

New research reveals impact of intimate partner violence on child health

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A new study led by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) has uncovered a strong connection between intimate partner violence and poor child health outcomes.

Published last week in *The Lancet Global Health*, researchers found that children under 5 years whose mothers experienced intimate partner violence during their life, were more likely to develop acute respiratory infection, diarrhoea and be under nourished. This risk was much higher in children of mothers who experienced multiple types of violence.

Through examining data from more than 230 000 children under 5 years, living across 37 sub-Saharan African countries, this study is the first to comprehensively explore the link between a mothers' experience of physical, sexual, and emotional violence, as well as their co-occurrence and the subsequent effects on their child's health.

These critical findings grow the knowledge base of the consequences of violence, providing a foundation to build tailored policy interventions and prevention programs that are specific to different contexts and regions.

This study also highlights the value of a multidisciplinary approach that integrates health care, social services, and legal frameworks, when it comes to addressing and preventing violence in the community.

Violence and the consequence of violence is a burden confronting most communities – including Australia and the Northern Territory (NT). Understanding these impacts is crucial to improving better outcomes for children and to reduce long term and intergenerational effects of domestic violence.

Given the direct link between a child's health and their mother's wellbeing, the study emphasised that support for mothers and their children was pivotal to shaping both their health and wellbeing trajectories.

These findings are part of a broader body of work undertaken by researchers at the Menzies Centre for Child Development and Education, which includes research projects relating to the impacts of family violence on maternal health and wellbeing, parenting as well as health, educational and social outcomes of children exposed to violence.

Read this study in full: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(24\)00313-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(24)00313-9)

Quotes attributed to lead author of the study and Senior Research Officer from Menzies School of Health Research, [Dr Abel Fekadu Dadi](#):

"This continental study underscores the need for targeted, country-specific policies to address the impact of intimate partner violence on child health.

"My research in the NT shows a strong correlation between maternal mental health and intimate partner violence, with their combined presence worsening outcomes. As intimate partner violence becomes a priority for the Australian government, I will continue my exploration in the NT context."

Quote attributed to Menzies School of Health Research Centre for Child Development and Education Director, [Professor Gary Robinson](#):

“Research into the impacts of exposure to violence on children’s health and development is essential for understanding possibilities for prevention.”

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Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies is one of Australia’s leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and a leader in global and tropical health research. Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.