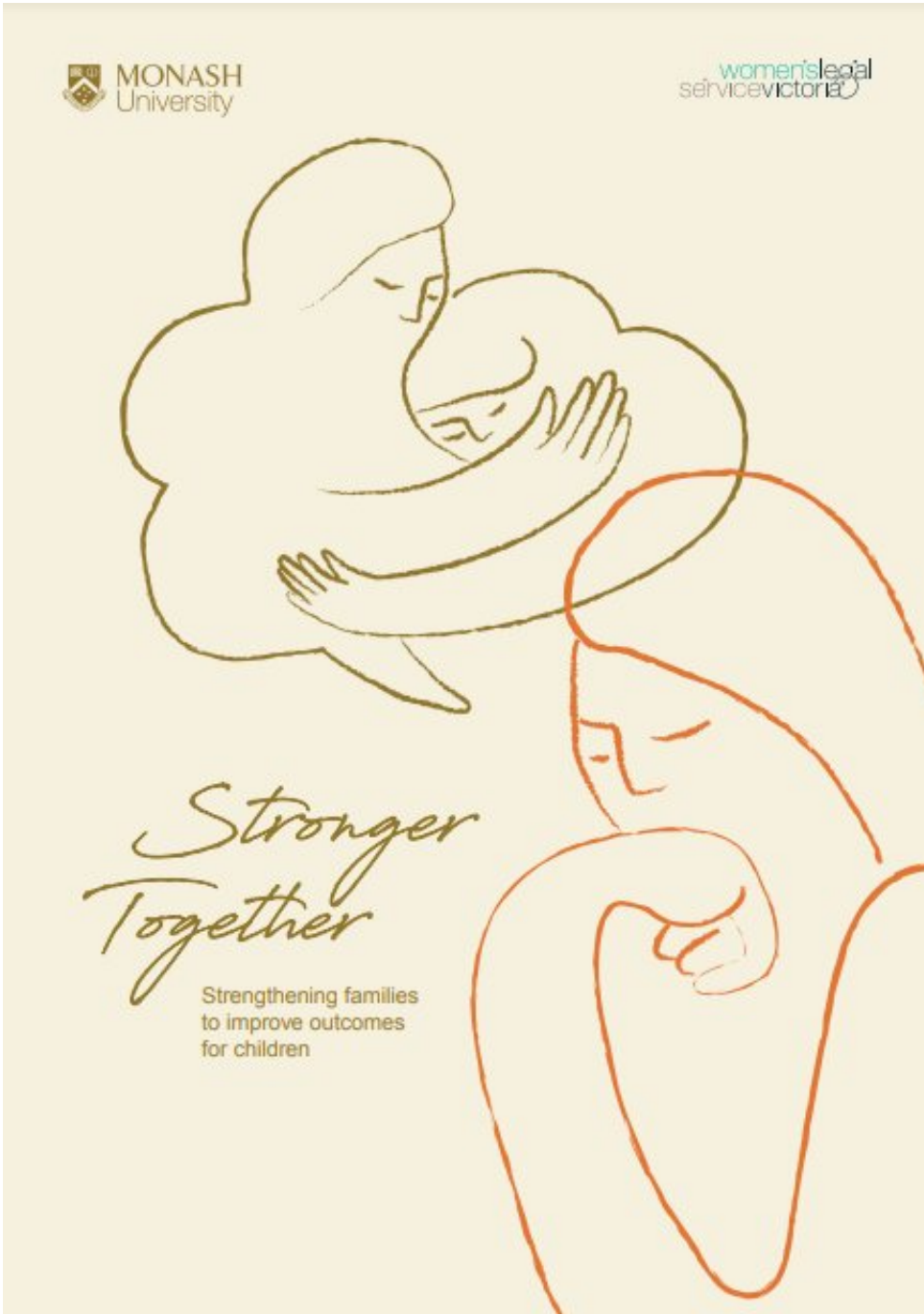


Driving cultural change throughout Victoria's child protection system

April 6 2022



Credit: Monash University

A new study from Monash University has found partnering and collaborating with mothers to improve family functioning could help

reorient Victoria's child protection system and achieve better outcomes for children.

Monash researchers spoke to 30 mothers affected by domestic and [family violence](#) that were subject to child protection intervention, with the findings published today in the report *Stronger together: Strengthening families to improve outcomes for children*. Researchers also spoke with 13 community legal center practitioners who assisted the victim-survivor mothers seeking the return of their children into their care.

The research was carried out by the Monash Gender and Family Violence Prevention Center in partnership with Women's Legal Service Victoria and funded by a Knowledge Grant from the Victoria Law Foundation.

The findings strengthen calls by the Victorian Government to transform the state's child and family system and reorient child protection services to focus on improving [family functioning](#) and supporting children to remain safely in their homes.

The research shows that putting policy into practice requires consistent domestic and family violence trauma informed practice, and a strength-based approach to enable children and families to thrive.

"The government's ambitious pathways to support policy presents a window of opportunity to reimagine the child protection system and generate an evidence-based and lasting transformation of the values and practices of child protection services," said lead researcher Dr. Naomi Pfitzner.

"Better outcomes for children and strong parent-child relationships are more likely to be achieved through collaborative relationships with client

families and supporting parents/caregivers to address concerns while families remain intact.

"Recovery from domestic and family violence is complex and takes time. The study findings highlight the need to improve child protection responses to mothers, children and families affected by domestic and family violence. Key to this is a holistic, cross-sector approach that focuses on children and parents/caregivers' support needs to facilitate better outcomes for everyone."

Co-researcher Professor Silke Meyer from Griffith University and Monash Adjunct Professor said the study had identified opportunities to assist in the achievement of the government's strategic priorities.

"The experiences of mothers in this study revealed the need to provide support to improve their parenting capacity and address other issues impacting their [mental health](#) and wellbeing, such as domestic and family violence, [financial hardship](#) and unstable housing," Professor Meyer said.

"Assistance should include cross-sector collaboration to provide wrap-around support, timely referrals to recovery services and flexibility with reunification timeframes when parents are actively working to address protective concerns and it is in the child's best interests."

Researchers said when families involved in child protection were affected by domestic and family violence, there should also be a focus on perpetrator visibility, engagement and accountability, with children placed in the care of an abusive parent likely to experience negative impacts on their social, emotional and physical wellbeing.

"Child protection responses should hold perpetrators of domestic and family violence accountable as caregivers and abusers," said Dr.

Pfitzner.

"Where a parent/caregiver's use of domestic and family violence triggers child safety concerns, partnering with victim-survivor parents/caregivers to support safe and secure parenting practices is an investment in children's recovery and wellbeing."

Other key recommendations from the study include the development of a shared strengths-based practice framework across Victoria's child and family system as well as embedding trauma-informed child practice through annual workforce training and building [child protection](#) workers' skills to work with parents/caregivers who perpetrate domestic and family violence.

More information: Stronger Together: Strengthening families to improve outcomes for children. [bridges.monash.edu/articles/re ... children /19353284/1](https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/research-bridges/2022-04-06-stronger-together-strengthening-families-to-improve-outcomes-for-children)

Provided by Monash University

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