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method insights into impact and support needs:
Final report



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Acknowledgement of Country

ANROWS acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present and future; and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and knowledge.

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Domestic and family violence and parenting: Mixed method insights into impact and support needs: Final report

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Table of contents

List of tables	3
List of figures	6
List of boxes	7
Executive summary	8
Contribution to knowledge from the empirical components of the program.....	9
Implications.....	12
Key points from the research program.....	14
Introduction	15
Outline of the project methodology.....	16
Structure of this report.....	19
1. State of knowledge literature review summary	20
1.1 What is the prevalence of DFV among parents?.....	20
1.2 How does DFV impact on parenting capacity?.....	20
1.3 What are the methods and behaviours that perpetrators use to disrupt the mother-child relationship?.....	21
1.4 What interventions exist to strengthen and support a positive and healthy mother-child relationship?.....	21
1.5 Conclusions from the state of knowledge literature review.....	21
2. Effects of inter-parental conflict on parenting, mother-child relationships, father-child relationships, and children’s outcomes	23
2.1 Abstract.....	23
2.2 Introduction.....	24
2.3 Measures and analytical approach.....	25
2.4 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict, maternal relationship satisfaction, psychological distress and parenting, and children’s outcomes.....	29
2.5 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict and maternal, paternal, and child outcomes for intact compared to separated families.....	47
2.6 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict and child adjustment to care transitions in separated families.....	56
2.7 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict and parenting arrangements in separated families.....	56
2.8 Discussion and conclusion.....	58
3. The impact of family violence on parenting and parent-child relationships—insights from experiences of separated parents	60
3.1 Abstract.....	60
3.2 Introduction.....	60
3.3 Measures and analytical approach.....	61
3.4 Experience of family violence, quality of inter-parental relationships, and safety concerns	65

3.5 Parent-child relationships.....	79
3.6 Parenting stress.....	88
3.7 Flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements.....	95
3.8 Child wellbeing.....	105
3.9 Summary and discussion.....	123
4. Qualitative insights into mothering, domestic and family violence, and service approaches.....	127
4.1 Abstract.....	127
4.2 Introduction.....	127
4.3 Conducting the qualitative interviews.....	129
4.4 Demographic profile of participants and patterns of DFV and abuse.....	131
4.5 The interconnection between tactics of abuse and control, the impact on women and children, and parenting arrangements.....	135
4.6 Analysis of fathering and patterns of domestic and family violence tactics.....	136
4.7 Mothering in the context of domestic and family violence.....	160
4.8 Relationships between mothers and their children.....	162
4.9 Services and agencies.....	165
4.10 Conclusion: mothering, fathering, domestic and family violence, and services approaches.....	185
Conclusions and implications for future research, services, and professional practice	187
Introduction.....	187
Frequency of inter-parental conflict and family violence in Australian families.....	187
Consequences of inter-parental conflict and family violence for parents and children.....	188
Qualitative findings about parenting in the context of family violence.....	190
Policy and practice directions and areas for further research.....	191
References.....	193
Appendices: List of tables.....	197
Appendix A: Comparison of LSAC, LSSF, and SRSP.....	198
Appendix B: Tables from Part 2 (Effects of inter-parental conflict on parenting, mother-child relationships, father-child relationships, and children’s outcomes).....	199
Appendix C: Tables of multivariate analysis results from AIFS Family Pathways studies.....	205

List of tables

Table 1	How each component addressed the research questions.....	18
Table 2.1	Mothers' and fathers' psychological distress, parenting styles, and child outcome variables.....	27
Table 2.2	Percentage (95% CI) of mothers in each IPC category.....	30
Table 2.3	Baseline demographic characteristics (at child age 4-5 years) of intact and separated families by current IPC when children were 12-13 years.....	48
Table 2.4	Percentage (95% CI) of children experiencing adjustment difficulties after care transitions by current reported IPC between separated parents.....	56
Table 2.5	Frequencies (and %) of parenting arrangements in separated families by current reported IPC.....	57
Table 3.1	Types of emotional abuse participants were asked about in each wave of LSSF and in SRSP 2012.....	62
Table 3.2	Reports of experiences of violence or abuse by gender, LSSF waves and SRSP (2012).....	66
Table 3.3	Each parent's report of experiences of violence or abuse before and during separation, former couples of LSSF Wave 1.....	67
Table 3.4	Reports of experiences of violence or abuse before and after separation, by gender, LSSF and SRSP.....	68
Table 3.5	Reports of experiences of violence or abuse since separation by experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse before and during separation, by gender, LSSF and SRSP.....	69
Table 3.6	Quality of inter-parental relationship by gender, LSSF waves and SRSP.....	70
Table 3.7	Proportions of parents who reported having safety concerns as a result of child's ongoing contact with other parent.....	74
Table 3.8	Proportions of parents who reported experiencing financial hardship.....	76
Table 3.9	Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child.....	80
Table 3.10	Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with child by experiences of violence or abuse, fathers and mothers.....	81
Table 3.11	Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child (reported in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3) by experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers.....	82
Table 3.12	Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child in Wave 3 by experiences of violence or abuse before and during separation (reported in Wave 1), parents who cared for study child at least half of nights per year, LSSF.....	83
Table 3.13	Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child by inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, financial hardship, and parental emotional health, SRSP and LSSF.....	83
Table 3.14	Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF wave 1-wave 3.....	85
Table 3.15	Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with relationship with study child that fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3.....	87
Table 3.16	Mean scores of parenting stress, by care-time arrangements and gender of parents, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 2.....	89
Table 3.17	Mean scores of parenting stress, by experiences of violence or abuse, care-time arrangements and gender of parents, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 2.....	90
Table 3.18	Mean scores of parenting stress (as reported in LSSF Waves 1 and 2) by experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers.....	91

Table 3.19	Mean scores of parenting stress (as reported in LSSF Wave 2) by experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers.....	91
Table 3.20	Mean scores of parenting stress (as reported in LSSF Wave 2) by inter-parental relationship, safety, financial hardship, and parental emotional health, LSSF.....	92
Table 3.21	Coefficients of OLS regression of parenting stress, by gender of parents, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 2.....	94
Table 3.22	Workability of care-time arrangements by gender of parents, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3.....	96
Table 3.23	Mean score of flexibility-workability scale of care-time arrangements by gender of parents, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3.....	97
Table 3.24	Mean scores of care-time arrangement flexibility-workability by experiences of violence or abuse, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3.....	98
Table 3.25	Mean score of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements (reported in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3) by experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers.....	99
Table 3.26	Mean scores of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements in Wave 3 by experiences of violence or abuse before and during separation (reported in Wave 1).....	99
Table 3.27	Mean scores of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements in Wave 3 by inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, financial hardship, and parental emotional health, SRSP and LSSF.....	100
Table 3.28	Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements, by gender of parents and waves of LSSF and SRSP.....	102
Table 3.29	Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangement as reported in LSSF Wave 3.....	103
Table 3.30	Parents' reports of children's wellbeing by gender of parents, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3.....	106
Table 3.31	Proportion of parents who reported child's health as "fair or poor" by reports of experiences of violence or abuse, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3.....	107
Table 3.32	Proportions of parents who indicated child's development worse in one or more areas by reports of experiences of violence or abuse, LSSF and SRSP.....	107
Table 3.33	Mean scores of children's socio-emotional development by whether parents experienced violence or abuse, LSSF Wave 2-Wave 3 (score 0-10, higher = better outcome).....	108
Table 3.34	Mean scores for the child's BITSEA behavioural problem scale by whether parents experienced violence or abuse, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1.....	109
Table 3.35	Proportion of parents who reported child's health as "fair or poor" (reported in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3) by reports of experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers.....	109
Table 3.36	Proportions of parents who reported child poor development in one or more areas in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3 by reports of experiences of violence or abuse over time.....	110
Table 3.37	Mean scores of child's socio-emotional development (score range 0-10, higher = better outcome) by whether parents experienced violence or abuse over time, LSSF Wave 3.....	111
Table 3.38	Parents' reports of children's wellbeing (reported in LSSF Wave 3) by experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation (reported in Wave 1 LSSF).....	112
Table 3.39	Odds ratios of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, fathers and mothers.....	114
Table 3.40	Odds ratios of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas, fathers and mothers.....	115
Table 3.41	Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome), fathers and mothers.....	116

Table 3.42	Coefficients of OLS regression of BITSEA scale (higher score = worse outcome), fathers and mothers.....	117
Table 3.43	Odds ratios of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3.....	119
Table 3.44	Odds ratios of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas, fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3.....	120
Table 3.45	Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome), fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3.....	121
Table 4.1	Demographics of participants.....	132
Table 4.2	Participants' current relationship status.....	133
Table 4.3	Ages of participants' children.....	133
Table 4.4	Perpetrator's relationship to the children.....	133
Table 4.5	Mother's reports of children's main post-separation overnight care-time with father.....	134
Table 4.6	Men attending parenting programs or programs for use of violence.....	141
Table 4.7	Frequency of forms of child abuse.....	143
Table 4.8	Family and domestic violence pre and post-separation.....	148
Table 4.9	Financial abuse pre and post-separation.....	151
Table 4.10	Frequency of types of post-separation housing issues.....	153

List of figures

Figure 2.1 Percentage of mothers reporting low couple relationship satisfaction by IPC categories.....	32
Figure 2.2 Percentage of mothers reporting psychological distress (broadband range) by IPC categories.....	34
Figure 2.3 Percentage of mothers of children aged 4-5 years reporting poor parenting by IPC categories.....	36
Figure 2.4 Percentage of mothers of children aged 8-9 years reporting poor parenting by IPC categories.....	37
Figure 2.5 Percentage of mothers of children aged 12-13 years reporting poor parenting by IPC categories.....	38
Figure 2.6 Percentage of children aged 4-5 years with poor outcomes by IPC categories.....	40
Figure 2.7 Percentage of children aged 8-9 years with poor outcomes by IPC categories.....	42
Figure 2.8 Percentage of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes by IPC categories	44
Figure 2.9 Number of LSAC participants (age 12-13 years, K cohort) included in the analyses	47
Figure 2.10 Percentage of mothers of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes in intact and separated families by IPC categories.....	50
Figure 2.11 Percentage of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes in intact and separated families by IPC categories.....	52
Figure 2.12 Percentage of fathers of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes in intact and separated families by IPC categories.....	55
Figure 3.1 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as fearful by reports of experience abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP.....	71
Figure 3.2 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as lots of conflict by reports of experience abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP.....	72
Figure 3.3 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as fearful by reports of experience abuse or violence before or during separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF.....	73
Figure 3.4 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as lots of conflict by reports of experience abuse or violence before or during separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF.....	73
Figure 3.5 Proportion of parents who had safety concerns by reports of experiences of abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP.....	75
Figure 3.6 Proportion of parents who had safety concerns by reports of experiences of abuse or violence during or before separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF.....	75
Figure 3.7 Proportion of parents who experienced financial hardships by reports of experiences of abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP.....	77
Figure 3.8 Proportion of parents who had financial difficulties by reports of experiences of abuse or violence during or before separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF.....	78
Figure 4.1 Tactics of DFV and implications for father-child and mother-child relationships.....	130

List of boxes

Box 1.1 Summary of DFV and parenting research gaps and recommendations.....	22
Box 2.1 Interpreting dichotomised parent outcome measures.....	28
Box 2.2 Interpreting confidence intervals.....	29
Box 3.1 Interpretation of coefficients of OLS regression.....	84
Box 3.2 Interpretation of logit regression odds ratios.....	113

Executive summary

The Domestic and Family Violence and Parenting Research program examined the impact of domestic and family violence (DFV) on parenting capacity and parent–child relationships in Australia. It focused on three main issues:

- parental conflict in families and impacts on the emotional health and parenting behaviours of mothers and fathers and child functioning;
- how DFV experienced before separation, after separation, or both affects parents' emotional health and parent–child relationships; and
- mothers' experiences of engagement with services in the domestic and family violence, child protection, and family law systems in the context of DFV.

The research program employed a mixed method approach involving four separate components:¹

- 1) a systematic literature review (Hooker, Kaspiew, & Taft, 2016);
- 2) an analysis of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) to examine the impact of inter-parental conflict (IPC) on mothers' and fathers' psychological distress, parenting, and children's health and developmental outcomes at preschool, middle primary school and the adolescent transition;
- 3) an analysis of two complementary datasets of over 16,000 separated parents that form the Australian Institute of Family Studies' (AIFS) Family Pathways suite of studies: these datasets are the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF) and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents (SRSP 2012), which examine the impact of family violence on relationships between children and mothers and fathers, and child wellbeing outcomes where parents were separated; and
- 4) qualitative in-depth interviews with 50 women who had experienced DFV and engaged with services in the domestic and family violence sector, the child protection system, or the family law system. The purpose was to gain deeper insight into how mother–child relationships are affected by DFV, the characteristics of the perpetrators of DFV as fathers, and the extent to which engagement with services in the three sectors is of assistance to

women seeking to improve or repair relationships with children after DFV.

Overall, this research program was concerned with examining family and domestic violence defined in a manner consistent with the description applied in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2011). However, one of the studies involved, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children, assessed conflict between parents rather than DFV (see detailed definition in section 2.3.1). In discussing these findings, this report refers to inter-parental conflict (IPC). When discussing findings about domestic and family violence specifically, it refers to DFV.

¹ See p.ii for author acknowledgements per component of this report.

Contribution to knowledge from the empirical components of the research program

The three empirical components of the research program detailed in this report make a significant contribution to the evidence base on family violence and parenting, reinforcing the needs for a systematic and sustained focus on policy and program development in this area. Findings in five main areas underpin the recommendations for policy and practice in this report.

Extent of IPC and DFV

IPC and DFV are common in intact and separated families. The LSAC findings show that by the time children enter adolescence, more than one in three are in families where parents had reported IPC. IPC is persistent for one in four of these children (reported as occurring both currently and in the past).

Gendered patterns in DFV are evident for separated parents' experiences across the AIFS Family Pathways surveys used in this report. Across the LSSF and SRSP datasets, applying different reference time frames (before and during separation, and after separation), mothers are consistently more likely than fathers to report experiences of violence or abuse (both physical hurt and emotional abuse, and emotional abuse alone). About one-quarter of mothers experience physical hurt before separation, compared to about one-sixth of fathers. In relation to emotional abuse before separation, two-thirds of mothers reported this experience compared with about half of the fathers. Overall, a higher proportion of mothers than fathers report having experienced physical hurt and any emotional abuse (with or without physical hurt) and tended to more frequently report having safety concerns as a result of a child's ongoing contact with the other parent. Analysis of data from a sub-sample of former couples who participated in LSSF provided further evidence that one-directional violence or abuse (in that it was reported by one member of the former couple only) was significantly more likely to be reported by mothers. Twice as many mothers as fathers reported one-directional emotional abuse (18% cf. 9%) and mothers were two and a half times as likely as fathers to have reported one-directional DFV, including physical hurt (7% of mothers cf. 2% of fathers).

The DFV experiences described by the 50 women in the qualitative sample were severe and the majority of the children in the sample were not only exposed to family violence but had also experienced abuse directly, according to their mother. DFV experiences encompassing financial abuse and systems abuse (meaning the use of services and agencies to perpetuate abuse and control after separation) were reported by more than half of the women in the sample (n = 30 financial abuse, n = 29 systems abuse out of 47 separated women). Forty-five

of the 50 women identified different forms of child abuse by partners or former partners. Nineteen women discussed direct physical or sexual abuse of children. Other women spoke of neglect, the emotional abuse of children, and harm children experienced when seeing their mothers verbally abused or assaulted. They also spoke of the way in which the tactics of coercive control, the enforcement of petty rules, the isolation of children from friends and family members, and financial abuse contributed to fear and an unsafe environment for children. The constant denigration of mothers made it particularly difficult to parent, and sometimes children were actively told by fathers or mothers' partners to abuse or not obey their mothers.

Impact of IPC and DFV on parents and children

Any exposure to IPC or DFV is associated with poorer wellbeing outcomes for mothers and children in intact and separated families, in comparison with families where such exposure does not occur. Sustained exposure to IPC and DFV is particularly damaging. A clear pattern of compromised functioning associated with IPC was evident for women and children in the LSAC sample. The analyses compared three different IPC groups: no reported IPC, past or emerging IPC (IPC reported in the past or currently but not both), or persistent IPC (IPC reported in both past and current waves of LSAC). There was a clear pattern of poorer outcomes across a range of measures where any IPC was reported, with particularly poorer outcomes where IPC was persistent. For mothers of children aged 4-5 years, 8-9 years, and 12-13 years, the findings establish a strong negative association between IPC and mothers' satisfaction with the couple relationship (a sixfold increase in the rates for persistent IPC compared to no IPC) and a strong positive association with mothers' psychosocial distress. IPC was also associated with poor parenting self-efficacy, higher irritability and less consistency in interactions with the study child (around a threefold increase in the rates for persistent IPC compared to no IPC), and some reduction in parents' reported warmth.

For children, associations between IPC and child functioning were also evident at all three of the ages examined (4-5 years, 8-9 years, and 12-13 years). The poorest functioning was associated with persistent IPC. The analyses established an increased rate of poor physical health and health-related quality of life in children where families have persistent IPC, with the highest rates of poor health occurring in the pre-teens, compared to younger ages. Elevated difficulties in children's socio-emotional wellbeing and poor school readiness, vocabulary, approaches to learning, and literacy and maths achievement were also evident.

The AIFS Family Pathways analysis shows that the experience of DFV is linked with lower levels of perceived flexibility and workability in relation to parenting arrangements. Part of this negative association arises from the negative effect of DFV on the inter-parental relationship and safety concerns. Mothers and fathers who reported experiences of violence or abuse had a higher level of parenting stress and reported poorer relationships with their children compared with those parents who did not report having this experience.

Parents who reported a history of DFV also reported poorer child wellbeing, regardless of duration of separation. Consistent with the findings from the LSAC analysis indicative of a dose-response effect (in that persistent IPC is associated with even poorer wellbeing outcomes than emerging or past IPC), the parents' reports on children's wellbeing in the AIFS Family Pathways studies were particularly negative where parents reported experiencing ongoing DFV.

The analysis based on qualitative data establishes that the impacts of DFV on mothering and mother-child relationships are multiple and, in many cases, continue long after women leave relationships with perpetrators. Relationships between mothers and children, and meeting the demands of caring for children are adversely affected by the negative impact of DFV on maternal health, with both mental and physical effects reported by many women in the sample. High levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress were commonly reported and children were also reported to be experiencing these issues in many cases.

DFV also had consequences for women's relationships with their children and their perceptions of their mothering abilities, particularly when their self-perception was already undermined by the emotional abuse by partners. Women also struggled to repair relationships with their children while dealing with ongoing guilt about their ability to parent as a result of abuse. Tactics that perpetrators used during the relationship that affected mother-child relationships included undermining the mother's authority and belittling her to the children.

The data from interviews with mothers demonstrate that negative fathering capacity was related to the tactics of abuse used in DFV. These tactics had an impact upon children before and after parental separation. A range of issues influenced the fathering capacity of men who used violence in this sample. Most women reported that fathers had little involvement in their children's lives prior to separation, except in specific ways of their choosing (e.g., sport, playing, sometimes driving them to their different activities). The capacity to father was also significantly impacted by: individual characteristics and behaviours of the men, their attitudes to children and

to women, and a tendency to employ manipulative tactics and coercive control as part of an ongoing pattern of family violence. The women's descriptions indicate that a range of issues were also relevant to some fathers' parenting behaviour, including personality characteristics and mental health issues and problems with alcohol, drugs, and gambling.

Among the main concerns raised by the women was the transmission of negative and disrespectful attitudes about them as mothers, and about women in general from abusive fathers to children. Twenty of the 50 women described how their children had adopted the abusive language and behaviours of their fathers, despite mothers' efforts to intervene and correct this in children.

Mothers also reported that some of the men had very little understanding of child development in undertaking their role as father and in their relationships with the children. Expectations of their children's behaviour were unrealistic for the child's age, and children would be punished for not adhering to the expected "rules" for the father's household. This reflected qualities of coercion and control in DFV by establishing standards and expectations reflecting the perpetrators needs rather than children's capacities. Some women reported that fathers had little experience of caring for children prior to demanding equal shared time or high levels of time with their children upon separation.

IPC and DFV after separation

Separation does not end exposure to IPC and DFV. Analysis of LSAC children at age 12-13 years showed that conflict between parents was common for children whose parents were separated (40% compared to 10% for intact families). Separation that was accompanied by ongoing IPC was associated with the poorest adjustment for mothers and children across a broad range of measures. Separation and IPC was also associated with psychological distress and inconsistent parenting for fathers. In the context of IPC, children showed elevated levels of distress after time with their father: 40 percent had difficulty settling and one in three were more critical of their mother and other family members after spending time with their father.

In the AIFS Family Pathways analysis, separation appeared to reduce the incidence of physical hurt but emotional abuse was sustained for significant proportions of the sample. Two in ten fathers and three in ten mothers reported DFV (mainly emotional abuse) in all three waves of the LSSF up to 5 years after separation, and approximately a quarter of parents (23% of fathers and 25% of mothers) reported DFV in two waves. Parents who had experienced violence or abuse before or during separation were at greater risk of experiencing some form of violence or abuse after separation.

There was evidence from the interviews that the abusive tactics, which undermine mother–child relationships, had continued or escalated after separation for at least two-thirds of the 47 women who were separated from their partner or the child’s father. For these women, this included ongoing control and coercion (n = 16), verbal abuse (n = 17), stalking (n = 13), and the emergence of systems abuse (n = 29). Financial abuse also increased, from 17 mothers pre-separation to 30 mothers post-separation. When combined with considerable time spent with fathers who were abusive and controlling, this provided an environment of fear and ongoing misery for children and their mothers. Managing the ongoing impact of trauma on their children or adolescent violence in the home created significant challenges for mothers who themselves were trying to recover from the domestic violence they had experienced. Therefore, the quality of life of some children and their mothers appeared to be significantly worse following separation.

