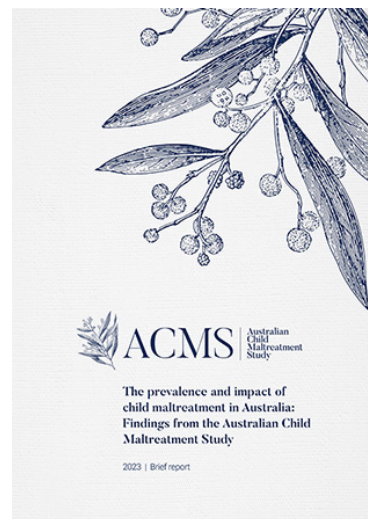


Australian Child Maltreatment Study shows a large proportion of Australians experience maltreatment as children

What is the study about?

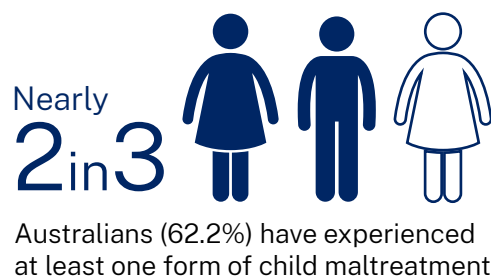
The Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) is the first national study of the prevalence of child maltreatment and its impacts in Australia. The researchers surveyed a random sample of 8,500 adolescents and adults aged 16 years and over to determine how many Australians have self-reported experiences of child abuse and neglect. The study captures five types of child maltreatment: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect and exposure to domestic violence. Participants also provided information on other childhood adversities, mental health disorders, health risk behaviours and health service utilisation. Selected key findings from the report, *The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: 2023 Brief Report*, are summarised below. They provide important evidence for policy and practice to help reduce and prevent child maltreatment.



What did the study find?

Child maltreatment is widespread in Australia

- Nearly two in three Australians (62.2%) reported that they had experienced at least one form of child maltreatment (58.4% of males and 65.5% of females).
- Exposure to domestic violence (39.6%) was the most commonly identified category of child maltreatment followed by physical abuse (32.0%), emotional abuse (30.9%), sexual abuse (28.5%) and neglect (8.9%).
- Compared with older participants, young people aged 16–24 years reported a higher prevalence of emotional abuse (34.6%), neglect (10.3%), and exposure to domestic violence (43.8%).
- Child maltreatment disproportionately affects girls. Compared to boys, girls are significantly more likely to experience sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. Girls and boys suffer similar rates of childhood physical abuse and exposure to domestic violence.

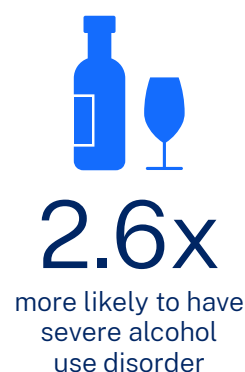
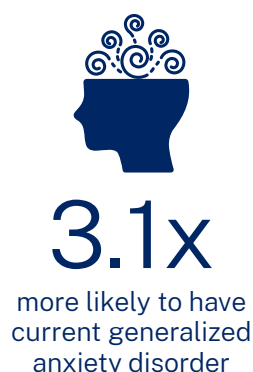
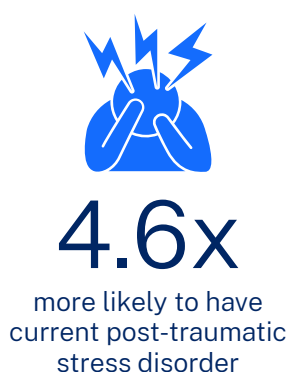
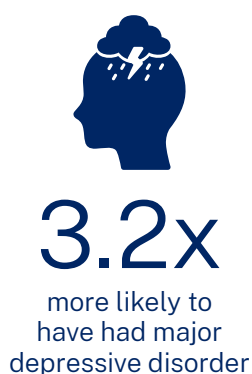


Many children suffer multiple forms of maltreatment and on many occasions

- Child maltreatment is rarely limited to a single type. Two in five Australians (39.4%) have experienced multi-type maltreatment (two or more types), and almost one in four (23.3%) have experienced three to five types of maltreatment. Parental separation, family mental illness, family substance problems and family economic hardship double the risk of multi-type maltreatment.
- When child maltreatment happens, it is rarely an isolated event. Study participants were asked how many times the abusive or neglectful incidents occurred up until age 18, and the median number of incidents reported was 11.8 (for exposure to domestic violence), 9.5 (for physical abuse) and 3.5 (for sexual abuse).

