



3 August 2020

Members of the Advisory Board
The Australian Child Maltreatment Study

Dear Advisory Board Members

Update on the Australian Child Maltreatment Study 2019-23

I am pleased to write to you on behalf of our research team to provide you with an update on progress with our [Australian Child Maltreatment Study](#). We are grateful for your involvement on our Advisory Board. We extend our thanks to those who have already provided ad hoc advice, or who have advocated for our Study with government agencies, stakeholders, and the community.

At the outset, we are pleased to advise that all aspects of our Study are on schedule despite Covid-19, including completion of all phases of our pilot study. We can also advise that because of our survey methodology, we are fortunate in being able to anticipate that the conduct of our main survey in 2021 should not be affected by Covid-19.

Nature of the Australian Child Maltreatment Study

As you will recall, our Australian Child Maltreatment Study is the first national study of the prevalence all five forms of child maltreatment in Australia (physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to domestic violence). Our survey of approximately 10,000 Australians aged 16 and over will also capture information about the nature of these experiences (including the age of onset and cessation; the frequency of the acts; the severity of the acts; and the relationship of the child to the person(s) who inflicted the maltreatment). Other childhood adversities, including peer bullying and sibling victimisation, will also be explored.

The second dimension of the study generates evidence of the mental and physical health impacts of maltreatment through the lifespan. Our analysis of the mental health effects of maltreatment gathers clinically diagnostic information of six conditions, providing particularly robust evidence of the mental health effects of child maltreatment going beyond self-reported symptoms. The third dimension of our work is to estimate the national burden of disease associated with maltreatment.

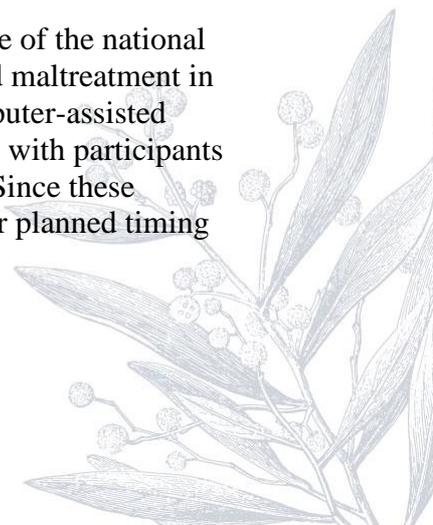
Taken together, and as a result of our use of a random sample representative of the national population, this will be the most comprehensive and rigorous study of child maltreatment in Australia, and significant globally. Our survey is being conducted by computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI), in which our interviewers conduct interviews with participants over the phone, using a software program to enter participants' responses. Since these interviews can be administered from the interviewers' offices or homes, our planned timing of the main survey should not be affected by Covid-19.

Australian Child Maltreatment Study

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Priorities and progress to date

Our Study is funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council for 5 years (2019-23: APP1158750). We have secured ethical clearance for our Study from the QUT Human Research Ethics Committee (#1900000477, 16 August 2019). Since commencement in 2019, our priorities have included work on project infrastructure establishment, project engagement, and project design:

Project infrastructure establishment has included:

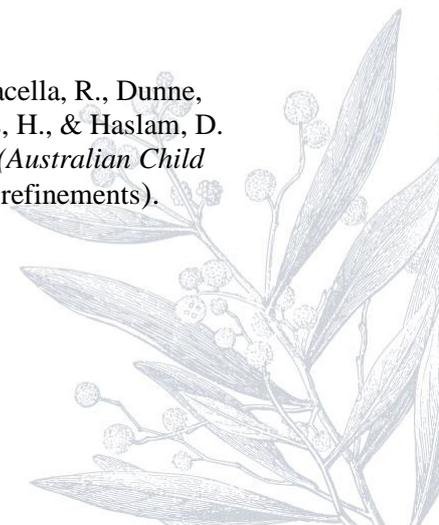
- Staff recruitment and induction
- Institutional contracts
- Ethical clearance
- Data management planning including data security
- Project management and information systems
- Budget forecasting
- Collaboration with the Social Research Centre
- Software purchase and design
- Securing supplementary project funding from the Department of Social Services
- Securing supplementary project funding from the Australian Institute of Criminology

Project engagement has included:

- A national media launch (news, television, radio: 11 March 2019)
- Advisory Group recruitment
- Technical Expert Panel recruitment (30 academic experts from Australia and overseas, who have content expertise in various elements of our Study)
- Initial engagement with government stakeholders and community end-users
- Conference presentations
- Website design (live March 2020): <https://www.australianchildmaltreatmentstudy.org/>

Project design has included:

- Analyses of legal issues
- Analysis of ethical issues (including ensuring participant safety)
- Analysis of survey design issues, including conceptual, epidemiological, and logistical issues (Mathews, B., & the Australian Child Maltreatment Study Team. (2020). *Australian Child Maltreatment Study Instrument Design: Conceptual mapping to configure the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire Child Maltreatment Screeners*. Brisbane. 1-56).
- Preliminary statistical planning
- A week-long whole of team intensive workshop in September 2019
- Testing our approach with international Technical Expert Panel
- Monthly team meetings
- Configuration of our survey instrument (full citation: Mathews, B., Pacella, R., Dunne, M., Scott, J., Finkelhor, D., Higgins, D., Meinck, F., Erskine, H., Thomas, H., & Haslam, D. (2020). *The Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire - R2: Adapted Version (Australian Child Maltreatment Study)*. Creative Commons licence forthcoming, after final refinements).
- Pilot testing of our survey instrument



An update on our pilot testing

We have completed a multi-phase pilot test of our survey instrument. Testing processes included:

- Interviewer training
- Interview software design and testing
- Cognitive testing in two rounds of iterative tests with 13 participants from diverse age groups, genders, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnicities, in Melbourne (conducted by the Social Research Centre qualitative team with Professor Mathews observing in person);
- Cognitive testing with four abuse survivors, including institutional abuse survivors;
- Cognitive testing with a small convenience sample of youth aged 18-24;
- Iterative test-runs amongst team members;
- Full pilot with 100 randomly selected participants in full survey mode including full software programming, through computer assisted telephone interviews, administered by our Social Research Centre interviewers;
- Re-administration of maltreatment screeners with the pilot sample within four weeks to enable test-retest analysis to assess reliability.

We are now analysing the pilot data to confirm various elements of our approach and to identify any areas where refinements may be made. At this stage, the data are most promising and indicate the questions are conceptually and operationally robust.

Next steps

The remainder of 2020 will involve:

- Complete analysis of pilot data
- Final refinements to survey instrument
- Final testing and programming of software platforms
- Ongoing engagement with Technical Expert Panel
- Preparation of full interviewer training for main survey
- Reporting to funding agencies
- Completion of four journal articles about the Study, with anticipated submission in September – December 2020.

We will also be steadily accelerating our expansion and engagement with our Advisory Board, as the Study progresses. This will include delivery of presentations to a range of stakeholders. We will place an updated presentation on our website in late August 2020. If you would like to request a presentation tailored to your agency, please contact our Project Officer, Andrea Boskovic, at acms@qut.edu.au



Year	Primary focus
2020	Analyse full pilot study data; final instrument refinement; initial publications; ongoing engagement with Advisory Board and Technical Expert Panel; prepare interviewer training
2021	Main survey: recruitment and data collection, data cleaning; ongoing engagement, publications
2021-22	Data analysis, knowledge transfer, ongoing engagement, publications
2022-23 +	Publications, policy briefs, engagement and impact focus

Over time, accelerating engagement and knowledge translation

To date, most of our time has been invested in ensuring the Australian Child Maltreatment Study is robustly designed, operationally sound, and will deliver gold-standard scientific outcomes.

As the Study progresses, we will have a growing focus on engagement and knowledge translation with Advisory Board members and their agencies. This will occur on an ad hoc individual basis, but it may also involve convening occasional teleconferences involving multiple Advisory Board members should this be advantageous. We will also send you periodic updates and ensure you are kept informed of significant developments via email.

This research and optimal dissemination of our Study's findings is of critical importance in developing appropriate public health policy and practice initiatives to reduce the prevalence and costs of child maltreatment, and improve the lives of Australians, and, by extension, our society. We deeply value your involvement and support in advocating for our Study and its outcomes across government agencies, professional organisations, and sector representatives.

We look forward to working with you as the Study progresses, to benefit children, families, and Australian communities.

Yours sincerely



Professor Ben Mathews

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