Most women in the sample reported court-ordered or agreed arrangements involving shared care or substantial and significant time arrangements. Arrangements involving no or limited time with fathers were reported by only 12 women. Substantial personal effort, financial and legal resources, and court processes were required to achieve these orders to protect children. In six cases, women had lost primary care of children, and in a further three cases, women were in the process of losing contact with at least one of their children to a domestically violent father. For these mothers the circumstances of engagement with legal and court processes resulted in poor outcomes due to the involvement of inexperienced professionals and poorly co-ordinated services and agencies.

Financial abuse

There is a significant association between financial stress and poor wellbeing outcomes for women and children, particularly evident in the AIFS Family Pathways data. The AIFS Family Pathways analysis showed that for mothers, financial hardship is a significant factor in the association between DFV and higher levels of parenting stress and lower wellbeing outcomes for children. This association was also convincingly established in the qualitative data, with financial abuse emerging in the interviews with women as a particularly strong and deleterious feature of severe and sustained patterns of DFV.

In the qualitative data, 30 of the women indicated that financial abuse escalated or occurred newly after separation, as ex-partners denied or misused access to financial or material resources to maintain abuse and control after separation. For some of the women, this meant periods of homelessness or housing problems, the loss of employment, and

a post-separation lifestyle marked by poverty and instability. Mothers reported children were also affected by the exercise of manipulation through money and other material resources after separation—directly through the poverty of their mothers, but also indirectly. There were reports of children sometimes being “won over” by their fathers, who were described as using gifts and treats to provide a direct contrast to mothers’ limited capacity in this regard. The material gifts, combined with the denigration of mothers, meant that for some women, their children turned against them and, even into adulthood, wanted no contact with their mothers. In other instances, children developed behaviours that challenged the mother–child relationship. These behaviours included angry outbursts and violence towards the mother.

Mothers’ experiences with services and agencies

The qualitative data shed light on the positive and negative features of the responses experienced by women who have suffered DFV across services and agencies in the domestic and family violence and family law sectors. Many of the women also had contact with justice system agencies, including police and courts, for personal protection orders and some criminal justice responses to the DFV. Most of the women had engaged with multiple systems and agencies and more than half described experiences that suggested ex-partners were using elements of the system to maintain the abuse.

Engagement with family violence services and refuges in the immediate period after separation was mostly described in positive terms, particularly where therapeutic support for restoration of parenting capacity and trauma recovery was offered as part of the refuge service for women and children.

Many women also spoke of the need to continue engagement with therapeutic services over the longer term, for both themselves and their children. Counselling and other support were seen as necessary to address the continuing consequences of the experience of family violence, including anxiety, depression, fear, and post-traumatic stress. Some were able to access professional therapeutic treatment for themselves and their children through domestic violence refuges or in the community, and these areas would benefit from future research and evaluation. For many women in the sample, this support continued to be necessary longer into the post-separation period in the context of the negotiation and management of post-separation parenting arrangements. Some women reported being unable to access services of a sufficiently expert or sustained nature for themselves and their children. Others were inhibited from obtaining or maintaining engagement with therapeutic services through fathers vetoing this for

children, court orders prohibiting it, fear of records being subpoenaed, or financial constraints. Some women came to therapeutic support later in life as they or their adult children continued to experience the long-term consequences of DFV, including the ongoing fractured nature of relationships with their children as teenagers and adults.

Many of the women in the sample had some engagement with child protection agencies. This varied from brief contacts as a result of notifications being made or self-referral when appealing for help with DFV and child abuse by fathers, through to more substantive processes involving investigation and, in some cases, intervention occurring in the form of child protection agencies taking steps to prevent further abuse, including through issuing warnings or instigating court action. From the women's accounts, restoration of their parenting capacity and support for mothers and children to recover from DFV did not appear to be a focus of engagement with child protection agencies.

From the women's perspectives, the majority of experiences with the family law system were negative. Where outcomes were satisfactory from women's perspectives, the outcome had maintained the safety of children. This occurred only among a small group of women who had the persistence, personal fortitude, and financial resources to pursue an outcome that was acceptable to them. More commonly, however, women reported being unable to secure satisfactory outcomes in the family law system. Several issues were identified as relevant in producing this situation. These included a lack of focus on, and expertise in, family violence among family law professionals; an emphasis on shared parenting in the family law system; and a lack of access to services funded and configured in a way that meant women had sustained support in securing the safety of their children. Some described how they had experienced their ex-partners using the family law system and other services to perpetuate abuse, including via control, stalking, financial abuse, and repeated litigation.

Implications

Policy and program development

In combination, the findings from four elements of this research program point to the need for policy and program development that address DFV and parenting at multiple levels and across multiple elements of the service sector. They reinforce the need for prevention and early intervention strategies, as well as pointing to some significant adjustments that need to be made in secondary and tertiary responses. These directions are consistent with the priorities identified in the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (Council of Australian Governments, 2016). Given variations in approaches in relevant areas among different states and territories, the implications of this research are set out in general terms, since consistent responses may already be evident or under development in the varied policies and programs operating in these areas. An overarching point, however, is the need for training for professionals interacting with parents to identify and assess harmful parenting behaviours and the need for screening approaches to be designed to identify such behaviours.

In keeping with established insights, two transition phases emerge as times of significance for the potential for DFV (or IPC) to emerge or escalate: the initial phases of parenthood, including pregnancy, and the lead up to and period after separation.

Prevention and early intervention strategies during the transition to parenthood are required to address the potential for IPC and DFV to emerge during this period and become entrenched afterwards. Where IPC and DFV are identified in this period, mothers and children need access to support that will mean they do not remain in a situation that exposes them to IPC or DFV, either because they are supported to end their exposure to the perpetrator or the perpetrator is supported to change their behaviour. Further program development and evaluation is required in these areas: therapeutic and practical support for women and children to leave or recover from DFV, and the development of therapeutic responses to repair parenting capacity after DFV and to strengthen mother-child relationships. Additionally, further research to understand more about the parenting capacity of men who perpetrate DFV is required to support the development of effective approaches for working with men in this context.

Similarly, it is clear that separation is a critical time for parents affected by IPC and DFV. The findings show that exposure to IPC and DFV is sustained after separation for a significant proportion of families and that it escalates for some. Sustained IPC and DFV exposure and financial stress contribute to particularly poor wellbeing outcomes for women and children, and the insights point to a need to refocus policy and programs in the post-separation arena.

Ending exposure to IPC and DFV after separation should be given much greater priority than it is currently. The direction established with the 2012 reforms to Family Law Act 1975 (Cth), which placed priority on protecting children from harm from exposure to family violence and child abuse, should be consolidated and enhanced. Greater recognition of the therapeutic needs arising from separation against a background of IPC and DFV should inform the development of new policy, program, and practice approaches. In addition, policy and program shifts that support ending exposure to IPC and DFV, either through changing behaviour or reducing children's exposure through supervised, limited, or no-time arrangements are required. The elements of the system that respond to women and children affected by DFV after separation should be adjusted to offer consistent, coherent, and supportive approaches that protect women and children from exposure to IPC and DFV, including recognition that maintaining relationships between children and abusive fathers is likely to be harmful unless the abusive behaviour ends.

The issues of financial abuse and systems abuse warrant greater recognition and preventative action. Existing policy directions designed to support financial and economic literacy and independence for women should be strengthened and particular attention paid to enhancing support for women to achieve financial stability after separation, particularly where family violence has occurred. Further, elements of the system involved with separation and financial arrangements, including the Child Support Program, Centrelink, and mediators, lawyers, and courts concerned with assisting parents to make financial arrangements after separation, require strengthened capacity to identify and deal with situations in which financial abuse is occurring. Similarly, the use of systems to maintain abuse should be given greater attention, in the first instance through systematic research and consultation that identifies how this happens and how it may be prevented, consistent with recent recommendations by the Family Law Council (FLC, 2016).

Practice

For practitioners working with families affected by IPC and DFV, the research shows that:

- Women who engage with services against a background of DFV have a number of complex material and psychosocial needs.
- If women are not already engaged with a specialist DFV service, then such a referral is usually necessary.
- It is likely that women and their children are experiencing ongoing abuse unless contact with the perpetrator has ceased and other safety measures to prevent abuse are available (e.g., being legally permitted to live at an undisclosed address to prevent stalking).
- Women may need assistance and referral in relation to financial and housing needs. This includes Financial Wellbeing and Capability services and financial counselling services, which were identified as a gap in the types of services made available to women in this research.
- Women and their children may be experiencing physical and emotional consequences from DFV and abuse and may need long-term therapeutic assistance.
- Mothers may need referrals to programs and services that will support restoration of parenting capacity from a perspective of understanding the dynamics of DFV, including programs that offer services to mothers and children together. Children may also need assistance separately.
- Where relationships between fathers and children are maintained, fathers may need referral to services in relation to parenting. Where this is occurring, the wellbeing and safety of children need to be monitored.
- Service providers should be alert to the fact that their services and other types of services and agencies may be used in a pattern of systems abuse. Staff, including legal professionals, should be trained to recognise this and provide appropriate advice and referrals where this is occurring.

Key points from the research program

To date, the implications that family violence has for parenting capacity have received little attention.

At a population level, the analyses based on LSAC data provide a clear indication of the links between IPC, poorer parental wellbeing and poorer outcomes for children, especially where sustained IPC occurs. The evidence from the AIFS Family Pathways suite of studies is consistent with the LSAC findings, by applying a specialised (though quite broad) measure of DFV among nationally representative samples of separated parents. It shows associations between DFV and negative impacts on parenting capacity, parental satisfaction with parent–child relationships and child wellbeing. The AIFS Family Pathways data also point to the significance of financial hardship in influencing adverse child wellbeing and mothers' parenting after separation.

Both the LSAC and the AIFS Family Pathways analyses demonstrate that for many families, IPC and DFV and their harmful effects do not end when parents separate. Both adults and children remain vulnerable to the effects that endure beyond parental separation, thereby increasing the risks to health and wellbeing associated with family breakdown. These results suggest the importance of a broad focus on the early reduction of family conflict as a key plank in health and social policies that seek to improve the wellbeing and life chances of Australian women, men, and children. More specifically, they also reinforce the need for policy and practice approaches in the post-separation sphere that prioritise a reduction in the occurrence of, and parent and child exposure to, IPC and DFV.

The insights from the qualitative data establish that a limited focus on recovery from DFV and restoration in mother–child relationships is evident in the women's accounts of engagement with a varied range of services and agencies in the DFV sector, the child protection system, and the family law system. Such a focus was evident in the services provided by refuges and professionals that provided therapeutic support for women and children.

There is a need for the development of policy and program approaches for women and children to help them repair damage to their relationships that has occurred as a result of DFV. This includes specific strategies to challenge the tactics that perpetrators use to disrupt mother–child relationships. There is a critical need for knowledgeable professional support that recognises and guides women and children in the rebuilding of healthy mother–child relationships after domestic violence. Skilled professionals also include those who work with men in therapeutic services, the family law system, and other legal systems, who can be alert to DFV behaviours in how men might engage with these services and systems. In addition, there is a need for community and professional-wide education about the tactics of DFV, so understanding can improve about how perpetrators can be successful in convincing children, the courts, and other professionals that a woman is a bad mother, and to understand that DFV persists well after women leave.

Introduction

This report sets out the findings of an extensive, mixed method research program examining the impacts of inter-parental conflict (IPC) and domestic and family violence (DFV) on parenting capacity with a view to understanding how outcomes for parents and children can be enhanced in this context. The research focuses on three main issues: how mother–child and father–child relationships are affected by DFV; how mothers who have experienced DFV perceive this has affected their relationship with their children; and how mothers experience engagement with services in the domestic and family violence, child protection, and family law systems in the context of DFV.

The research involves four elements: a literature review (Hooker et al., 2016), two elements based on analyses of different quantitative data sets, and a qualitative component based on interviews with 50 women who had used services against a background of DFV and parenting. The quantitative elements focus respectively on population-level findings about Australian families (Part 2, Longitudinal Study of Australian Children [LSAC]) and separated Australian families (Part 3, the AIFS Family Pathways studies). These elements provide insight into the nature and extent of IPC (LSAC) and DFV (AIFS Family Pathways) in these populations and their effects on parenting capacity, as well as on parent and child relationships and wellbeing. The qualitative component (Part 4) provides insight into the experiences of a non-representative sample of mothers who participated in an in-depth interview. This part of the research addresses the effect of DFV on the women's ability to care for their children; the fathering behaviours of their ex-partners and, in some cases, current partners; and how engagement with services in the DFV, child protection, and family law sectors was either helpful or unhelpful in this context.

This research project refers jointly to domestic violence and family violence as DFV. This recognises that violence in family settings may involve couples where one or both are parents to children in the household; former couples who are separated; or violence perpetrated towards family members of the couple, including children. DFV includes physical, psychological and emotional, sexual, financial, and other forms of violence associated with abusive control and coercion (Hooker et al., 2016; Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2011; Campo, 2015).

Inter-parental conflict (IPC) is the phenomenon measured in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children that most closely resembles a measure of DFV. IPC refers to verbal or physical conflict between two people who are biological, adoptive, or step-parents of a child (see Westrupp, Rose, Nicholson, & Brown, 2015). The extent to which a couple experiences difficulty in resolving conflict, assessed in terms of the frequency of arguments, tension, anger, and physical conflict in the couple relationship serves as an indicator of IPC. However, the IPC measure does not identify which parent initiates the conflict or the extent to which either partner is harmed and the presence of IPC should not be considered indicative of DFV. The definition, limitations, and measures used for IPC and DFV are explained further in Part 2 and Part 3 of this report respectively.

To date, the evidence base on parenting, IPC, and DFV has been under-developed in Australia (Hooker et al., 2016). Policy, practice, and research has only recently become oriented toward recognising that DFV has significant implications for parenting and children's wellbeing outcomes. In the face of increasingly strong calls for more attention to be paid to these questions (Council of Australian Governments, 2016; State of Victoria, 2016; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015), the research presented in this report provides rigorous evidence that is both broad and rich and offers a solid platform for further policy and practice development in this area. The findings of the research indicate significant priority should be placed on addressing the impact of family violence on parenting and on children's wellbeing outcomes. They indicate that IPC and DFV are not uncommon in Australian families, that they increase or are sustained even when separation occurs, and that they have significant negative consequences for parenting capacity and parent and child wellbeing, especially where exposure is sustained. Service responses remain under-developed, and the importance of recovery from DFV for mothers and children requires greater emphasis.

Outline of the project methodology

This section provides an overview of the methodology of the components of this report, the research questions, and the role of the project advisory committee. An extended description of each part's method is provided later in the relevant chapter of the report.

Methodology

The broad aim of this mixed method, multi-disciplinary research was to build the evidence base on the impact of DFV on parenting. To meet this aim, the research has four complementary components:

1. A systematic literature review on the impact of DFV on parenting and parent–child relationships, and current programs to alleviate these impacts (state of knowledge report);
2. A quantitative analysis of inter-parental conflict and child outcomes in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC);
3. A quantitative analysis of surveys of separated families and family violence by using the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF) and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2012 (SRSP); and
4. A qualitative study with mothers who have experienced family violence.

This Horizons report comprises the LSAC component, surveys of separated parents component, and the qualitative study with mothers. A short summary of the state of knowledge report is provided. The full state of knowledge report can be found at <http://anrows.org.au/publications/landscapes>.

The AIFS Research Ethics Committee granted approval for each of the components of this research. The University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committee granted additional clearance for the qualitative research component.

Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

LSAC is a study of 10,000 children and their families, from all states and territories. LSAC comprises two cohorts: approximately 5,000 children who were aged 0-1 year at recruitment in 2004 (the Baby or B Cohort) and 5,000 children who were aged 4-5 years (the Kindergarten or K Cohort) (Gray & Sanson, 2005). The cohorts are broadly representative of the Australian population (Soloff, Lawrence, & Johnstone, 2005; Soloff, Lawrence, Misson, & Johnstone, 2006).

Data are collected every 2 years by interviews and questionnaires

for the child's resident parents; questionnaires or telephone interviews with non-resident parents; direct child assessments; teacher questionnaires; and data linkage. Five waves of data were available for each cohort: from ages 0-1 years to 8-9 years for the B cohort and 4-5 years to 12-13 years for the K cohort. The study captures a comprehensive assessment of the study child's wellbeing and functional abilities, along with detailed measures of parenting, family functioning, and the broad social and economic environment of the family (Zubrick et al., 2008).

This report uses a measure of inter-parental conflict (IPC) that has been assessed via parent report at each data collection wave. This provides the opportunity to examine concurrent and prospective associations between IPC, maternal satisfaction with the couple relationship, psychological distress, parenting capacity (self-efficacy, irritability, consistency, and warmth), and child health and developmental outcomes. Details about the measure of IPC and our analyses are presented in Part 2.

AIFS Family Pathways Surveys of Separated Families

This part of the report draws on data of two surveys that are collectively referred to as the AIFS Family Pathways suite of studies: the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF) and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2012 (SRSP 2012). LSSF and SRSP were focused studies of large, national samples of recently separated families who have registered with the federal government for child support. These studies have collected detailed interview data from parents on the post-separation parenting arrangements and the relationship between the separated parents, including their experiences of DFV (physical, sexual, and emotional). They have more limited data (compared to LSAC) on the parents' stress, parenting confidence, and the wellbeing of one focus child in the family (the "study child").

As has been previously reported (Qu, Weston, Moloney, Kaspiew, & Dunston, 2014), the LSSF was a national study of parents (with a child under 18 years of age) who had separated after the introduction of the 2006 family law reforms. These parents were registered with the Department of Human Services–Child Support (DHS–CS) in 2007 and were still separated at the time of the survey.² Parents with child support arrangements that involved mothers having the liability to pay fathers were over-sampled to enable reliable statistical power given there are so few of these arrangements in the DHS–CS population.

The study entailed three survey waves. The first two waves were funded by the Australian Government Attorney-General's

² When the LSSF Wave 1 sample was derived, this dataset was managed by the then Child Support Agency (CSA).

Department (AGD) and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) (now called the Department of Social Services [DSS]) and the AGD funded the third. The first wave of LSSF involved 10,002 parents (4983 fathers and 5019 mothers). Interviews were conducted in late 2008, on average 15 months after separation, though it should be noted that 11 percent of respondents had never lived together or had separated before the study child was born. Both the mother and father of around 1,800 study children happened to participate (separately) in this survey, which was to be expected given that they came from the same sample pool of DHS–CS cases. The remaining participants were just one parent from a formal couple registered with DHS–CS.

The second wave of LSSF data collection was conducted between September and October 2009, with 70 percent of the original parents being interviewed again. The third wave of LSSF data collection occurred between September and November 2012. A total of 9028 parents were interviewed (comprising 5755 members of the original sample and a “top-up” sample of 3273 parents). Both the original and top-up sample members had been separated for an average of 5 years at the time of this survey wave. Findings based on the first two waves formed components of the AIFS evaluation of the 2006 reforms to the family law system (see Kaspiw et al., 2009; Qu & Weston, 2010), and results based on the three waves were published recently (Qu et al., 2014). The Australian Institute of Family Studies is the custodian for the LSSF and SRSP and these datasets are only available for analysis by staff with the AIFS.

The SRSP 2012 is a national study of the experiences of 6119 parents (with a child under 18 years old) who had separated between 31 July 2010 and 31 December 2011 (De Maio, Kaspiw, Smart, Dunston, & Moore, 2013). Similar to the LSSF, these parents had registered with the DHS–CS during 2011 and were still separated at the time of the survey. The research was commissioned and funded by the AGD. The survey included measures to examine parents’ experiences of, and system responses to, family violence and child safety concerns. The survey took place between August and September 2012 in order to focus on parents whose main use of family law system services occurred during 2011, prior to the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Family Violence and Other Measures) Act 2011 (Cth) reforms. The parents in the sample had been separated for an average of 17 months. Consistent with the LSSF, one child born to the separated couples was focused on for the majority of the child-related questions in the SRSP 2012. The 2014 wave of SRSP was not available for additional analysis at the time of developing this project, therefore it was not possible to include it in this report.

Detail about the methodologies for the LSSF and SRSP analyses are in Part 3.

Qualitative interviews component

The qualitative component of this project provides in-depth insight into the experiences of mothers who have used services across a range of areas (family law, child protection, and DFV support) in the context of a history of DFV. The focus of this component was twofold: the experience of mothering in the context of DFV, and the experience of engaging with agencies and services against this background for themselves and their children. An explanation about the recruitment strategies, sample achieved, and interview questions is provided in Part 4.

Research questions

This research was underpinned by a comprehensive set of research questions.

- 1) How does DFV affect mother–child and father–child relationships?
 - a) What is the association between a reported history of DFV and mothers’ and fathers’ satisfaction with their relationship with their child, in both intact and separated families?
 - b) In separated families, what is the association between DFV and mothers’ and fathers’ views about the workability of post-separation parenting arrangements?
 - c) What are the associations between inter-parental conflict, relationship difficulties, parenting behaviours, and child outcomes for intact and separated families?
 - d) What is known about the parenting capacity of men who perpetrate DFV?
 - e) What is known about the tactics used by men who perpetrate DFV to undermine relationships between mothers and children?
- 2) How do mothers who have experienced DFV perceive this has affected their relationship with their children?
 - a) What impact do they report this experience has on their parenting capacity?
 - b) What impact do they report this experience has on their relationship with their children?
 - c) How do they describe the emotional dynamics

within the family in the context of the DFV, including the perpetrators' relationship with the children?

- d) What support do victims of DFV say they need to enhance parenting in this context?
- 3) To what extent have these mothers had contact with services and agencies in the child protection, family law, and DFV systems?
- a) How do they describe their experiences with these services and agencies?
- b) What other support and therapeutic services have they used, with or without their children? Were these services helpful or unhelpful in supporting their relationships with children? Why or why not?
- c) To what extent have these services been helpful in addressing any ongoing difficulties in their relationship with their ex-partner and the relationship between their ex-partner and their children?

Table 1 shows how the LSAC, AIFS Family Pathways studies, and qualitative components of the project responded to the research questions.