Experiences of child maltreatment are harmful for future mental health

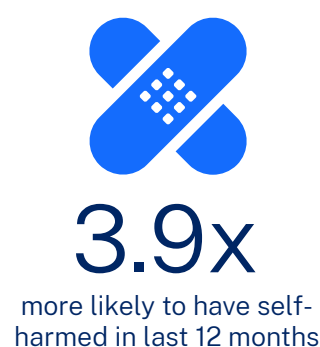
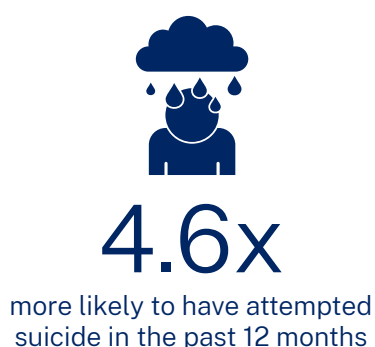
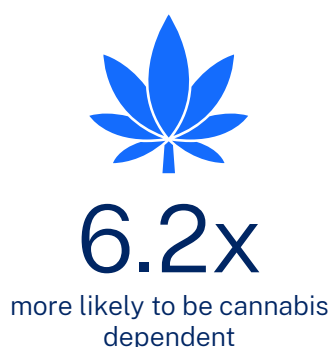
The impact of maltreatment is broad and long lasting. Mental health disorders and health risk behaviours related to maltreatment appear early and are present across the lifespan. Almost half of Australians (48%) who experienced maltreatment in childhood met the criteria for at least one of the four mental health disorders measured, compared with one in five (21.6%) of those without a history of child maltreatment. Australians who experienced child maltreatment are:



All forms of child maltreatment were similarly associated with mental health harm, but associations were strongest for sexual abuse and emotional abuse. The ACMS data show that the mental health impacts of child maltreatment occur early in life, in adolescence and early adulthood.

Child maltreatment increases the likelihood of health risk behaviours

Child maltreatment is also related to a range of health risk behaviours and conditions. Study participants with a history of child maltreatment were:



The researchers concluded that there is a national crisis in self-harm and suicide attempts in young people. Three in 10 (30.5%) study participants aged 16–24 years reported that they had self-harmed at some time in their life. Among those aged 16–24, self-harm was twice as common in females (39.5%) compared with males (20%). Some participants reporting self-harm had not experienced child maltreatment, but those with a history of child maltreatment were at much higher risk, with sexual and emotional abuse being the strongest predictors of self-harm.

How can the study be used?

The ACMS provides reliable and valid data about the extent and nature of child abuse and neglect in Australia. While this summary is only able to provide a high level snapshot, the study publications give a detailed context about maltreatment experiences, including which children are most at risk of which types of abuse and neglect. They also identify the social determinants of abuse and neglect. The ACMS provides comprehensive new evidence, which can inform policy and practice to help prevent and reduce child maltreatment in Australia. It identifies the associated mental health disorders and health risk behaviours to indicate where supports are most needed.

Where can I find out more?

The findings of the ACMS are available in a [report](#) for a general public audience and in a series of open-access academic articles in the [Medical Journal of Australia](#). The [ACMS website](#) has a wealth of information that is useful for policy and practice, including a large number of [infographics](#).

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Reference

Haslam, D, Mathews, B, Pacella, R, Scott, JG, Finkelhor, D, Higgins, DJ, Meinck, F, Erskine, HE, Thomas, HJ, Lawrence, D & Malacova, E 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, Brisbane, Qld., viewed 1 May 2023.