

Landmark study to unpack impact of child maltreatment

Leading child protection expert Daryl Higgins has joined a prestigious list of international researchers to deliver a \$2.3 million study unpacking the prevalence and effects of child maltreatment in Australia.

Sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence are the five forms of child maltreatment.

The five-year study, which will bring together researchers in Australia, the United States and United Kingdom, will deliver a comprehensive assessment of the mental and physical health outcomes of those affected.

Professor Higgins, Director of ACU's Institute of Child Protection Studies, said reducing the prevalence of child maltreatment offered the greatest opportunity to prevent mental illness, suicide and other serious health problems.

"There is currently no systematic way of knowing whether our prevention efforts are working despite the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 making a clear commitment to the need for actions to prevent all forms of child maltreatment, including child sexual abuse," he said.

"A national, population-based study will provide such a benchmark."

Led by Professor Ben Mathews from QUT's Childhood Adversity Research Program, the study will:

- Provide the first reliable estimate of the prevalence and occurrence of all five forms of child maltreatment
- Identify the location, frequency, severity and timing of experiences and the child's relationship to the person who inflicted them
- Unpack impact on health including depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide, substance abuse, and chronic physical health conditions such as obesity, cardiovascular disease and diabetes and
- Estimate the national burden of disease caused by child maltreatment.

About 10,000 Australians, aged 16 and over, will be surveyed via telephone interviews on the prevalence, health and economic burdens of child maltreatment.

Participation will be voluntary, anonymous and confidential. Professional support will be available.

Findings will inform national public policy strategies about where, when and how to invest resources to reduce child maltreatment.

The study will be based on a national survey generated by the team's survey partner, the Social Research Centre. It is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council.

Professor Higgins is available for interview.

Media Contact: *Elisabeth Tarica, Australian Catholic University on 0418 756 941 or elisabeth.tarica@acu.edu.au*