Advisory group—the nexus between knowledge and practice

An important feature of this project was the family violence and parenting capacity advisory group. The advisory group provided support on the research design, ethical issues, implementation of the project, and dissemination of findings. The following agencies and organisations took part in the advisory group in some capacity:

- Domestic Violence Victoria;
- National Network of Women's Legal centres;
- Women's Legal Service Victoria;
- No To Violence;
- South Australia Uniting Communities;
- Anglicare Western Australia;
- Department of Health and Human Services Victoria; and
- Australian Government Attorney-General's Department.

The range of agencies and organisations in the advisory group enabled the research to maintain a focus on findings that were relevant to improving both policy and practice in services that may have contact with parents and children who have experienced family violence.

Table 1 How each component addressed the research questions

Research question	LSAC component	AIFS Family Pathways component	Qualitative study with mothers
1(a)	X	X	
1(b)	X	X	
1(c)	X	X	
1(d)	X		X
1(e)			X
2(a)		X	X
2(b)			X
2(d)			X
3(a)			X
3(b)			X
3(c)			X

Structure of this report

Part one of this report provides a brief summary of the systematic literature review undertaken for the state of knowledge report for this project (Hooker et al., 2016).

Part two presents a comprehensive analysis of inter-parental conflict measures from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. The effects of inter-parental conflict on mother-child relationships, father-child relationships, and child outcomes are assessed using a range of available outcome measures. These are compared for families where inter-parental conflict is not evident, emergent or intermittent, and persistent, and where parents have and have not separated.

Part three focuses on DFV and separated families by using bivariate, cross-sectional and longitudinal multivariate analyses of data from mothers and fathers in the Longitudinal Study of Separated Parents and Survey of Recently Separated Parents (2012). These include the frequencies of violence and abuse reported by mothers and fathers over time, and how these experiences pre-separation and post-separation are associated with the quality of inter-parental relationships, financial hardship, parent-child relationships, parenting stress, perceived child wellbeing, and the flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements.

Part four contains the findings from the qualitative study with women who have experienced DFV. A description of the demographic characteristics of women and children is provided along with the frequencies and forms of DFV and child abuse perpetrated by men, as evident from the women's accounts. Insights about the interconnection between fathering and tactics of abuse and control are presented, followed by the findings about mothering and mother-child relationships in the context of DFV. Women's experiences of services and agencies are then discussed. These include refugee and domestic violence services, therapeutic support for women and children, child protection agencies, and family law services and courts.

1. State of knowledge literature review summary

Australian governments have acknowledged the prevalence and harm of violence against women and their children in the community. National policy aims to prevent, reduce, and respond to domestic and family violence (DFV) through a comprehensive and strategic public health approach. New National Priority Areas in the government's Third Action Plan to reduce violence against women and children include a focus on children and keeping perpetrators accountable for the violence (Australia. Department of Social Services, 2016).

This section provides a short summary of the state of knowledge paper prepared for this project, which was published in January 2016 and informed the subsequent mixed methods research outlined in this report (Hooker, Kaspiew, & Taft, 2016). The state of knowledge paper looked at literature about the prevalence and impact of DFV on parenting, especially the tactics perpetrators use to disrupt the mother-child relationship and what helps to strengthen or heal this relationship (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, 2014).

Parenting in the context of DFV was examined using the following four research questions, and a summary of the key findings are provided in the next section. Further details on the literature review methodology, including the comprehensive search strategy, are published in the state of knowledge paper (Hooker et al., 2016).

1.1 What is the prevalence of DFV among parents?

Accurately measuring and understanding the complexity of DFV is a challenge (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013a). The state of knowledge paper identified that definitions and measures of DFV differ across the literature, and prevalence data on DFV and parenting are not easily accessible or synthesised well. In addition, measures are often oversimplified to assess parental conflict rather than the harmful effects of fear, coercion, and control (Laing & Humphreys, 2013).

Although there are significant data limitations, it is estimated that up to one third of parents in the general community (from parent and child reports) experience DFV. Clinical populations and those parents "at risk" (e.g., recently separated parents), experience higher rates of abuse (Kaspiew et al., 2015a). Very few studies exist on the prevalence of DFV among diverse parent groups, such as those from migrant and refugee backgrounds, same-sex, disabled and adoptive

parents. Indigenous Australians suffer considerable DFV, although the proportion of those who are parents is unknown and much of this abuse is under-reported and not recorded (Olsen & Lovett, 2016). There is a need to improve data collection methods to accurately assess the prevalence of DFV experienced by women and children in all the diversity of Australian families.

1.2 How does DFV impact on parenting capacity?

Parenting capacity refers to the ability to recognise and meet children's changing developmental needs and accept responsibility for doing this (Mares, Newman, & Warren, 2011). Although every woman's experience of, and response to, violence may differ, the majority of evidence suggests that DFV does negatively impact on women's parenting and experience of motherhood (Hooker et al., 2016; Hooker, Samaraweera, Agius, & Taft, 2016). Abuse during pregnancy may lead to poor pregnancy outcomes and subsequently alter a women's relationship with her new baby. The detrimental mental and physical health effects of DFV on both women and children (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008; Webster, 2016; World Health Organization, 2013) affects parenting capacity. In addition, children's behaviour becomes more difficult to manage in the context of DFV (Carpenter & Stacks, 2009). Despite attempts to maintain an effective mothering role and protect children, abused women may struggle to parent effectively. The needs of demanding, abusive partners can be expected to come first in the household; subsequently women need to control and discipline children in order to keep them safe (Bancroft, Silverman, & Ritchie, 2012). When DFV stops, relationships, parenting, and health outcomes usually improve.

There is a global lack of research about the parenting style of abusive fathers and the father-child relationship in the context of DFV perpetration. Fathers who are abusive to partners vary in their characteristics and relationships with children. Limited evidence suggests that abusive fathers are often authoritarian, under-involved, and self-centred men, disinterested in their children or parenting (Bancroft et al., 2012). Other factors associated with abusive fathers and step-fathers include high levels of alcohol and other drug use and co-occurring child maltreatment and child sexual abuse. Substance abuse negatively impacts on men's responsiveness, emotional availability, and attachment to their children and parenting capacity (Stover, Easton, & McMahan, 2013).

1.3 What are the methods and behaviours that perpetrators use to disrupt the mother-child relationship?

Children's exposure to violence in the home is not limited to witnessing abuse. Experiences of violence may include physical, emotional and sexual violence towards the child as well as using the child to undermine the mother's parenting and self-worth and ultimately interfere with the mother-child relationship (Humphreys, Thiara, & Skamballis, 2011). Perpetrator behaviours aim to isolate, control, and undermine women's authority to parent and have meaningful relationships with their children.

Abusive behaviours may be direct or indirect and occur pre and post-parental separation. Tactics are varied and harmful. They include child loss (violence during pregnancy resulting in miscarriage, child abduction, and homicide); insisting on partner's attention, to the detriment of the child; deliberate use of children to abuse, control, and undermine women's parenting; and financial and litigation abuse (Bancroft et al., 2012; Fish, McKenzie, & MacDonald, 2009; Humphreys et al., 2011).

Vexatious and false claims (by abusive fathers) to authorities such as child protection, police, and legal services aim to separate mother from child. Post separation, co-parenting arrangements can facilitate continual harassment and abuse of women and children. Ultimately, this undermining and abuse alters children's views of their mother and damages women's confidence, authority, and the respect needed to parent effectively (Bancroft et al., 2012; Humphreys et al., 2011; Thiara & Humphreys, 2015).

In order to reduce ongoing risk and harm to women and children, greater understanding is needed of these tactics, including enhanced DFV identification, and collaboration between DFV advocacy, family law, and child protection services. Some screening and risk assessment tools have been developed for DFV advocacy services and courts (McIntosh, Wells, & Lee, 2016).

1.4 What interventions exist to strengthen and support a positive and healthy mother-child relationship?

Evidence suggests that a strong mother-child relationship may be protective against the impact of DFV (Buchanan, 2008; Miller-Graff, Cater, Howell, & Graham-Bermann, 2016). Very few Australian interventions to support the mother-child relationships after DFV exist. There were a number of home-visiting interventions, therapeutic treatment, and parenting programs identified that were not yet evaluated or discontinued, although the practices were promising. In turn, this is a barrier to developing the evidence base needed

for large-scale evaluation, as well as limiting the availability of qualitative insights specific to vulnerable groups within the Australian population. Improved ways of working with women and children experiencing DFV are needed to rebuild mother-child relationships.

The state of knowledge paper examined clinical-trial level evidence of interventions to identify best practice in supporting women and children recovering from DFV. Intensive home-visiting programs can result in less child maltreatment and improve parenting and behaviour outcomes in children, yet their effectiveness in the context of DFV remains unclear (Old et al., 2013). Research is underway to assess the effectiveness of home-visiting interventions when DFV continues in the home (Jack et al., 2012).

More specific and targeted therapy is needed for abuse victims. The most effective approaches evaluated to date had combined mother-child psychotherapeutic interventions based on trauma and attachment theory that aim to improve the maternal-infant bond and awareness and responsiveness to the child's experience of violence (Graham-Bermann, Lynch, Banyard, DeVoe, & Halabu, 2007; Lieberman, Van Horn, & Ippen, 2005). With few exceptions, all psychotherapeutic programs were from the United States. Very few Australian interventions exist to support children affected by DFV (Campo, Kaspiw, Moore, & Tayton, 2014). Some promising research with vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is underway; however, evaluation is yet to demonstrate effective outcomes.

1.5 Conclusions from the state of knowledge literature review

Domestic and family violence among parents is a prevalent and complex issue. The state of knowledge paper (Hooker et al., 2016) identified that DFV may impact negatively on women and children and the parenting capacity of both perpetrator and victim. Further research exploring DFV and the experience of motherhood and fatherhood is needed, including therapeutic interventions to heal the mother-child bond. This literature review also identified evidence gaps and made recommendations to strengthen knowledge and professional practice in response to DFV and parenting (see Box 1.1). The findings also laid the foundation for the subsequent research presented in Parts 2 and 3 of this Horizons report.

Box 1.1 Summary of DFV and parenting research gaps and recommendations

Gaps—Limited evidence on domestic and family violence and parenting

More rigorous research needed on:

- Improved ways to measure DFV among Australian parents, including minority groups
- Greater understanding of the prevalence and nature of DFV within (intact and separated) families
- The experience of motherhood and fatherhood in the context of DFV
- The parenting and co-parenting of abusive fathers
- The co-occurrence of DFV and child sexual abuse
- Resilience factors for abused women and children
- Development and trialling of mother-child therapeutic interventions to heal and support abuse victims
- Perpetrator interventions to address interference with mother-child relationships and other tactics of abuse

Recommendations

- Greater professional awareness, identification and support for abused women in the antenatal and postnatal periods
- Abused women may seek help for parenting rather than abuse. Early childhood and parenting support services need to be alert and adequately respond to women and children
- More education and reform within the family law system. Enhance legal professionals' understanding of the complexity of DFV, including tactics of abuse and issues with co parenting
- Improve the identification of, and response to, DFV victims by the family law sector
- Improve multi-sector collaboration between services providing domestic violence advocacy, child protection, and family law to reduce risk and improve outcomes for victims
- Practitioners who work with families to provide therapeutic work need additional training and support, as the readiness of professionals and organizations to implement programs varies

Source: Hooker et al., 2016.

2. Effects of inter-parental conflict on parenting, mother-child relationships, father-child relationships, and children's outcomes

2.1 Abstract

This component focuses on inter-parental conflict (IPC) in a longitudinal study of Australian children and their families³. IPC refers to arguments, tension, anger, and physical conflict between two parents. Data from two cohorts of children participating in Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) were examined at three developmentally distinct times: preschool, when children were aged 4-5 years; primary school, when children were aged 8-9 years; and pre-adolescence, when children were aged 12-13 years. At these ages, the following longitudinal data were available: three waves of data representing a 4-year observation period for the 4-5 year-old (Baby or B cohort at ages 0-1 years, 2-3 years, and 4-5 years); five waves of data representing an 8-year observation period for the 8-9 year-old (B cohort at ages 0-1 years, 2-3 years, 4-5 years, 6-7 years, and 8-9 years); and five waves of data representing an 8-year observation period for the 12-13 year-old (Kindergarten or K cohort at ages 4-5 years, 6-7 years, 8-9 years, 10-11 years, and 12-13 years).

Across eight-year observation periods for the two cohorts, around one in three children (35-36%) were exposed to conflict between their parents. For 8-9% of children this was persistent conflict that occurred both in the past and at the most recent data collection wave. At all three child ages, there was a consistent pattern of associations between IPC and mother-reported measures of dissatisfaction with the couple relationship, maternal psychological distress, and impaired parenting (low parenting efficacy, high irritability, and inconsistency). For children, IPC was associated with children having poor physical health, poor vocabulary, limited skills required for school success, and poor performance in literacy and maths. Socio-emotional behaviour at school and approaches to learning showed similar trends but were not statistically significant, and cognitive ability did not appear to be related to IPC. For both mother and child outcomes, there was evidence of a dose-response relationship: poor outcomes were least common amongst those who did not experience IPC, they were more common for those who had experienced IPC in the past or recently (but not both), and

they were most common amongst those who experienced current and past IPC.

A second set of analyses examined IPC at one time point (when children were aged 12-13 years) between parents who were separated compared to parents who were living together ("intact" families). IPC was high in separated families: 40 percent compared to 10 percent for intact families. For mothers, fathers, and children, a consistent pattern of findings indicated that the poorest outcomes were experienced by those in separated families compared to intact families, and for those experiencing IPC relative to no reported IPC. Within separated families, IPC was not associated with differences in parenting arrangements between the couple. However, the presence of IPC was associated with more mothers reporting that their child was unsettled, unhappy, and critical of her or other family members after returning from visits to the father.

³ Acknowledgements: This research uses unit record data from Growing Up in Australia, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. LSAC is conducted in partnership between the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS), the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The findings and views reported are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DSS, AIFS, or the ABS. Jan M. Nicholson, Cattram D. Nguyen, Dr Elizabeth M. Westrupp, and Dr Amanda R. Cooklin were supported through the Roberta Holmes Transition to Contemporary Parenthood Program, Judith Lumley Centre, La Trobe University.

2.2 Introduction

Children may experience DFV as witnesses (violence between parents), as victims (parent to child), or as perpetrators (child to parent). While violence against women is widely recognised as a serious human rights abuse, until recently, the impact of DFV on children and young people has received less attention, and family violence services have been largely oriented towards women and their wellbeing (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006; State of Victoria, 2016). Little is known about the effects on children of witnessing angry and hostile exchanges between their parents (inter-parental conflict) and the factors that mitigate or exacerbate the impact this has on children's development (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015).

This section examines the extent to which Australian children are exposed to conflict between their parents, and whether this is associated with disrupted family functioning that places children's development at risk. In particular, these analyses build on previous work, which indicates that more prolonged conflict between parents is associated with greater disruption to family functioning (Westrupp, Rose, Nicholson, & Brown, 2015). Drawing on quantitative data from a large representative study of Australian children, *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)*, the analyses in this part of the report examine the associations between past and persistent inter-parental conflict (IPC), mothers' and fathers' psychological distress, parenting styles, and the health and developmental outcomes of children.

The analyses respond to research questions 1(a) to 1(d), with a specific focus on IPC within the general population of Australian families:

1. How does DFV affect mother-child and father-child relationships?
 - a. What is the association between a reported history of DFV and mothers' and fathers' satisfaction with their relationship with their child, in both intact and separated families?
 - b. In separated families, what is the association between DFV and mothers' and fathers' views about the workability of post-separation parenting arrangements?
 - c. What are the associations between inter-parental conflict, relationship difficulties, parenting behaviours, and child outcomes for intact and separated families?
 - d. What is known about the parenting capacity of men who perpetrate DFV?

The findings in this part of the report come from examinations of LSAC's longitudinal data. The first set of analyses include children from LSAC's two cohorts: around 5000 children in the B (baby) cohort who were aged 0-1 years at recruitment in 2004 and 5000 children in the K (kindergarten) cohort, aged 4-5 years in 2004. For these analyses, IPC was measured over time and categorised according to its degree of persistence across data collection waves. This was then examined in relation to mothers' psychological distress, parenting, and child outcomes assessed at three developmentally important times: the transition to primary school (age 4-5 years), middle primary school (age 8-9 years) and the adolescent transition (age 12-13 years).

The second group of analyses examined concurrent IPC between parents who were separated compared to those who lived together (hereafter referred to as "intact" families for brevity). As family structure can be highly fluid due to parents separating, reconciling, or re-partnering, these analyses were conducted for IPC and outcomes measured at one time-point only—the adolescent transition (age 12-13 years) using data for children in the K cohort. These analyses examined the relationship between concurrent IPC and mothers' and fathers' psychological distress, parenting styles, and child outcomes by parental separation status. Finally, for children whose parents were separated, concurrent IPC was examined in relation to child adjustment around care transitions and mothers' perceptions of the parenting arrangements.

Section 2.3 provides an overview of the IPC and outcomes measures, followed by a description of the statistical approaches used. Results are presented in sections 2.4 to 2.6 along with a description of the relevant samples used. The associations between IPC persistence, maternal relationship satisfaction, psychological distress and parenting, and child outcomes are reported in section 2.4 for all LSAC families where the primary carer of the study child was the child's biological, step, or adopted mother. This is followed in section 2.5 by an examination of the associations between concurrent IPC and maternal, paternal, and child outcomes for intact compared to separated couples. Sections 2.6 and 2.7 examine the associations between concurrent IPC and child adjustment to care transitions (section 2.6) and parenting arrangements (section 2.7) in separated couples.

2.3 Measures and analytical approach

2.3.1 Measuring experiences of IPC

Mother-reported inter-parental conflict (IPC) is the measure available in LSAC that most closely resembles a measure of DFV. IPC refers to verbal or physical conflict between two people who are jointly the (biological, adoptive, or step) parents of a child (Westrupp et al., 2015). In LSAC, IPC is a measure of the extent to which two parents experience difficulty in resolving conflict, assessed in terms of the frequency of arguments, tension, anger, and physical conflict in the couple relationship. The measure does not identify which parent initiates the conflict or the extent to which either partner is harmed.

The presence of IPC should not be considered to be indicative of DFV. IPC is likely to be high in couples experiencing DFV. However, conflict can exist without being part of a pattern of abusive behaviour where one parent is seeking to exert power and control. This limits the extent to which findings from the current research can be generalised to DFV.

Data are collected in LSAC every 2 years using a variety of sources and methods. These include face-to-face interviews and questionnaires for the child's primary caregiver (P1), defined as the parent living with the child who is most involved with the child's care. Across both cohorts and all waves of data collection, P1 is typically the child's mother. Where there are other parent figures in the child's life, data are collected from and about these parent figures. As relevant, these include a questionnaire that is self-completed by a second parent (P2) who lives with the primary caregiver, and a telephone interview conducted with a parent figure who lives elsewhere (PLE). P2 and PLE are mostly male. P2 may be the child's biological father, stepfather, or another parental figure, and PLE is typically a biological father who has separated from the child's mother.

Depending on family structure at the time of data collection, IPC was assessed by self-reporting from P1 mothers in relation to none, one, or two other parent figures. If the mother was single and there was no contact between the child and a father living elsewhere, no measure of IPC was collected. If the mother was cohabiting with a father or father figure (P2), the mother reported on IPC with the P2 using a five-item measure. If the child had contact with a father or father figure who lived elsewhere (PLE), the mother reported on IPC between herself and the PLE using a shortened three-item measure. As a result, for the analyses reported here, IPC within the child's household was measured using five items, while IPC between parents living in separate households was assessed using three items.

2.3.1.1 IPC measures for parents in the same household

IPC between parents who were living in the same household in a married or de facto relationship was assessed at each wave using a set of five items termed "The Argumentative Relationship Scale"⁴. This was administered to the child's primary parent figure, which was restricted here to women who were the child's biological, adoptive, or stepmother. They were asked to respond using "never", "rarely", "sometimes", "often", or "always" to the following questions:

- 1) How often do you and your partner disagree about basic child-rearing issues?
- 2) How often is your conversation awkward or stressful?
- 3) How often do you argue?
- 4) How often is there anger or hostility between you?
- 5) How often do you have arguments with your partner that end up with people pushing, hitting, kicking, or shoving?

For each wave of data collection, a binary IPC variable was derived based on mothers' responses to these five questions. IPC was considered to be present if mothers reported "often" or "always" to any of questions 1 to 4, or if they reported "sometimes", "often", or "always" to question 5. For analyses of within-household IPC, mothers who did not have a resident partner were classified as having no IPC at that wave of data collection.

2.3.1.2 Measuring within-household IPC over time

To examine the influence of within-household IPC on family functioning and children's outcomes, three time points were selected that represented developmentally significant periods in a child's life, and accumulated or longitudinal exposure to IPC within the family household was examined. The child ages and cohorts selected for study were: age 4-5 years, as represented by data collected up to and at Wave 3 for the B cohort; age 8-9 years as represented by data collected up to and at Wave 5 for the B cohort; and age 12-13 years as represented by data collected up to and at Wave 5 for the K cohort.

Accumulated IPC was summarised into three categories based on the current and prior waves of data:

- If mothers did not report IPC at any wave, participants were classified as being in the "never" IPC group. This category included mothers who were single at all waves of data collection and therefore had no within-household IPC.

⁴ At Waves 4 and 5, a single item assessing fear of partner was also asked. Due to the challenges associated with incorporating an item that assessed a different aspect of DFV into longitudinal analyses, this item was not included in the reported analyses.

- If mothers reported IPC at the current wave and at one or more waves in the past, participants were classified as being in the “persistent” IPC group.
- If mothers reported IPC at one or more past waves only, or at the current wave only, participants were classified as being in the “past or emerging” IPC group.
- For children aged 4-5 years, this classification was based on three waves of data. For those aged 8-9 years (B cohort) and those aged 12-13 years (K cohort), the classification was based on five waves of data.

