were exposed to than many adults assume.

Lead researcher Sally Robinson noted that above all else, children and young people with disability are children first.

“They are whole people with interests, humour, contributions, and a sense of fun. They are valued and loved. Most live with their family members in a network of relationships, many of which are complex.”

Children, young people, families and practitioners who participated in the research shared their experiences of being on support service waitlists for up to a year, barriers to securing support from government agencies and financial assistance, fear of harm during a violent parent's access

visits with children, and the discontinuity of care when service providers fail to turn up to appointments.

These issues tell a story of a system that is not meeting the needs of children with disability experiencing violence and are evidence of the urgent need for policy attention from all levels of government.

Robinson said, “The over-representation of children and young people with disability is not because of the children themselves. In our study, children and their families had unmet needs for support, experienced unresponsive service systems and intersecting disadvantage relating to violence, poverty, housing crisis and discrimination. Their complex, compounding circumstances often included disability, but disability did not drive domestic and family violence.”

In the absence of skilled assistance in services for children with disability experiencing DFV, researchers found that a significant amount of advocacy and persistence by family and supportive practitioners was required to access the support children needed.

Effective advocacy can be particularly challenging for family members who are experiencing DFV themselves with many victims and survivors reporting that it is harder to leave unsafe housing when alternate support for children and young people with disability is not easily accessible through DFV, disability or family support services.

Given the intersectional nature of the challenges faced by young people with disability and their families this research finds it is essential that they be included in the design of policy and child-centred responses.

ANROWS CEO Padma Raman PSM said governments must urgently respond to the unmet needs of children and young people with disability experiencing DFV in meaningful and practical ways.

“Children’s access to disability and domestic and family violence support must not rely on their family and practitioners’ ability to continually negotiate barriers on their behalf.”

“Support in principle alone is not enough. Concrete, fit-for-purpose strategies are essential for children and young people with disability, and their families”.

Minister for Social Services Amanda Rishworth said tackling family, domestic and sexual violence is a priority.

“The Albanese Labor Government is committed to ensuring that the safety of every woman and child is a national priority and to improving the lives of children with disability”.

“We will be releasing the next National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children in October which will directly address the issues raised in the report”.

Additional background:

Meeting the needs of children with disability who experience DFV requires an intersectional approach, and this report finds that the children and their families must be heard and included in the *Australian Disability Strategy (2021–2031)*, the *Safe and supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children (2021–2031)* as well as the *Draft National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children (2022–2032)*.

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About ANROWS

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited ([ANROWS](#)) is a not-for-profit independent national research organisation.

ANROWS is an initiative of Australia's National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022. ANROWS was established by the Commonwealth and all state and territory governments of Australia to produce, disseminate and assist in applying evidence for policy and practice addressing violence against women and their children.

ANROWS is the only such research organisation in Australia.

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