2.3.1.3 Measuring IPC between separated parents

IPC between parents who were not living together (separated families) was assessed using a shortened set of three items from The Argumentative Relationship Scale. Mothers were asked to respond “never”, “rarely”, “sometimes”, “often”, or “always” to the following questions about their relationship with the child’s parent living elsewhere (PLE):

- 1) How often do you and your child’s PLE disagree about basic child-rearing issues?
- 2) How often is your conversation awkward or stressful?
- 3) How often is there anger or hostility between you?

A binary IPC variable was derived based on the responses to these three questions (and the matching questions asked of mothers living with the child’s other parent). IPC was considered to be present if the mother reported “often” or “always” to any of these three questions. To enable comparisons across family types, these three items were extracted from the five-item set administered to mothers who were living with a male partner (intact families) and coded in the same way.

For these comparisons, the focus is on IPC between parents who are separated, with IPC between parents in intact families used as a comparison to provide an indication of the relative size of observed differences between IPC and non-IPC groups. Therefore, for separated families, we report IPC between the mother and the child’s father living elsewhere (PLE), irrespective of whether the mother had re-partnered. For intact families, we report IPC between the mother and her male cohabiting partner (P2).

2.3.2 Outcome variables

We examined a number of measures of mothers’ and fathers’ psychological distress, parenting styles, and child outcomes as summarised in Table 2.1. One of the strengths of LSAC is the collection of data on child functioning from independent sources (such as teachers) and by direct assessment of the child’s abilities. Where available, these measures were used in preference to parent-reported measures, which may have been subject to negative bias.

To identify “poor functioning” categories that were readily comparable and interpretable, the outcome variables were dichotomised. Parent psychological distress was assessed using the Kessler-6 (K6), which is on a scale of 0-24 with higher scores indicating greater distress. Scores were dichotomised using two different cut-points: broadband psychological distress was defined as scores greater than or equal to 8; clinical psychological distress was defined as scores greater than or equal to 12. For the child global health measure, children were considered to have poor health if the mother reported the child’s health to be “good”, “fair”, or “poor” (versus “excellent” or “very good”).⁵

The remaining outcome variables were dichotomised based on percentiles. To facilitate comparison across ages and outcomes, scores in the poorest 15 percent of the distribution were classified as indicating poor functioning. This cut-point represents a value that is more than one standard deviation from the mean for the sample and has been used as a marker of significantly poor functioning (e.g. Willms, 2002), including in other studies using LSAC data (Nicholson, Lucas, Berthelsen, & Wake, 2012; Zubrick et al., 2008). For measures where a higher score represented positive functioning, a parent or child was considered to be in the poor functioning group if he or she scored below the 15th percentile. For irritable parenting and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), where higher scores represent greater problems, parents and children were considered to be in the poor functioning group if they scored above the 85th percentile (see Box 2.1 for more detail about the interpretation of these measures).

⁵ It is our experience that if parents say their child’s health is only “good” compared to “very good” or “excellent”, then this represents some degree of concern.

Table 2.1 Mothers' and fathers' psychological distress, parenting styles, and child outcome variables

Outcome variable	Measure	Source	When child aged		
			4-5 Years	8-9 Years	12-13 Years
Mothers' (M) or fathers' (F) outcomes					
Satisfaction with couple relationship	Hendrick's relationship scale ^a	Self-report	M	M	M
Psychological distress	Kessler-6 psychosocial screener ^b	Self-report	M	M	M, F
Mothers' (M) or fathers' (F) Parenting styles					
Efficacy	Parenting efficacy scale ^c	Self-report	M	M	M
Irritability	Angry parenting scale ^c	Self-report	M	M	M, F
Consistency	Consistent parenting scale ^c	Self-report	M	M	M, F
Warmth	Parental warmth scale ^c	Self-report	M	M	M, F
Child outcomes					
Global physical health	Single item from Child Health Questionnaire ^d	Mother report	✓	✓	✓
Quality of life— physical	PedsQL physical functioning ^e	Mother report	✓	✓	✓
Socio-emotional development	SDQ total difficulties score ^f	Teacher report	✓	✓	✓
School readiness	Who Am I? ^g	Direct assessment	✓		
Vocabulary	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (shortened) ^h	Direct assessment	✓	✓	
Learning outcomes	Teacher academic rating scales ⁱ	Teacher report		✓	✓
Approach to learning	Approaches to learning scale ^j	Teacher report		✓	✓
Cognitive skills	Matrix reasoning (WISC) ^k	Direct assessment		✓	

Notes: a. Hendrick (1988); b. Furukawa, Kessler, Slade, & Andrews (2003); c. Zubrick, Lucas, Westrupp, & Nicholson (2014); d. Waters, Salmon, & Wake (2000); e. Varni, Burwinkle, Seid, & Skarr (2003); f. Goodman (2001); g. de Lemnos & Doig (1999); h. Rothman (2003); i. National Center for Education Statistics (2000); j. Gresham & Elliott (1990); k. Wechsler (2004)

Box 2.1 Interpreting dichotomised parent outcome measures

For the K6 measure of psychological distress, the cut-points used to dichotomise mothers and fathers are clinically meaningful. Those parents who fall within the broadband range are regarded as being at risk of psychological distress; those within the more stringent clinical range are likely to be experiencing a clinically significant disorder (Furukawa et al., 2003).

Interpretation of the dichotomised parenting measures (efficacy, irritability, consistency, and warmth) is more complex. Self-reports on these measures are highly skewed in the positive direction for both mothers and fathers: the majority of parents report themselves to be high in efficacy, consistency, and warmth, and low in irritability. The variations that are observed in LSAC are predominantly within what would be regarded as the “normal range” for parenting. Few parents self-report behaviors that could be interpreted as abnormal or abusive (Zubrick et al., 2008). As a result, these variables are often dichotomised for analysis.

There is no agreed threshold for distinguishing “good” parenting from “poor” parenting. We therefore dichotomise based on the sample distributions, with those mothers falling in the poorest 15 percent of the total LSAC sample distribution classified as reporting poor parenting, and similarly for fathers. Our resulting measures are relative measures. For example, the majority of mothers who are classified as being “low in warmth” in fact score quite highly on the summed measure, but this score is low relative to all other LSAC mothers. Similarly, fathers who are classified as “high in irritability” have total scores that are quite low, but are high relative to all other LSAC fathers (Zubrick et al., 2008).

This dichotomising of the parenting variables within the LSAC mother and father samples means that mothers’ and fathers’ data for parenting are not directly comparable. The appropriate reference for any subgroup of mothers is other mothers and likewise for fathers.

Father data on psychological wellbeing and parenting are recorded in the LSAC datasets as different variables depending on whether the father is resident with the child’s mother (i.e. he is a P2) or not (PLE) at the time of data collection. Where a child’s family composition has changed between data collection waves, it is challenging to identify whether a P2 at any given data collection point is the same individual as a PLE at another data collection point. For these reasons, we have not included father-reported outcomes data in the longitudinal analyses in section 2.3. These are considered in section 2.4, where cross-sectional associations are examined for intact and separated families.

2.3.3 Statistical analyses

Categorical variables were summarised using frequencies and percentages. To compare outcomes across the IPC groups, we estimated the percentage (and 95% CI, see Box 2.2) of parents or children in the “poor functioning” group for each of the outcomes listed in Table 2.1. This was done separately by IPC category. Sampling weights were applied to account for the LSAC survey design using the `svy` command in Stata version 13.1.

For the child outcomes, we also estimated the percentage of children in the “poor functioning” group after adjustment for demographic variables. The predicted probabilities were estimated using marginal standardisation following logistic regression with adjustment for the following variables: maternal age, remote geographic location, maternal and paternal education, socioeconomic status, child Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, mothers born overseas, and language other than English (LOTE) spoken at home. The predicted probabilities were obtained using the margins command in Stata software.

Missing data were handled using multiple imputation by chained equations, which was implemented in Stata software using the mi impute chained command. Within the chained equations framework, continuous variables were imputed using linear regression models, binary variables were imputed using logistic regression models, and ordinal variables were imputed using ordinal logistic regression. The outcome variables and the IPC variables were included in the imputation models. The following variables were included in the imputation models as auxiliary variables: child has a special health care need, socioeconomic position, maternal age, remoteness, maternal education, paternal education, maternal work status, paternal work status, child sex, whether the main language at home was English, number of children in the household, child Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status, maternal distress and survey weights, and stratum variables. Multiple imputation was performed separately for each study cohort and thirty imputed datasets were produced.

For analyses comparing IPC between separated parents and parents in intact families, we estimated the proportion (and 95% CI) in the “poor functioning” group for each of the outcome variables at Wave 5. This was done separately by family structure (intact vs separated) and concurrently reported IPC (yes vs. no). When estimating proportions, we applied sampling weights to account for the survey design. The proportions were estimated using cases with available data (i.e. no multiple imputation was done for this analysis).

Box 2.2 Interpreting confidence intervals

The 95 percent confidence intervals (CIs) for the proportions were estimated using the “proportion” command in Stata version 13.1. Confidence intervals contain the true value of the population proportion in 95 percent of repeated samples. It gives the range of values within which we are reasonably confident that the true proportion lies.

For example, for the proportion and confidence intervals “5.9 percent (5.1, 6.8%)” we estimate the proportion of persistent IPC to be 5.9 percent, and this could be as low as 5.1 percent or as high as 6.8 percent.

If the 95 percent CIs for two groups are *not overlapping*, then the estimates for those groups would be significantly different at the 0.05 level.

2.4 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict, maternal relationship satisfaction, psychological distress and parenting, and children’s outcomes

2.4.1 Reported IPC over time

For these analyses, we used longitudinal data from the B and K cohorts. For both cohorts, the sample was restricted to families where the primary caregiver (P1) was a biological, step, or adopted mother. Primary carers who were fathers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, foster parents, and unrelated adults were not included. Sample sizes varied due to study attrition over time and missing data on relevant variables at previous waves. Data were available for 3259 families at 4-5 years, 3368 families at age 8-9 years, and 3102 families at 12-13 years.

Table 2.2 below shows the percentages (and 95% CI) in the “never”, “past or emerging”, and “persistent” IPC groups when the LSAC child was aged 4-5, 8-9, and 12-13 years.

When the LSAC study child was 4-5 years old (B cohort):

- 76 percent of mothers reported no IPC at any of the three waves of data collection;
- 18 percent reported IPC either in the past, or currently, but not both (“past or emerging”); and
- 6 percent reported IPC in both past and current waves (“persistent”).

When the LSAC study child was 8-9 years old (B cohort) or 12-13 years old (K cohort), five waves of data collection had been completed. The proportions of mothers reporting IPC were similar:

- 64-65 percent reported no IPC at any of the five waves of data collection;
- 26-27 percent reported IPC either in the past, or currently, but not both (“past or emerging”); and
- 8-9 percent reported IPC in both past and current waves (“persistent”).

Table 2.2 shows the sample size in each category with complete data, and the range of sample sizes when multiple imputation was performed. The proportions estimated in this and subsequent tables are based on the imputed data.

In the following sections (2.3.2-2.3.5), results are presented in graphs with full estimates reported in the tables in Appendix B. The graphs show for each maternal and child outcome the percentage of mothers and children who were “functioning poorly” presented by IPC group. For the majority of measures, poor functioning was based on sample distributions (see section 2.2.2). For these measures, estimates that are substantially greater than 15 percent indicate a higher than expected percentage of mothers or children are functioning poorly in that IPC group. The “I” bars on the graphs represent 95 percent confidence intervals (CIs) around the estimates. Non-overlapping I bars indicate significantly different estimates between IPC groups.

Table 2.2 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers in each IPC category

Age of LSAC study child	Estimate	Reported IPC		
		Never	Past or emerging	Persistent
4-5 years B cohort ^a	Proportion	76.0 (74.4, 77.6)	18.1 (16.6, 19.5)	5.9 (5.1, 6.8)
	n complete cases (n range multiple imputation)	2619 (3499-3556)	498 (773-845)	142 (233-271)
8-9 years B cohort ^b	Proportion	64.2 (62.4, 66.1)	27.4 (25.7, 29.2)	8.3 (7.2, 9.5)
	n complete cases (n range multiple imputation)	2,353 (2925-3001)	801 (1,157-1,225)	214 (335-379)
12-13 years K cohort ^b	Proportion	65.1 (63.2, 67.1)	25.9 (24.1, 27.6)	9.0 (7.8, 10.2)
	n complete cases (n range multiple imputation)	2,178 (2,787-2,859)	714 (1,039-1,112)	210 (335-383)

Notes: a. Based on three waves of data; b. Based on five waves of data.

2.4.2 Maternal dissatisfaction with the couple relationship

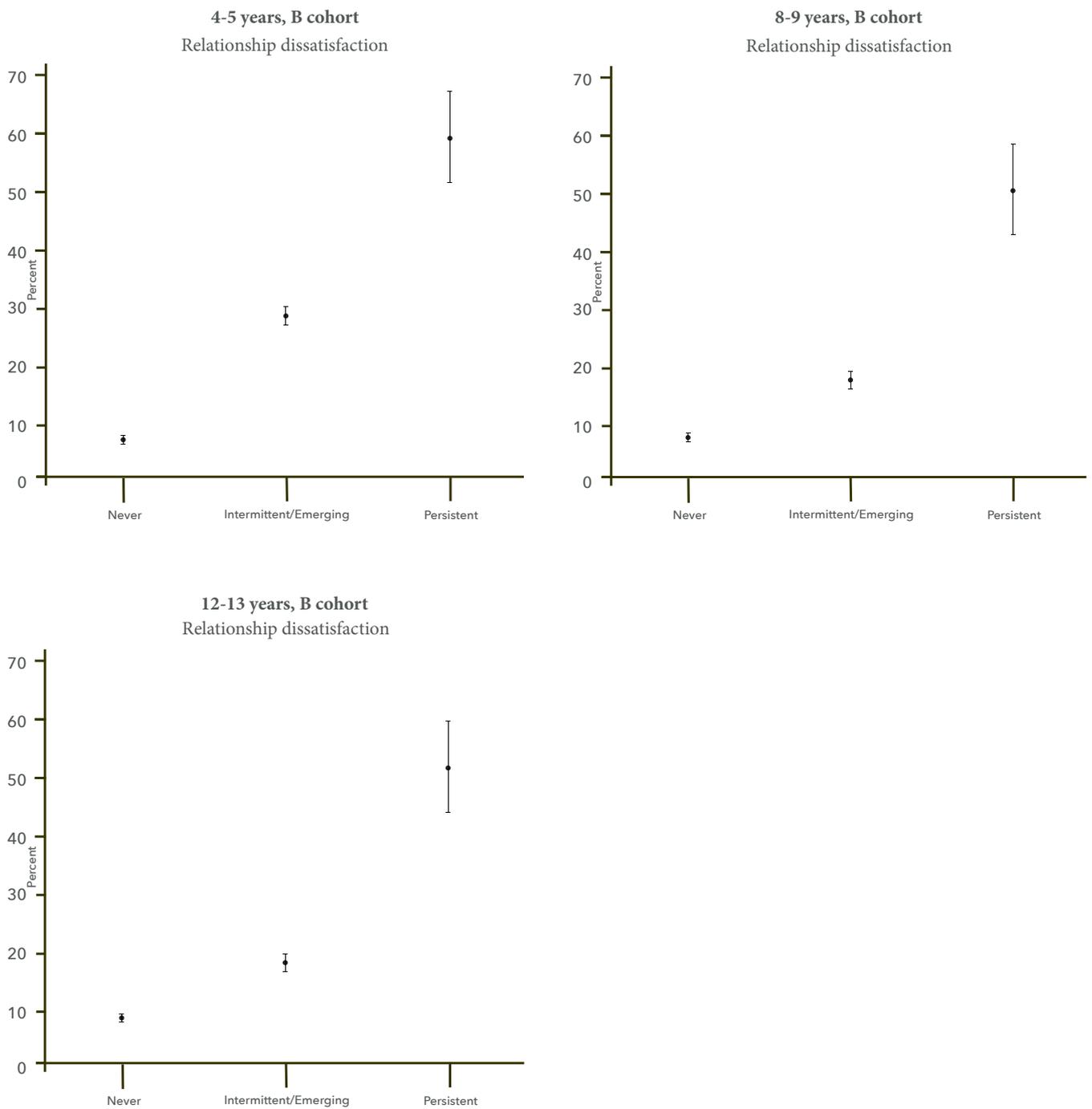
Figure 2.1 shows the proportions of mothers reporting dissatisfaction with their couple relationship by IPC group and child age (see also Table B1 in Appendix B). Mothers' dissatisfaction with their couple relationship was strongly associated with their reports of past or current IPC. Proportions were similar across child ages.

- For mothers who reported no IPC, dissatisfaction with the couple relationship was low (8%).
- For mothers who reported past or emerging IPC, 18-25 percent reported dissatisfaction with the couple relationship.
- Over half of mothers who reported persistent IPC (50-59%) reported dissatisfaction with the couple relationship.

These results extend our previous cross-sectional analyses of the relationship between IPC and parents' relationship satisfaction using the first wave of LSAC data (when the B cohort children were aged 0-1 year and the K cohort children were 4-5 years). We previously found that high conflict was associated with a seven to tenfold increased likelihood of concurrent relationship dissatisfaction for both mothers and fathers (Zubrick et al., 2008). The current analyses provide a stronger case for a likely causal relationship. The associations were evident when IPC occurred prior to the measurement of satisfaction. They also showed a dose-response type relationship whereby the lowest rates of relationship dissatisfaction were observed for mothers who reported no IPC, rates increased for mothers with some IPC (the past or emerging group), and were highest for mothers with persistent IPC. Estimates were significantly different (as indicated by the non-overlapping confidence intervals) at all three child ages.

6 Same-sex couples are rare in LSAC and were not included in the analyses reported here.

Figure 2.1 Percentage of mothers reporting low couple relationship satisfaction by IPC categories



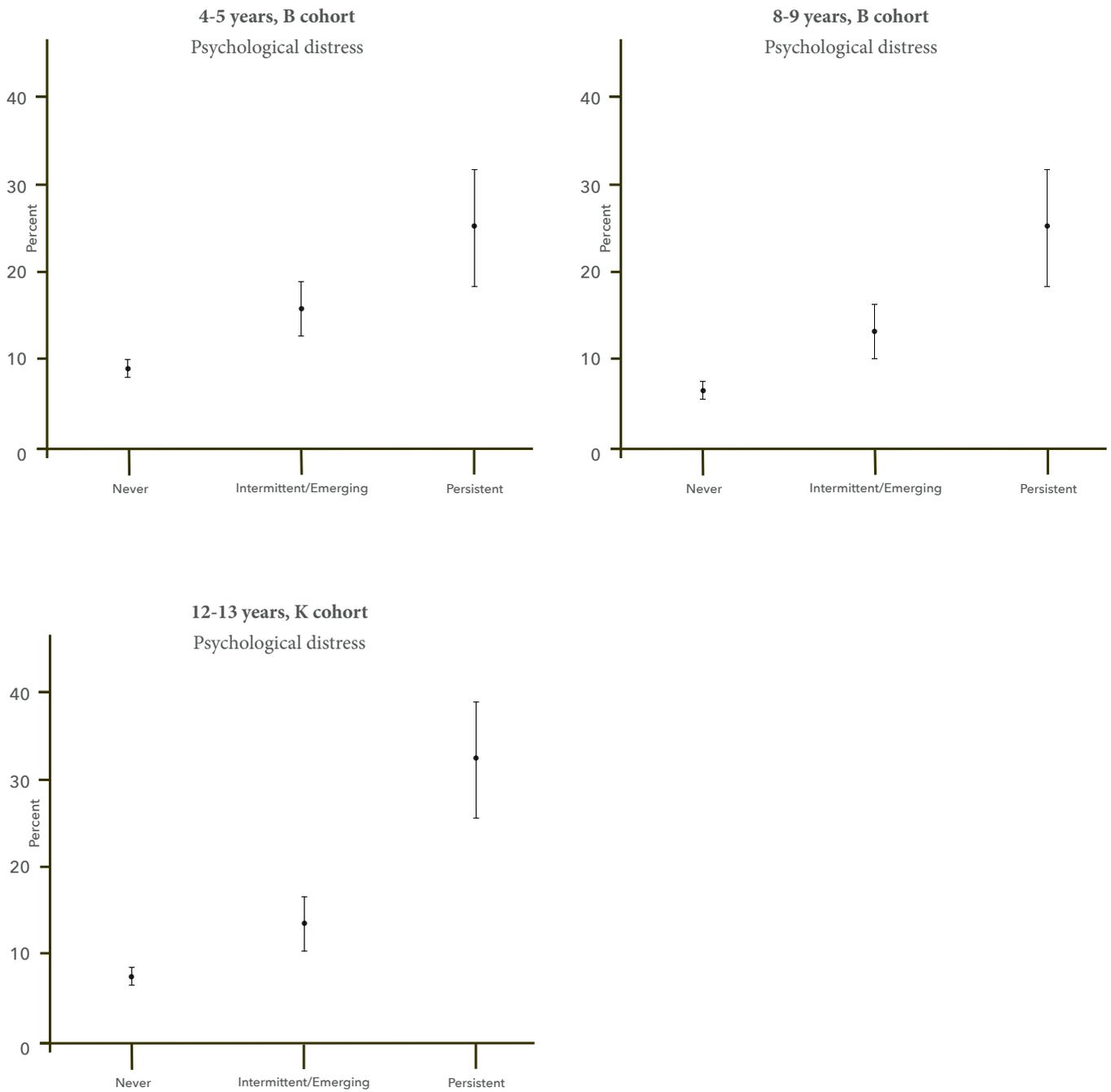
2.4.3 Maternal psychological distress

Mothers' psychological distress was strongly associated with their experience of past or current IPC. The broadband range on the K6 (i.e. a score of 8 or higher) is regarded as indicating a level of psychological distress that is currently or may lead to a serious disorder. As shown in Figure 2.2 (and Table B2), prevalence of this level of distress was strongly associated with experience of IPC. There was a notable increase amongst women who experienced persistent IPC. Specifically, broadband distress was reported by:

- 6-7 percent of mothers who reported no IPC;
- 12-15 percent of mothers who reported past or emerging IPC; and
- 24-33 percent of mothers who reported persistent IPC.

As indicated by the confidence intervals, estimates were significantly different between the no IPC and the two IPC groups at all ages. Comparing the two IPC groups, estimates were overlapping at the youngest child age (4-5 years, B cohort) but were significantly higher for the persistent group relative to the past and emerging group when children were aged 8-9 years and 12-13 years.

Figure 2.2 Percentage of mothers reporting psychological distress (broadband range) by IPC categories



2.4.4 Maternal parenting

Mothers' self-reported parenting is summarised in Figures 2.3-2.5 (and Table B3). Maternal reports of poor parenting (as indicated by scoring below the 15th percentile for efficacy, consistency, and warmth and above the 85th percentile for irritable parenting) were associated with their experience of past or current IPC at all child ages. Across the measures of parenting efficacy, irritability, and consistency, there was a similar distribution of mothers reporting poor parenting.

In terms of mothers' sense of efficacy as a parent, low efficacy was reported by:

- 9-13 percent of mothers who reported no IPC;
- 14-21 percent of mothers who reported past or emerging IPC; and
- 25-27 percent of mothers who reported persistent IPC.

High irritability was reported by:

- 11-12 percent of mothers who reported no IPC;
- 16-19 percent of mothers who reported past or emerging IPC; and
- 24-27 percent of mothers who reported persistent IPC.

Low consistency was reported by:

- 12-13 percent of mothers who reported no IPC;
- 20-23 percent of mothers who reported past or emerging IPC; and
- 32-35 percent of mothers who reported persistent IPC.

Over these three measures of parenting, the estimated proportions of mothers with poor parenting were significantly higher for mothers in the persistent IPC group compared to mothers in the no IPC group. Confidence intervals for mothers in the past or emerging IPC group tended to overlap with the other groups, suggesting that they could not be reliably distinguished from the no IPC or the persistent IPC groups.

Maternal warmth showed less variation by IPC, ranging from 11-20 percent. As shown in the figures, confidence intervals around the estimates were overlapping. Thus, while there appeared to be a trend for mothers experiencing greater levels of IPC to have lower levels of warmth, this trend was not significantly different for any of the child age groups.

Figure 2.3 Percentage of mothers of children aged 4-5 years reporting poor parenting by IPC categories

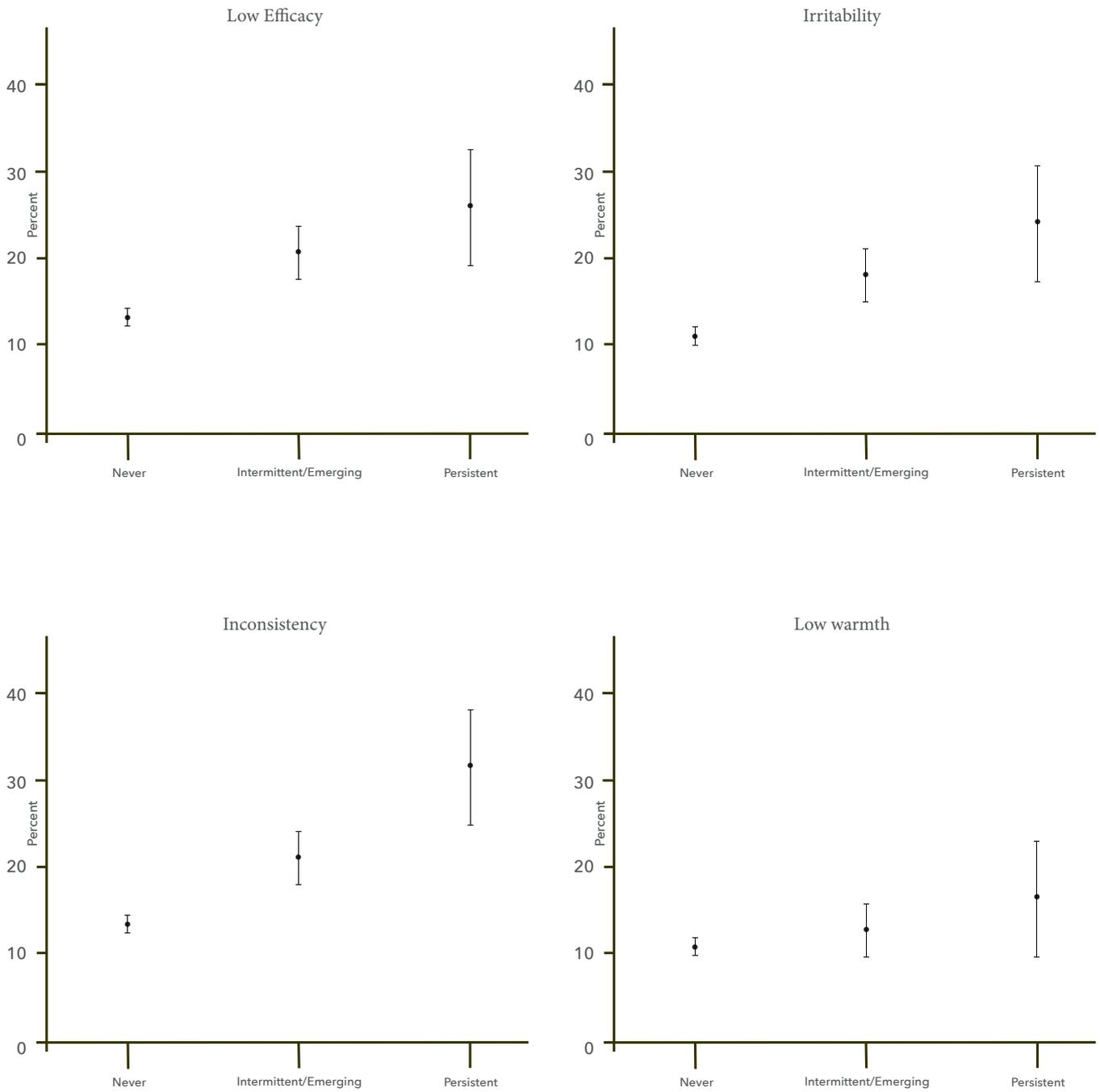


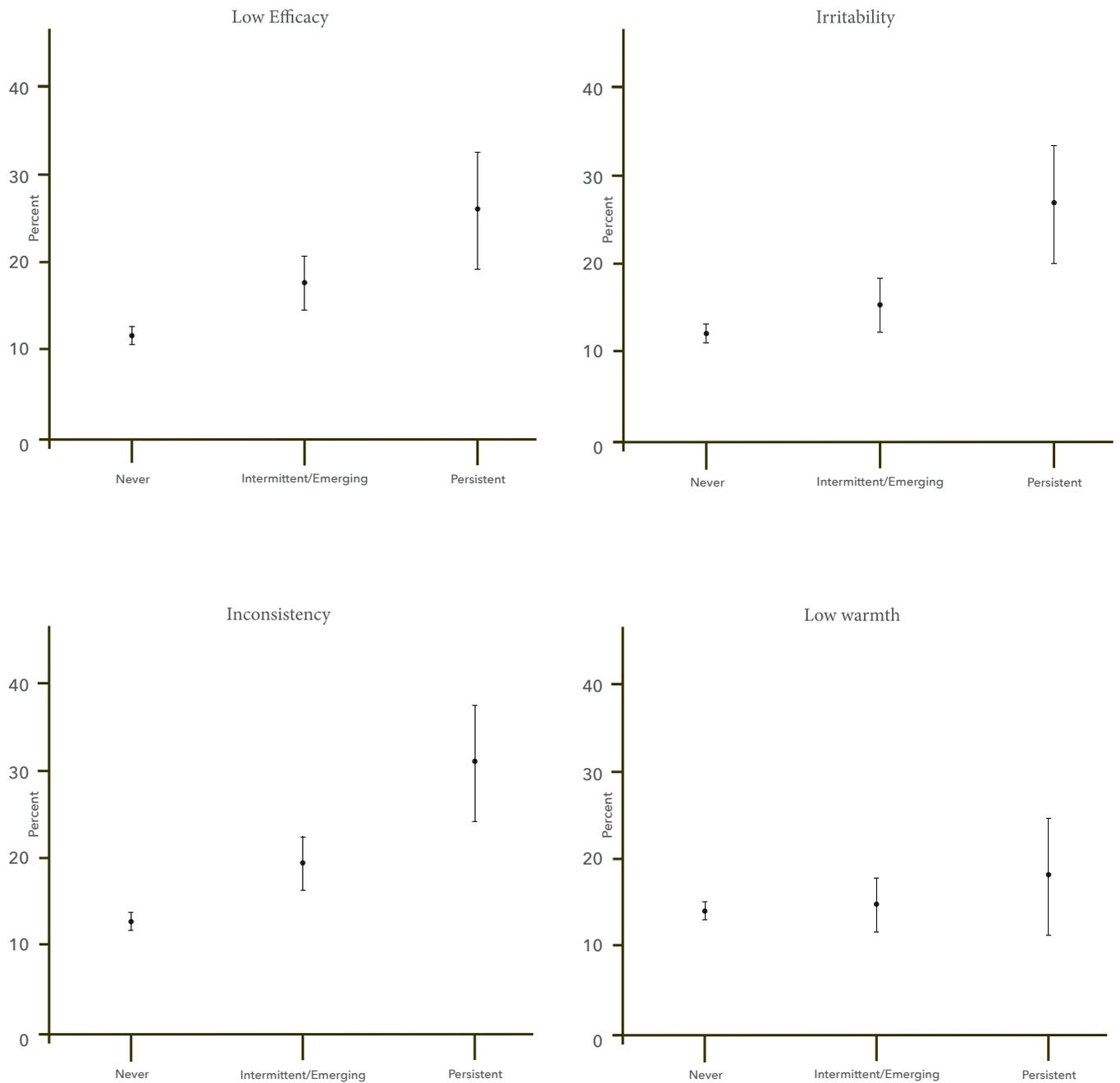
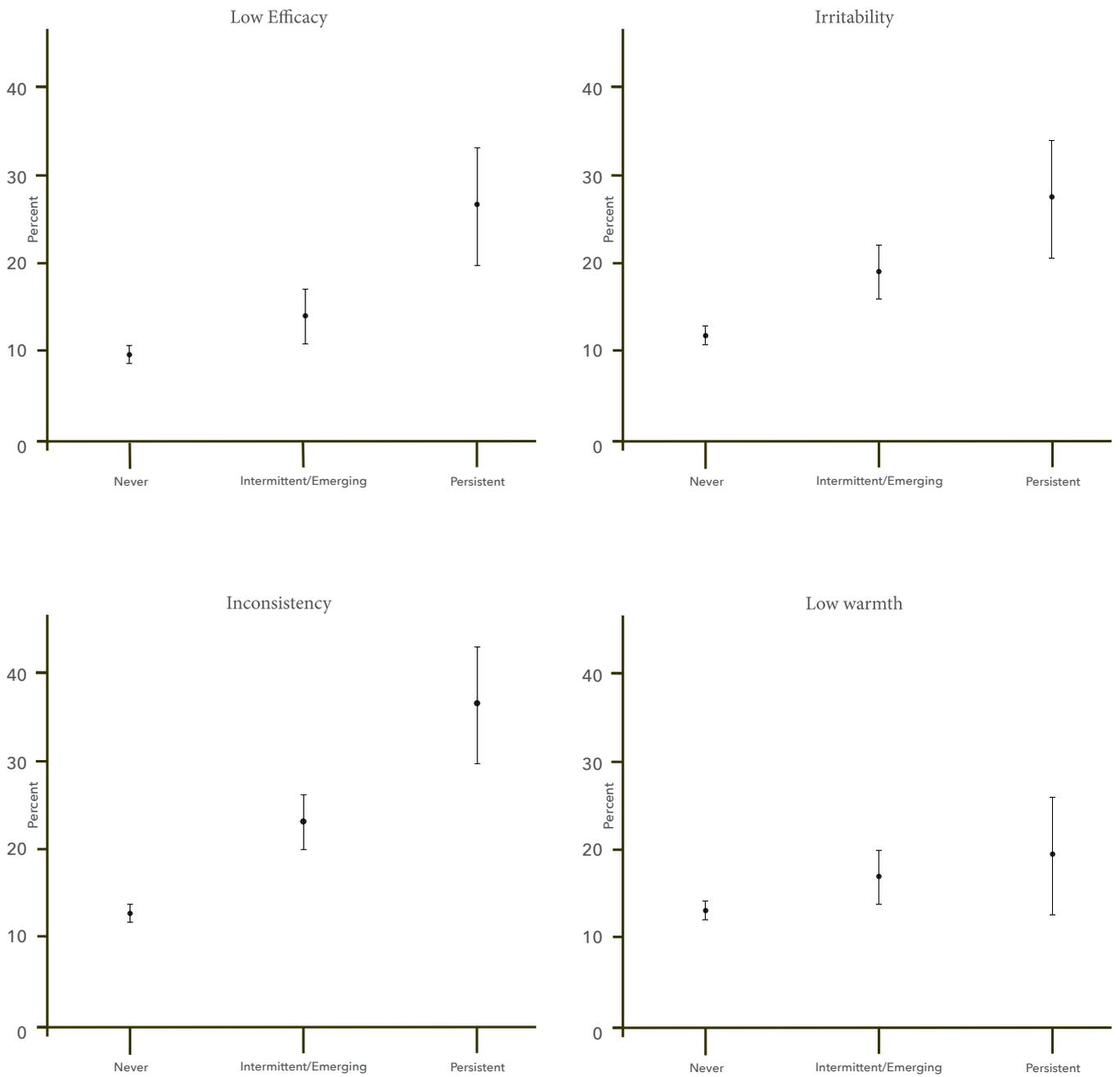
Figure 2.4 Percentage of mothers of children aged 8-9 years reporting poor parenting by IPC categories

Figure 2.5 Percentage of mothers of children aged 12-13 years reporting poor parenting by IPC categories



In summary, across all three child ages that were examined, there was a consistent pattern of associations between IPC and mother-reported measures of the couple relationship, maternal psychological wellbeing, and mothers' parenting. With the exception of maternal warmth towards the child, for all other measures, IPC was associated with a higher proportion of mothers reporting poorer functioning, and this was most marked for mothers who had experienced persistent IPC. Relationship dissatisfaction, parental psychological distress, and poor parenting are a constellation of family attributes that tend to co-occur and have been known to have detrimental effects on children's development (Bayer et al., 2011; Zubrick et al., 2008). It is therefore likely that IPC will be associated with poorer child outcomes in a similar manner. This is examined next.

Child socio-emotional adjustment was measured by classroom teacher reports on the SDQ. This provides a measure that is independent of the potential bias associated with parental reports, which are known to be influenced by parental mental health. It also represents the child's adjustment as observed in a non-family setting. At all three ages examined, poor adjustment was reported for 18-23 percent of children in the persistent IPC group compared to 12-14 percent in the no IPC group. There was a small amount of overlap in the confidence intervals for two of the three age groups, and no age trends were evident. Overall, these results do not provide reliable evidence of an association between children's socio-emotional adjustment in the school setting and IPC.

2.4.5 Child physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, and academic outcomes

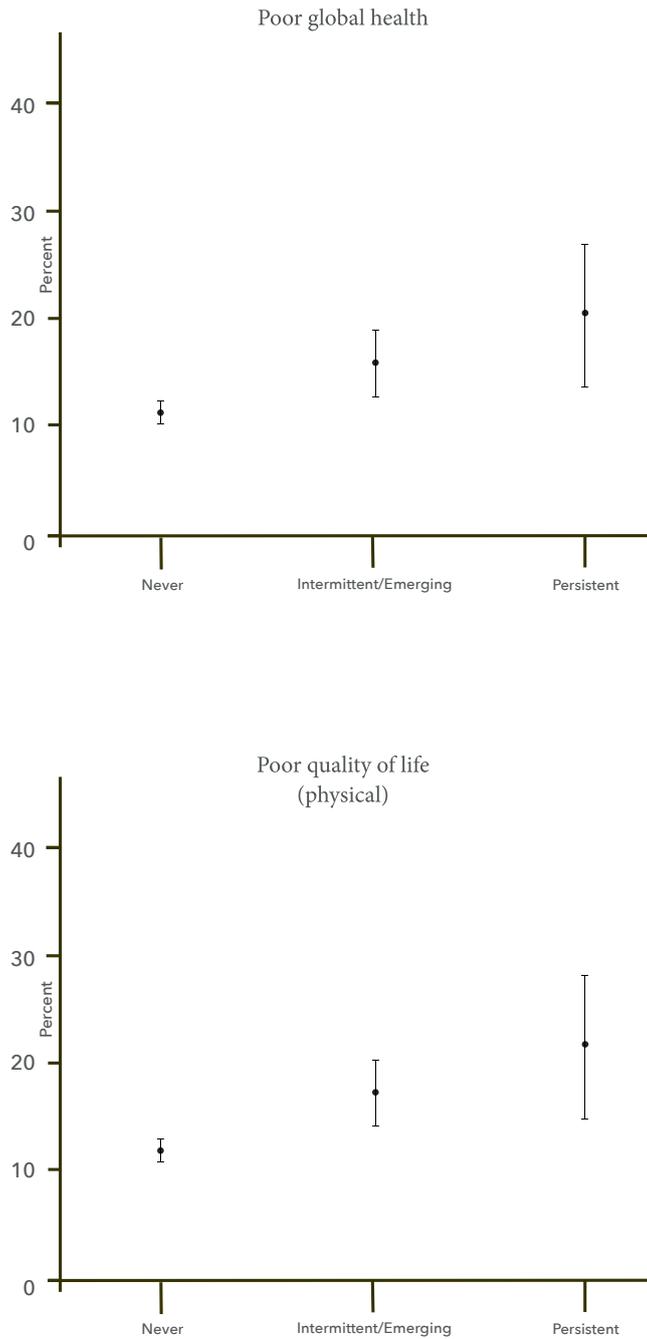
Figures 2.6-2.8 (and Table B4) present the percentage of children with poor health and developmental outcomes by child age and mother-reported experience of IPC. As shown, most children's outcomes were associated with IPC. Visual inspection of the graphs reveals a consistent pattern whereby a higher proportion of children where mothers reported IPC were doing poorly, and this was highest amongst children in the persistent IPC group. Comparisons were undertaken for 18 child outcome measures. For 12 outcomes, the confidence intervals were non-overlapping for children in the no IPC and persistent IPC groups, while for the remaining six outcomes there were small overlaps. This indicates a fairly consistent pattern of poorer functioning amongst children in the persistent IPC group relative to children who experienced no IPC. In all cases, the past or emerging IPC group fell between these two, with overlapping confidence intervals. For simplicity the following summaries contrast the proportions of children doing poorly for the persistent IPC compared to no IPC groups.

In terms of child physical health as reported by the mother, poor health was reported for:

- 20-24 percent of children in the persistent IPC group compared to 11-14 percent in the no IPC group for the single item rating of global health; and
- 23-32 percent of children in the persistent IPC group compared to 12 percent in the no IPC group for the physical health scale of the PedsQL.

The proportions of children with poor physical health tended to be slightly higher for the older children (age 12-13 years) compared to both younger groups.

Figure 2.6 Percentage of children aged 4-5 years with poor outcomes by IPC categories



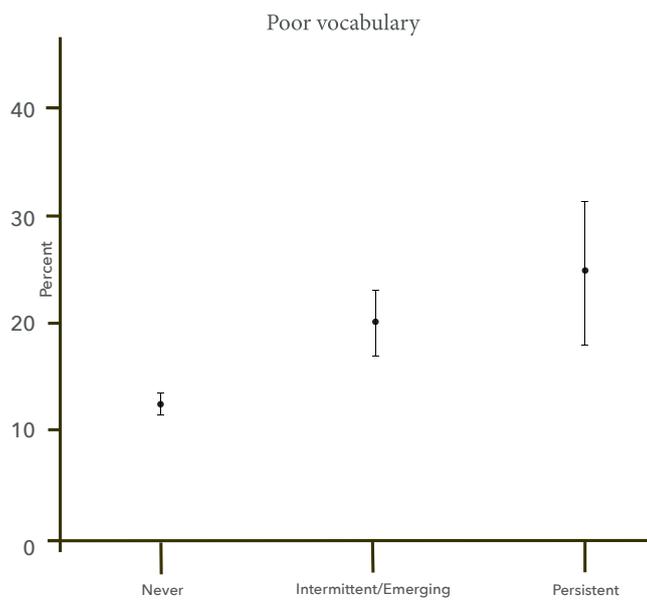
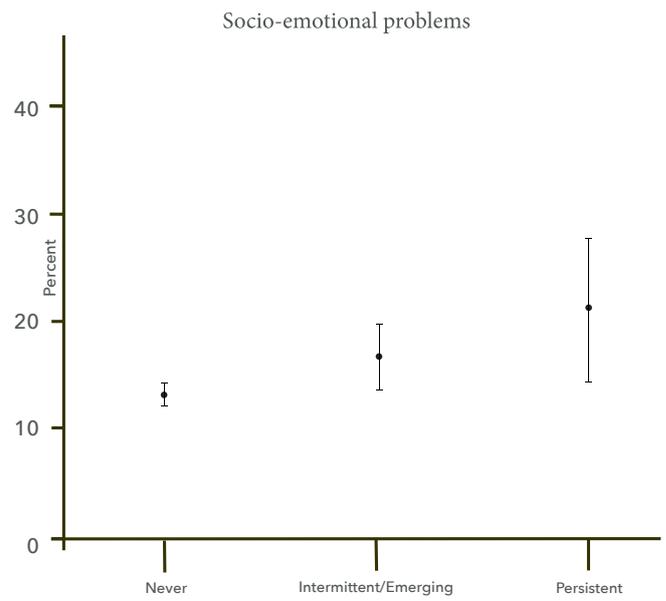
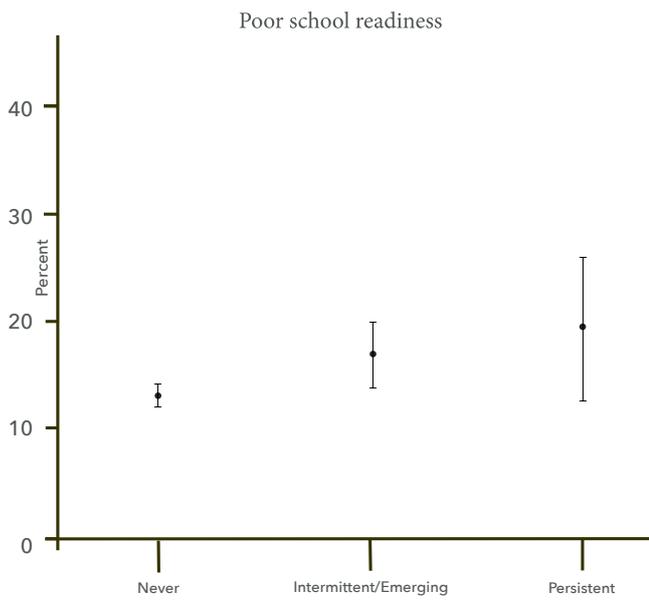
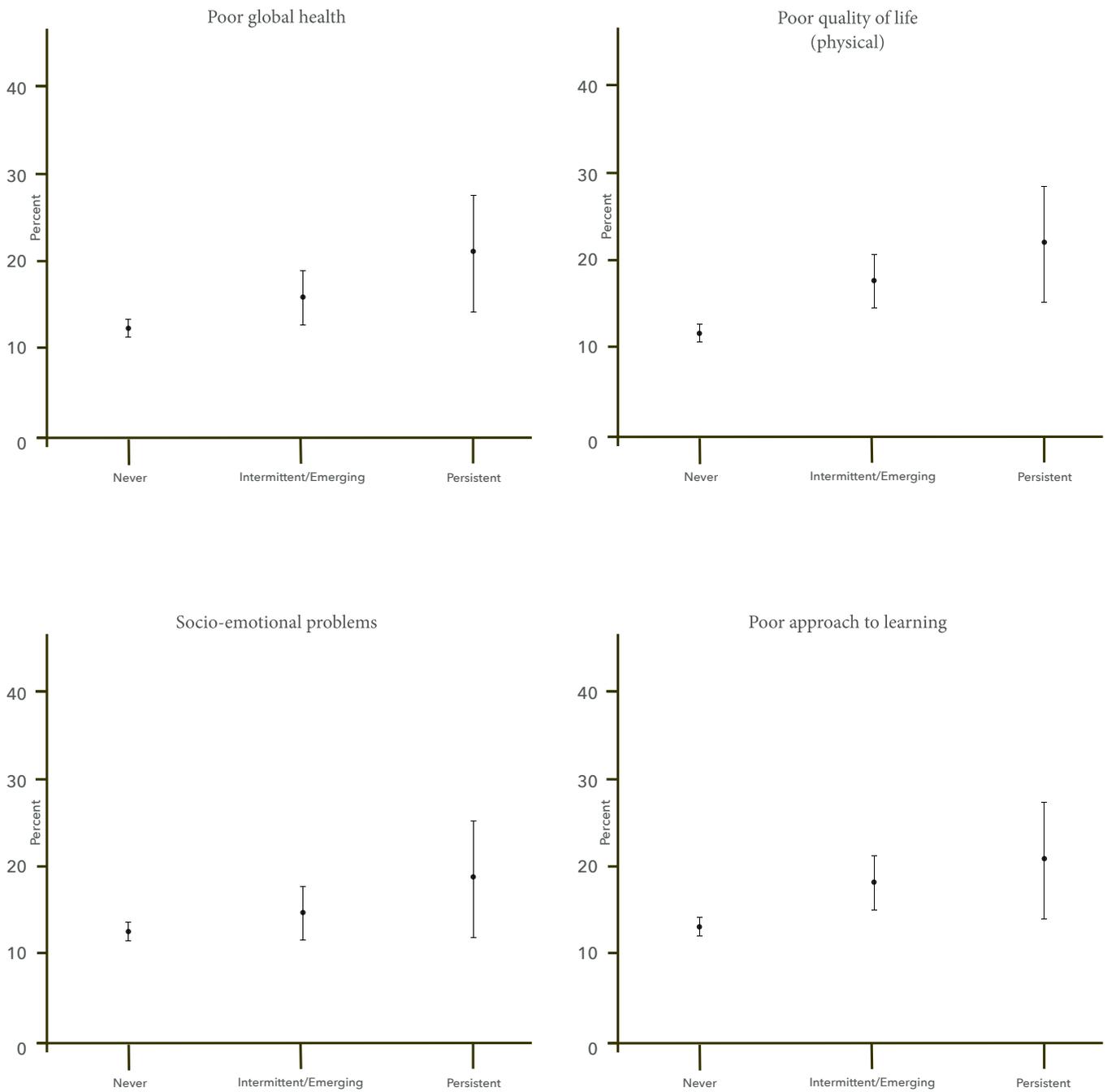


Figure 2.7 Percentage of children aged 8-9 years with poor outcomes by IPC categories



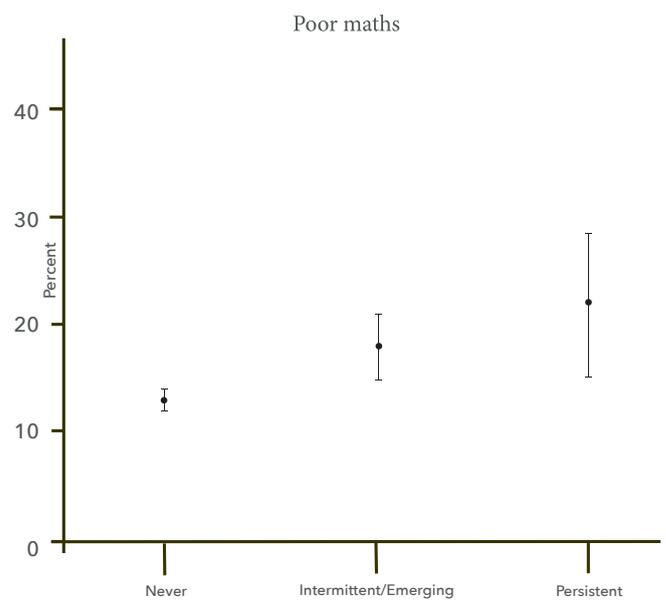
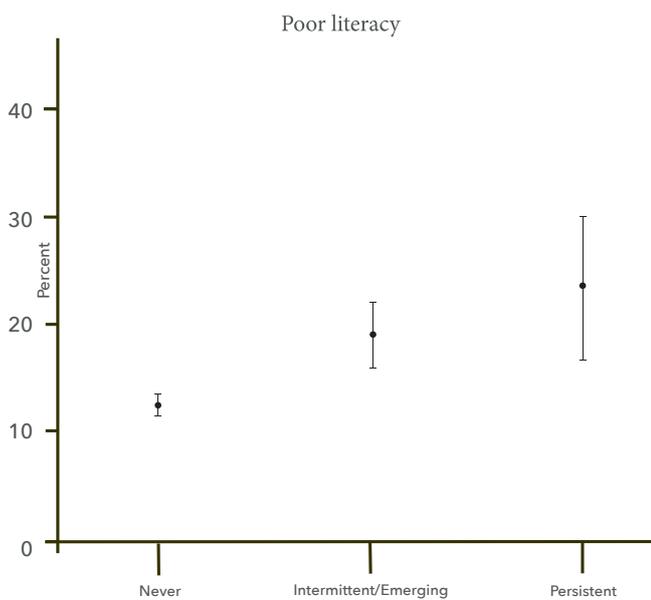
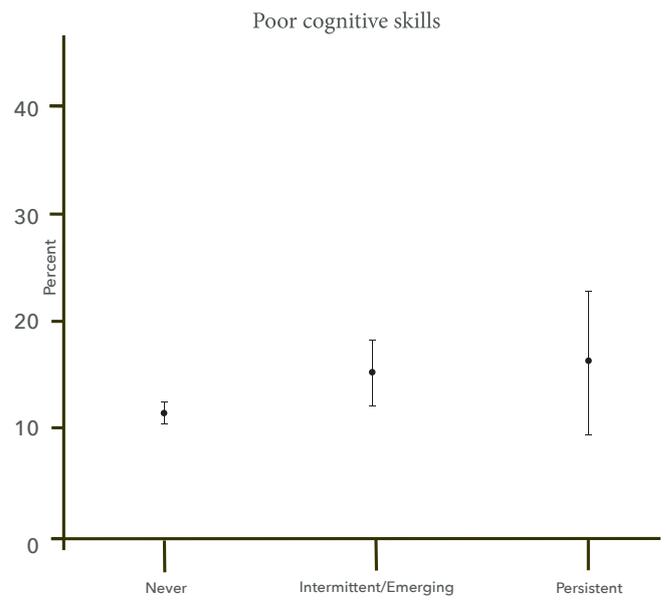
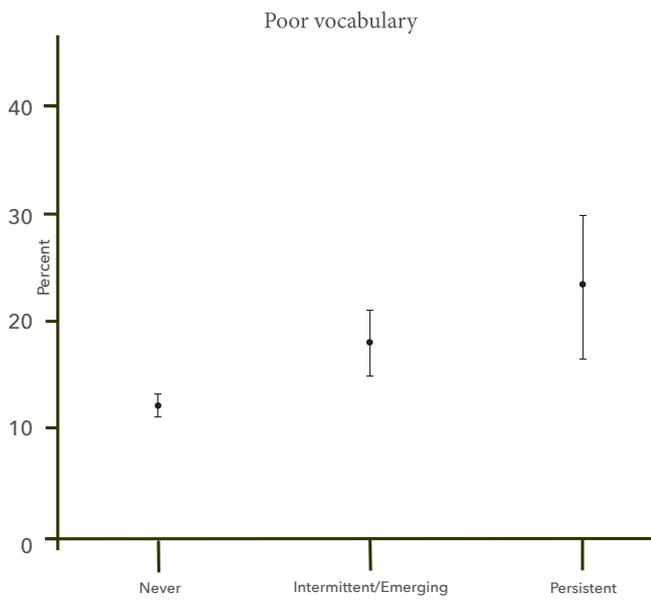
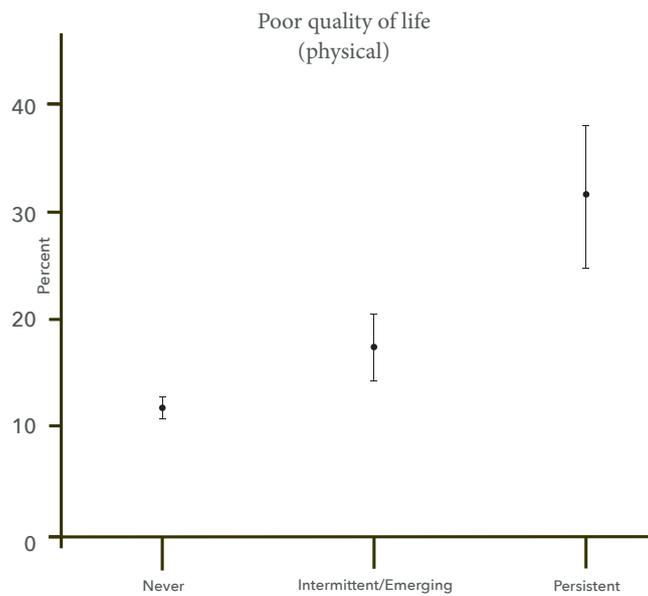
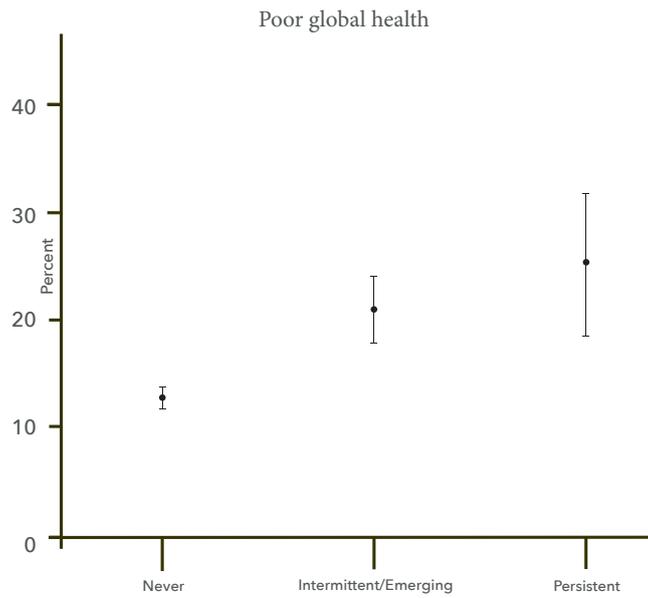
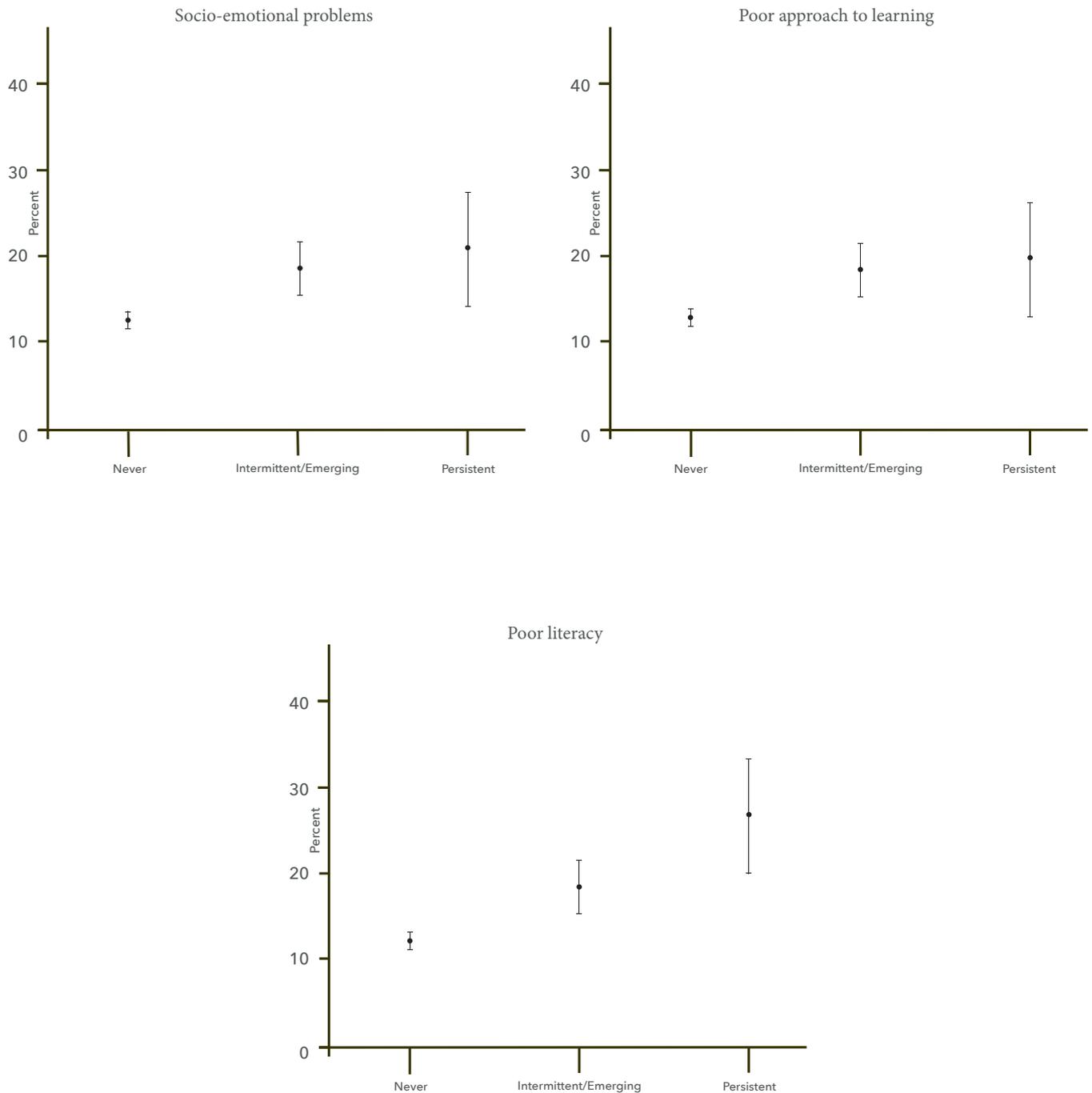


Figure 2.8 Percentage of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes by IPC categories





School readiness and cognitive skills (matrix reasoning) were measured by direct child assessment at age 4-5 years, and expressive vocabulary was directly assessed at ages 4-5 and 8-9 years. Poor development as indicated by scores in the poorest 15 percent of the distribution was demonstrated by:

- 23 percent of children in the persistent IPC group compared to 14 percent in the no IPC group for school readiness; and
- 23-24 percent of children in the persistent IPC group compared to 13 percent in the no IPC group for vocabulary.

Cognitive skills showed no reliable differences between IPC groups.

At ages 8-9 and 12-13 years, classroom teachers rated each child's skills in the learning environment (e.g. attentiveness, organisation, task persistence) and their academic performance in literacy (assessed at both ages) and maths (assessed at age 8-9 years only). Poor outcomes were reported for:

- 22-25 percent of children in the persistent IPC group compared to 13 percent in the no IPC group for literacy; and
- 21 percent of children in the persistent IPC group compared to 13 percent in the no IPC group for maths.

Approaches to learning showed no reliable differences between IPC groups with overlapping confidence intervals at both ages.

Children's health and development is affected by parent and family demographic characteristics. To see whether these factors accounted for the observed differences in child outcomes by IPC group, analyses were repeated with adjustment for a range of characteristics, including parental age, education, socioeconomic status, and cultural background (see Table B5). In the adjusted results, significant differences remained for child physical health at all three ages and literacy at age 12-13 years. For all other child outcome measures, unadjusted and adjusted prevalence estimates were similar, but the adjustment resulted in overlapping confidence intervals.

In summary, the data presented here examined children's health and developmental outcomes across a range of parent-reported, teacher-reported, and directly assessed measures when the children were 4-5 years (B cohort), 8-9 years (B cohort) and 12-13 years (K cohort). Despite the variety of sources providing these data, there was a consistent pattern for children experiencing persistent IPC to be faring more poorly. Specifically, there was a trend towards children whose mothers had experienced IPC having poor physical health, poor vocabulary, and limited skills required for school success. Not surprisingly, they were also more likely to be performing poorly on literacy and maths. Socio-emotional behaviour at

school, approaches to learning, and cognitive ability showed similar trends but were not significantly associated with IPC. As was found for the analyses of maternal outcomes, the outcomes of children who were exposed to past or emerging IPC fell between the no IPC and persistent IPC groups but not to a statistically significant extent.

The consistent patterns shown in the graphs of children's outcomes by IPC group, suggest that IPC has a pervasive negative effect on children's development. This is not surprising given the associations between IPC and maternal factors that are important to child development (psychological adjustment and parenting). However, IPC is not the only factor that predicts how well children fare. In the analyses that adjusted for differences in parent and family demographics, the associations with IPC were reduced. The underlying patterns remained the same but were mostly statistically non-significant.

2.5 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict and maternal, paternal, and child outcomes for intact compared to separated families

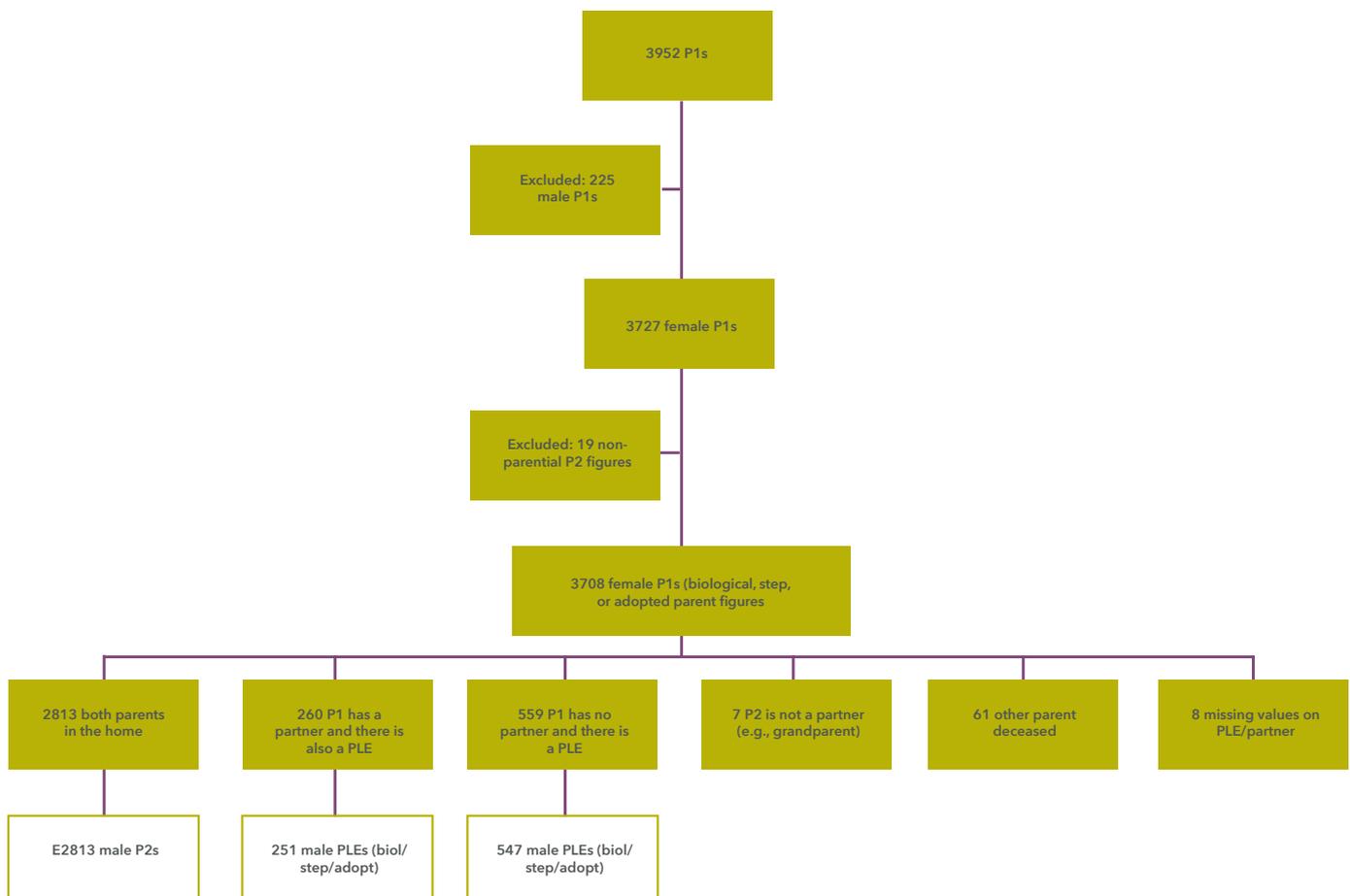
Results presented in this section explore the associations between IPC and individual outcomes for families where the conflict occurs between parents who are not living together (separated families). Separated families are a sub-sample of all families in LSAC. They have increased in total numbers over the course of the study as more parents separate. To maximise our sample size for these analyses, we looked at LSAC families at one time-point only—age 12-13 years, which represented the oldest age available for the K-cohort children at the time of analysis.

Separated families were included in this analysis if they were still participating when the child was aged 12-13 years (Wave 5, K cohort); P1 (the primary caregiver) was a biological, adopted, or step-mother of the study child; and there was a male PLE (parent living elsewhere) who was a biological, adopted, or stepfather of the study child and had ongoing contact with the child. As the focus was on IPC between a child's separated parents, families were classified as "separated" irrespective of whether mothers had re-partnered or not.

The comparison group for these analyses were "intact" families, defined as those where the mother (P1) was living with a male partner (P2) and there was no PLE who had ongoing contact with the child. P2 could be the biological, adopted, or stepfather of the study child.

The sample available for these analyses is shown in Figure 2.9. As shown, the families of 3632 children aged 12-13 years were eligible for inclusion and 3611 had IPC data available (shaded grey boxes). These included 798 families (22%) that had a father living elsewhere (PLE), 251 of whom had both a father living elsewhere and another father figure (P2) in the maternal home.

Figure 2.9 Number of LSAC participants (age 12-13 years, K cohort) included in the analyses



2.5.1 Inter-parental conflict in intact and separated families

The frequency of IPC and family demographic characteristics are shown in Table 2.3 by family structure. As expected, the demographic characteristics of intact and separated families differed. Separated families had parents who were more socio-economically disadvantaged, had lower levels of high school completion, and were less likely to speak a language other than English at home.

Table 2.3 Baseline demographic characteristics (at child age 4-5 years) of intact and separated families by current IPC when children were 12-13 years

Demographic	Intact families (n = 2734)		Separated families (n = 629)	
	No IPC (n = 2469; 90.3%) ^a	IPC (n = 265; 9.7%) ^b	No IPC (n = 379; 60.3%) ^c	IPC (n = 250; 39.7%) ^d
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Baseline maternal age	35.4 (4.6)	35.5 (5.1)	34.0 (5.3)	33.3 (5.5)
Baseline maternal age	37.7 (5.5)	38.7 (6.3)	36.7 (6.0)	36.4 (6.4)
Socioeconomic position (Z-score) ^e	0.27 (0.93)	0.17 (0.98)	-0.18 (0.94)	-0.24 (0.90)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Mother completed high school	1682 (68.2)	161 (60.8)	204 (54.3)	126 (50.4)
Father completed high school	1357 (56.0)	133 (52.0)	112 (49.8)	70 (39.3)
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	47 (1.9)	7 (2.6)	10 (2.6)	8 (3.2)
Main language at home is English	2167 (87.8)	202 (76.2)	345 (91.5)	241 (96.4)

Notes: ^a n ranged between 2,424 and 2,468. ^b n ranged between 256 and 265. ^c n ranged between 225 and 379. ^d n ranged between 178 and 250. ^e Socioeconomic position is a composite variable indicating the family's socioeconomic position relative to all other LSAC families derived at each wave. It is derived using indicators of adjusted household income, parental employment and parental education. Demographic variables were measured at Wave 1 (child aged 4-5 years).

2.5.2 Maternal and child outcome by family structure and reported IPC

For these analyses, IPC and maternal and child outcome data were available for almost all eligible intact families who participated in LSAC at Wave 5 (3% missing) and for the majority of separated families (21% missing).

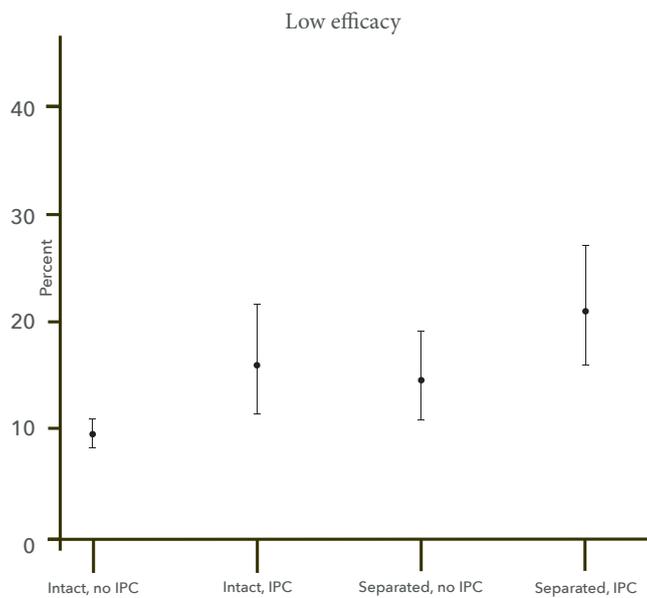
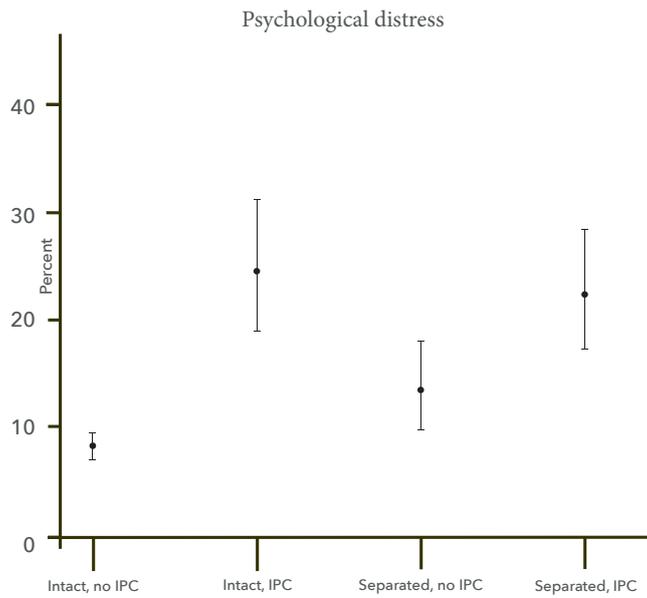
Figures 2.10 and 2.11 show the proportions of families in the “poor functioning” group for each of the maternal and child outcome variables, with full details summarised in Table B6. As for the previous sections, for most outcomes, this is defined as falling within the poorest 15 percent of the complete LSAC sample distribution. Results are presented by family structure (intact vs. separated families) and reported IPC (yes vs. no). It is important to note that for separated families, IPC refers only to conflict between the child’s separated parents. There may also be conflict between the mother and a current resident partner, which is not considered here due to sample size limitations.

For the intact family–no IPC group, confidence intervals around the estimates were narrow relative to the other three groups, reflecting the greater precision afforded by the large sample size for this group (2,469 families compared to 248–370 for the other groups). Across most comparisons, confidence intervals around the estimates were overlapping. This means that the differences between estimates were not statistically significant. However, there is a common pattern evident across the analyses and it is likely that the lack of statistical significance reflects the small sample sizes in the comparison groups. A larger sample size would substantially reduce the width of the confidence intervals and would probably result in a number of the comparisons becoming statistically significant. For this reason, the overall patterns are described below.

As shown in Figure 2.10 (and Table B6), the lowest proportions of mothers experiencing psychological distress or reporting poor parenting were those who were in intact families with no IPC. The exception was low maternal warmth, which was reported by similar proportions of mothers across all family–IPC groups. Across the maternal outcomes, Figure 2.10 shows a general pattern for poor functioning to be more commonly reported by mothers from separated compared to intact families and by mothers experiencing IPC compared to those not experiencing IPC. There was no evidence of any additive or exacerbating effects when mothers were both separated and experiencing IPC: the proportions of mothers reporting poor functioning was similar for IPC with or without separation.

The pattern of results for children’s outcomes were similar to the pattern for mothers’ outcomes and were evident across both the mother-reported and directly assessed measures. As shown in Figure 2.11 (and Table B6), the lowest proportions of children experiencing poor functioning in terms of physical health, socio-emotional problems, approaches to learning, and literacy were those who were in intact families with no IPC. There was a general pattern for poor functioning to be more common for children from separated compared to intact families and for children whose mother reported IPC compared to those with no reported IPC. Again, there was no clear evidence of any additive or exacerbating effects for children whose mothers were both separated and experiencing IPC.

Figure 2.10 Percentage of mothers of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes in intact and separated families by IPC categories



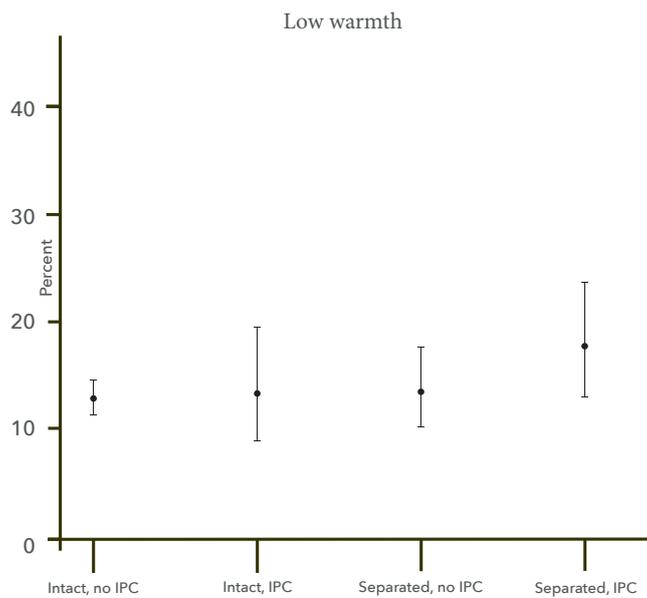
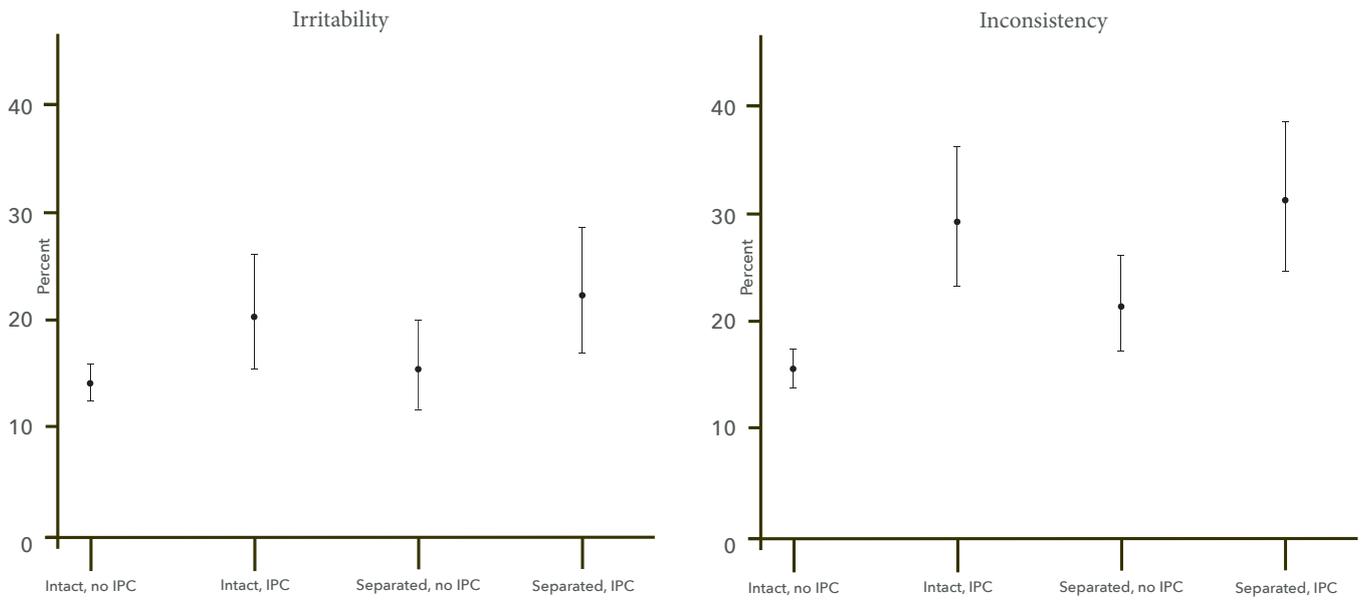
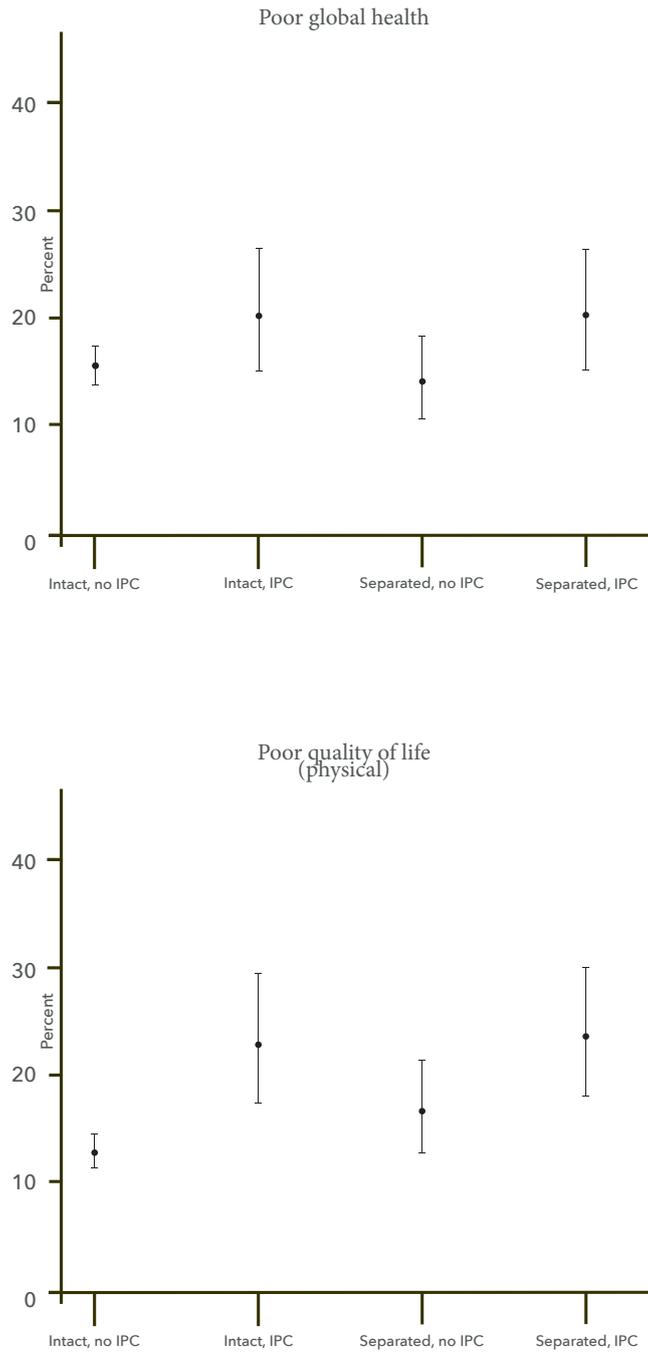
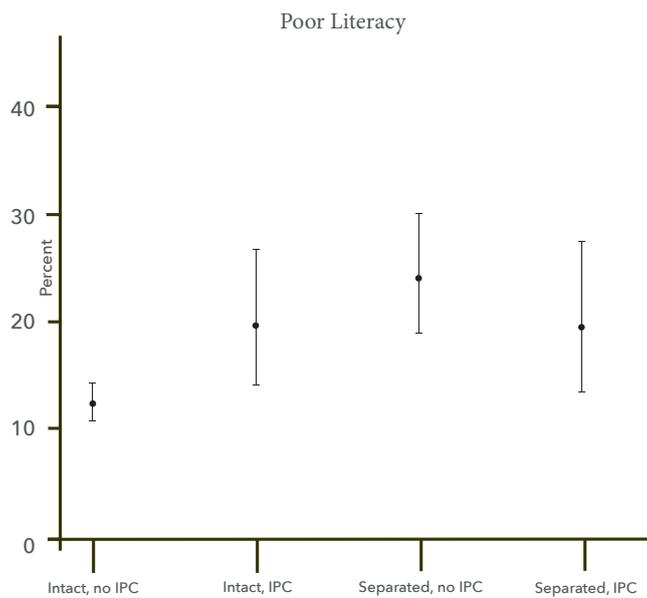
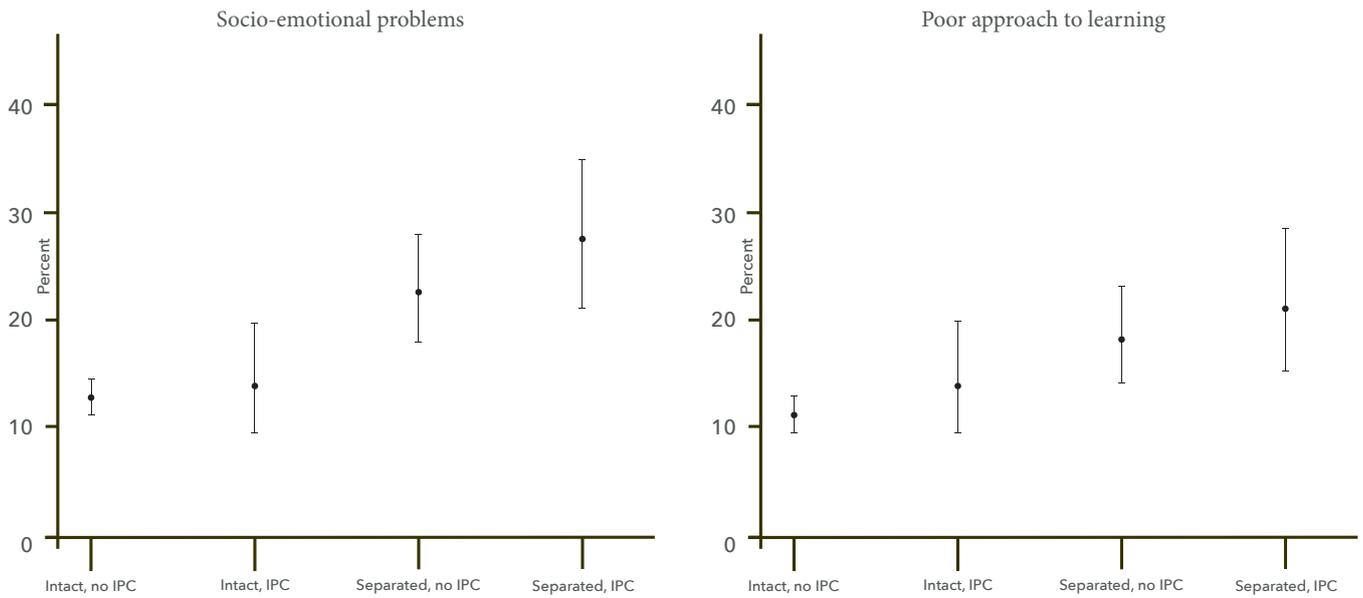


Figure 2.11 Percentage of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes in intact and separated families by IPC categories





2.5.3 Paternal outcomes by family structure and reported IPC

LSAC data collection procedures differed for mothers and fathers. For the study child's mother, data were collected during an in-home interview. For fathers who lived with the study child's mother, a questionnaire was left behind for completion. Around one in four of these fathers did not provide data at any given data collection wave.

For fathers who did not live with the study child's mother, the mother was asked to provide contact details. These details were not requested if the father was reported to have no contact with the study child, and mothers who had highly conflicted relationships with the father or were engaged in family court proceedings were less likely to provide contact details.

As a result, the participation of fathers in separated families was selectively restricted when there was current conflict, and it is likely that where conflict existed and fathers could be approached for participation, the conflict was less severe than for those not approached. Fathers' data were missing for approximately:

- 26 percent of intact families with no IPC;
- 28 percent of intact families experiencing IPC;
- 33 percent of separated families with no IPC; and
- 41 percent of separated families experiencing IPC.

As missing data rates vary according to the variables of interest for the analyses (IPC and separation), results reported here should be interpreted with considerable caution. Additionally, selective bias in the sample of fathers with available data means that results from fathers are not directly comparable with the previously reported data on maternal outcomes. The fathers examined here were from a relatively more advantaged and well-functioning sub-sample of LSAC participants, while the mothers are representative of the full LSAC cohort.

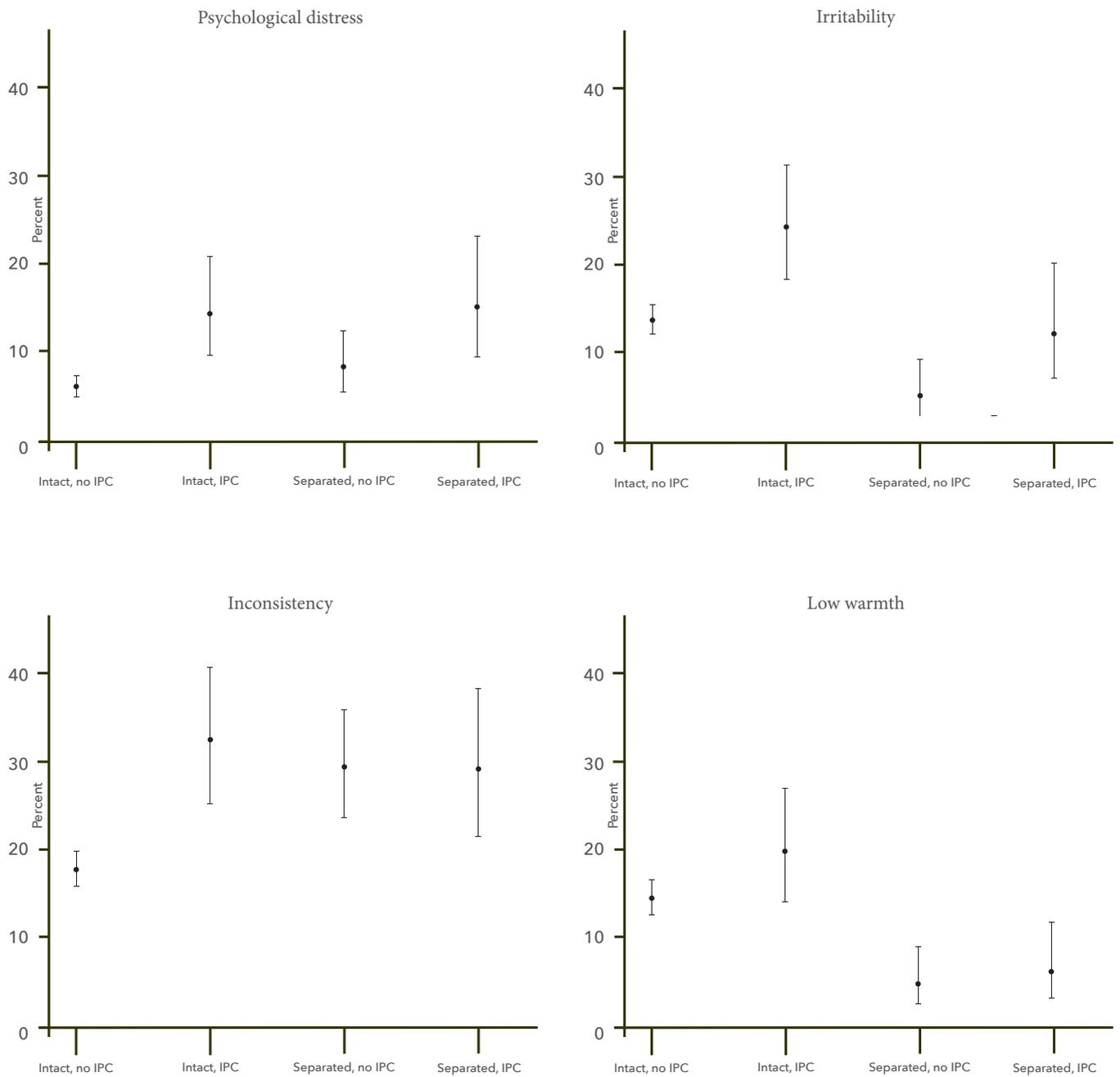
Figure 2.12 (and Table B7) shows the proportions of fathers reporting "poor functioning" for each of the paternal outcome variables. Similar to the analyses of maternal and child outcomes, confidence intervals around the estimates were overlapping and therefore not statistically significant. However, patterns were evident in the data and again, it is likely that a larger sample size would result in a number of the comparisons becoming statistically significant. For this reason, the patterns in the findings are described below.

The pattern of results for fathers' outcomes differed by family structure. Compared to intact families with no IPC, a higher proportion of fathers in separated families reported inconsistent parenting, and fewer reported irritable parenting or low warmth. These patterns are not unexpected and likely reflect differences in the nature of father-child relationships post-separation, which are characterised by a greater amount of paternal involvement especially around "special occasion" activities (Hawkins, Amato, & King, 2007).

For intact families, there was clear evidence that IPC was associated with more fathers being in the "poor functioning" groups. Fathers in intact families with IPC were more likely to self-report psychological distress in the broadband range, irritable parenting, and inconsistent parenting, with a trend for lower warmth compared to fathers in intact families with no IPC.

For separated families there was a similar trend for higher proportions of fathers to report broadband range psychological distress and irritability in the presence of IPC, with no discernible sub-group differences in father-reported irritable parenting and warmth by IPC.

Figure 2.12 Percentage of fathers of children aged 12-13 years with poor outcomes in intact and separated families by IPC categories



2.6 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict and child adjustment to care transitions in separated families

Within the separated families identified in the previous analysis (age 12-13 years, K cohort), we examined the cross-sectional association between IPC between a mother and father living elsewhere and their child's adjustment after returning from contact visits with the father. The items were purpose designed for LSAC, and reported by the mother.

Mothers reported on the adjustment of the study child after returning from contact with the PLE by responding "strongly disagree", "disagree", "neither agree nor disagree", "agree", or "strongly agree" to the following items:

1. When child first returns from contact with PLE he/she has difficulty settling back into household/family routines.
2. When child first returns from contact with PLE he/she is unpleasant or critical towards yourself or other family members.
3. When child first returns from contact with PLE he/she is withdrawn and unhappy.

Table 2.4 summarises the proportions of children reported by mothers as having poor adjustment (ratings of "agree" or "strongly agree") after visits. A higher proportion of mothers reported that the child was poorly adjusted when there was IPC between separated parents (22-40%) compared to no IPC (9-16%). In families with IPC, mothers were more likely to report that the child had difficulty settling, was critical of herself or other family members, and was withdrawn or unhappy.

2.7 Results: associations between inter-parental conflict and parenting arrangements in separated families

In separated families, we also examined the cross-sectional associations between IPC between mother and father living elsewhere, and the mother's perceptions of the parenting arrangements between herself and the father using items purpose designed for LSAC. Table 2.5 summarises these parenting arrangements as reported by mothers.

Table 2.4 Percentage (95% CI) of children experiencing adjustment difficulties after care transitions by current reported IPC between separated parents

Child adjustment after contact visits with his or her father	Frequency (%) (95% CI)		
	No IPC (n = 362)	IPC (n = 225)	Total (n = 587)
Has difficulty settling after contact with PLE	16.1 (12.7, 20.3)	40.0 (33.8, 46.6)	24.9 (21.6, 28.4)
Is critical of mother or other family after contact with PLE	11.9 (9.0, 15.7)	32.4 (26.6, 38.9)	19.9 (16.9, 23.2)
Is withdrawn and unhappy after contact with PLE	9.2 (6.6, 12.6)	22.2 (17.2, 28.1)	14.4 (11.8, 17.4)

Table 2.5 Frequencies (and %) of parenting arrangements in separated families by current reported IPC

Variable	Frequency (%)		
	No IPC	IPC	Total
Shared or joint parenting arrangement with the PLE			
P1 has main care of child	298 (79)	193 (77)	491 (78)
Shared or joint parenting	79 (21)	53 (21)	132 (21)
Other	2 (0.5)	4 (2)	6 (1)
Length of time since child last saw PLE			
Last saw more than 1 month ago	56 (15)	47 (19)	103 (16)
Last saw 1-4 weeks ago	96 (25)	55 (22)	151 (24)
Last saw 1-6 days ago	184 (49)	122 (49)	306 (49)
Saw today	42 (11)	23 (9)	65 (10)
How often PLE sees the child			
Every day or several times a week	92 (24)	40 (16)	132 (21)
At least once a week	68 (18)	58 (23)	126 (20)
At least once a fortnight	104 (28)	63 (25)	167 (27)
At least once every 1-3 months	69 (18)	47 (19)	116 (19)
Less than 6- monthly or not at all	45 (12)	42 (17)	87 (14)
How involved does mother think the PLE should be in the study child's life			
More involved	186 (49)	132 (53)	318 (51)
About right	184 (49)	89 (36)	273 (43)
Less involved	9 (2)	29 (12)	38 (6)
How well mother gets along with PLE			
Very well	81 (21)	3 (1)	84 (13)
Well	166 (44)	36 (14)	202 (32)
Neither well nor poorly	107 (28)	83 (33)	190 (30)
Poorly	15 (4)	47 (19)	62 (10)
Very poorly or badly	4 (1)	62 (25)	66 (11)
No contact with other parent	6 (2)	19 (8)	25 (4)

Note: n ranged between 625 and 629

2.8 Discussion and conclusion

This research investigated the prevalence and effects of mother-reported inter-parental conflict (IPC) on parent and child functioning. IPC was relatively common in the LSAC samples and was evident at all ages examined. There was clear evidence that the difficulties that couples were experiencing in resolving disagreements were associated with a range of adverse outcomes for mothers and children, with mixed evidence on outcomes for fathers. These data provide a strong additional imperative to provide couples with early assistance around communication and conflict resolution. While the harmful effects of domestic and family violence have gained increasing recognition, the current data illustrate that the more common forms of conflict (which may or may not involve violence) are also associated with significant impairments for mothers, fathers, and children.

Our results indicate that more than one in three Australian children are exposed to IPC by the time they enter adolescence. Of these children, one in four are exposed to persistent IPC (reported as occurring both currently and in the past). These estimates are likely to be conservative. IPC was recorded as being present at the time of data collection (every 2 years), and IPC occurring between these time-points may be missed.

For women and children, we found a clear pattern of impaired functioning associated with IPC, which tended to be greatest when there was persistent exposure to IPC. For mothers of children aged 4-5 years, 8-9 years, and 12-13 years, we found:

- a strong association between IPC and mother's dissatisfaction with the couple relationship (a sixfold increase in the rates for persistent IPC compared to non-exposed) and a strong positive association with maternal psychosocial distress (a fivefold increase, for both those in the broadband and the clinical ranges);
- reported IPC associated with poor parenting self-efficacy, higher irritability, and less consistency in interactions with the study child (around a threefold increase in the rates for persistent IPC compared to non-exposed), and some reductions in reported warmth; and
- evidence of a dose-response type relationship, whereby outcomes were poorest for mothers who experienced persistent IPC and were intermediate for those who experienced past or emerging IPC compared to mothers with no reported IPC.

For children, the effects of IPC were also evident at all three of the ages examined (4-5 years, 8-9 years, and 12-13 years). Again, there was a trend indicating a dose-response relationship with the poorest functioning associated with persistent IPC. Specifically, we found:

- an increased rate of poor physical health and health-related quality of life in children in the persistent IPC group, with the highest rates of poor health occurring in the pre-teens compared to younger ages;
- across all ages, a smaller but consistent pattern of elevated difficulties in children's socio-emotional wellbeing, and poor school readiness, vocabulary, approaches to learning, and literacy and maths achievement; and
- cognitive functioning, as measured by matrix reasoning, which is regarded as an indicator of non-verbal intelligence, showed little association with reported IPC.

The robustness of the evidence reported here and the breadth of adverse consequences for children highlights IPC as a potential threat to the general health and development of the Australian population. The associations between mother-reported IPC and child outcomes were similar across measures of functioning that were captured via direct assessment of the child and from teacher reports, as well as those reported by the child's mother. This gives us greater confidence that these are "true" associations, and not a function of shared method variance whereby a mother's perceptions of the child are affected by her reported IPC.

We anticipated that reported IPC would be most strongly related to impaired functioning in socio-emotional, language, and academic outcomes. These are areas of development that are regarded as being most vulnerable to the quality of parent-child interactions and the home environment (Nicholson et al., 2012). The comparatively stronger associations with child physical health were not expected and require further exploration.

When we compared mother-reported IPC (categorised as present or not present when children were aged 12-13 years) by family structure, 40 percent of separated couples were experiencing current IPC. This rate was four times higher than for couples who were living together ("intact" families). Clearly, separation does not result in an elimination of conflict for many families, raising the question of the extent to which this conflict continues to be harmful for children and parents. Overall, maternal and child functional outcomes were poorer for those from separated families and for those with reported IPC.

We also examined the associations between IPC and the father's psychological wellbeing and parenting for intact and separated families. As noted earlier, the fathers' data reported here are not directly comparable to those reported by mothers. The participating sample of fathers is relatively more well-adjusted and likely to be experiencing milder levels of conflict. Additionally, fathers' self-reported parenting differs from mothers. On average, fathers in LSAC report themselves to be less consistent and warm in their daily interactions with their children than mothers (Baxter & Smart, 2010).

For fathers, separation and IPC were each associated with psychological distress and less consistent parenting. For fathers in "intact" families (non-separated), IPC was adversely associated with irritable parenting and lower warmth.

Collectively, these results highlight that for many families, IPC and its harmful effects do not end when parents separate. Both adults and children remain vulnerable to the effects of IPC that endure beyond parental separation. This suggests that the services and professionals who support parents or children need to consider parental separation as a potential indicator for a family being at particularly high risk of experiencing conflict that has detrimental effects on individual wellbeing.

We also examined a number of aspects of post-separation parenting arrangements. In the context of current IPC, children were two to three times more likely to be reported by their mothers as having behavioural or adjustment difficulties on returning home from time with their father. IPC was not strongly related to structural arrangements around the father-child contact, but was strongly related to poor current relationships between the mother and father, and was related to maternal dissatisfaction with the father's involvement with the study child (higher proportions wanting either more or less involvement).

This research has a number of important strengths. It is one of the first studies internationally to document the effects of IPC across a wide range of parent and child outcomes, using data from a large sample that is broadly typical of the Australian population.

Longitudinal data enabled exploration of the effects of IPC at different ages and we selected three key development times for examination: age 4-5 years, which marks the end of the early childhood period; 8-9 years, which represents the middle of the primary school years; and 12-13 years, which is the cusp of adolescence. The analyses revealed little variation in the proportions of children experiencing poor outcomes in relation to IPC across these ages, highlighting IPC as a developmental threat across childhood to early adolescence.

The longitudinal data also enabled us to examine the effects of persistent IPC. As expected, there was a pattern for persistent IPC to be associated with the poorest outcomes for mothers and children. We had insufficient sample size to rigorously examine the effects of IPC that had occurred only in the past. Our intermediate IPC group ("past/emerging IPC") included those who had exposure in the past only as well as those who had newly reported IPC at the time of measurement. Overall, our data suggest that IPC confers risks, which may be long lasting, but further research is needed to determine whether and when these risks may reduce following the cessation of IPC. The differences in proportions of mothers and children who experienced problems for the past/emerging versus persistent IPC groups indicates that it is likely that escape from conflict leads to a recovery in at least some aspects of maternal and child functioning.

Together, these results suggest the importance of a broad focus on the early reduction of family conflict as a key plank in health and social policies that seek to improve the wellbeing and life chances of Australian women, men, and children.

3. The impact of family violence on parenting and parent–child relationships—insights from experiences of separated parents

3.1 Abstract

This component focuses on separated parents and examines any links between a history of family violence and parent–child relationships. The analyses are based on two surveys: the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF) and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2012 (SRSP).

Across the two datasets, with different references to time frames, mothers were consistently more likely than fathers to experience violence or abuse (both physical hurt and emotional abuse, and emotional abuse alone). While reported experiences of physical hurt diminished with the increasing duration of separation, reports of emotional abuse experiences remained prevalent even after 5 years of separation.

Most separated parents provided a positive picture in terms of their parent–child relationship, parenting stress, and the flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements. However, those who reported experiences of violence or abuse provided relatively negative post-separation accounts in the three parenting domains compared to those without experiences of violence or abuse, regardless of the gender of separated parents. Part of the negative association between violence or abuse and parenting appeared to be mediated through its negative effects on various post-separation experiences, such as the inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, and parental emotional health. These, in turn, were negatively associated with the three outcome domains. More importantly, the pre-separation violence or abuse continued to be negatively associated with parents' satisfaction with the parent–child relationship and perceived flexibility or workability of care-time arrangements 5 years after separation, which was mainly attributed to the continuing violence or abuse after separation.

Despite the fact that separated parents indicated that children fared well overall, the reports on child wellbeing by separated parents who were experiencing violence or abuse were less positive compared to those without these experiences. The results of multivariate analyses suggest that parental experiences of violence or abuse led to poorer quality inter-parental relationships and generated safety concerns and poorer emotional health, which, in turn, were negatively associated with children's wellbeing.

3.2 Introduction

Part 2 of this report showed that separated families were more likely than intact families to report inter-parental conflict. Separation may have reduced the risk of physical violence in the long run; however, as Lodge, Moloney, and Robinson (2011, p. 29) observed in their literature review, post-separation violence can remain prevalent among those “who have been chronically abused via a process of long standing coercive control”. This assertion is supported by some recent data. Of the women who reported experiencing violence perpetrated by a previous partner in the Personal Safety Survey 2012, one-quarter indicated that their former partner had increased violent behaviour towards them after the relationship ended.

This part of the report focuses on separated parents and their children using data from studies that are collectively known as the AIFS Family Pathways suite of studies. Drawing on the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (LSSF) and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2012 (SRSP), the links between a history of family violence and parent–child relationships after parental separation are analysed. In particular, it examines the impacts of family violence on parent–child relationships, parenting capacity, post-separation care-time arrangements, and child wellbeing.

The analyses respond to the following research questions, specifically in relation to separated parents:

- 1) How does DFV affect mother-child and father-child relationships?
 - a) What is the association between a reported history of DFV and mothers' and fathers' satisfaction with their relationship with their child, in both intact and separated families?
 - b) In separated families, what is the association between DFV and mothers' and fathers' views about the workability of post-separation parenting arrangements?
 - c) What are the associations between inter-parental conflict, relationship difficulties, parenting behaviours, and child outcomes for intact and separated families?

- 2) How do mothers who have experienced DFV perceive this has affected their relationship with their children?
- a) What impact do they report this experience has on their parenting capacity?

The findings in this part of the report come from very large samples of Australian parents. The numbers of separated fathers in LSSF were 4983, 3244, and 4522 in Wave 1, Wave 2 and Wave 3 respectively, and the numbers of separated mothers were 5019, 3415, and 4270 respectively in the three waves. There were 2853 fathers and 3266 mothers in SRSP 2012, which is a cross-sectional study separate to the LSSF. (For survey details, see the section on methodology in the Introduction.)

The measures and analytical approach are explained in section 3.3. The findings of these analyses are then presented in sections 3.4 to 3.8, commencing with an overview of parents' experiences of family violence and an examination of the link between these experiences and inter-parental relationships and safety concerns (section 3.4). The following sections then cover parent-child relationships (section 3.5); parenting stress (sections 3.6); parenting arrangements, including their flexibility and workability (section 3.7); and child wellbeing (section 3.8). Section 3.8 provides a discussion and conclusion.

3.3 Measures and analytical approach

3.3.1 Measuring experiences of domestic and family violence

In both LSSF and SRSP surveys, participating parents were asked about their experiences of emotional abuse and physical hurt during different time periods. This was used as a measure of domestic and family violence (DFV). All parents (in LSSF and SRSP) were asked about their experiences of emotional abuse and physical hurt in the time period "before or during separation". Parents' reports of the experience of emotional abuse or physical hurt are here referred to as "family violence". In Waves 2 and 3 of LSSF, parents were then asked about their experiences of family violence in the 12 months prior to the interview; parents in SRSP were also asked about their experience of family violence "since separation".

Two variables on family violence were constructed. The first variable refers to participants' reported experiences of abuse or violence before or during separation and was classified into three categories: physical hurt, emotional abuse alone, and neither.⁷ The second variable refers to participants' reported experiences of family violence since separation and is set as a binary measure (i.e. either present or not).⁸ A limitation of these measures is that the context, initiation, severity of harm and power dynamics are not assessed (see section 3.9.5 for a further discussion of limitations). A comparison of LSAC, LSSF, and SRSP is provided in Appendix A.

7 Given that few parents who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation did not report any form of emotional abuse (5% in LSSF Wave 1 and 3% in SRSP), this variable did not have a separate category for this group.

8 This variable is binary because numbers of parents who experienced physical hurt since separation in SRSP and in the preceding 12 months in LSSF Waves 2 and 3 were small (1-6%). Sometimes, the violence before or during separation (reported in LSSF Wave 1 and SRSP) is also set as binary due to sample sizes in sub-groups or for the sake of simplicity.

Table 3.1 Types of emotional abuse participants were asked about in each wave of LSSF and in SRSP 2012

Did [study child's other parent] ...	LSSF Wave 1 (before/ during separation)	LSSF Wave 2 (in last 12 months)	LSSF Wave 3 (in last 12 months)	SRSP 2012 (before/ during separation)	SRSP 2012 (since separation)
Try to prevent you from contacting family or friends?	✓			✓	
Try to prevent you from using the telephone or car?	✓			✓	
Try to prevent knowledge of or access to family money?	✓			✓	
Insult you with the intent to shame, belittle, or humiliate?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Threaten to harm the child or children?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Threaten to harm other family or friends?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Threaten to harm you?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Threaten to harm themselves?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Threaten to harm or actually harm pets?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Damage or destroy property?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Try to force you into any unwanted sexual activity?			✓	✓	✓
Monitor your whereabouts (e.g. followed you, made constant phone calls, etc.)?			✓		✓
Circulate defamatory comments about you with the intent to shame, belittle, or humiliate (incl. social media)?			✓		✓

3.3.2 Outcome variables

3.3.2.1 Quality of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns

The first set of outcome variables measure the quality of inter-parental relationships, whether parents had safety concerns for the study child or themselves, and experiences of financial hardship. In both LSSF and SRSP, parents were asked to describe their current relationship with the child's other parent. The response categories were: *friendly, cooperative, distant, lot of conflict, and fearful*. Safety concerns were assessed by asking parents: "Do you have any concerns about [the child's] safety or your own safety as a result of ongoing contact with [the child's other parent]?" This variable is binary: *had any safety concerns or no concerns*.

3.3.2.2 Financial hardship

In each wave of LSSF, parents were asked whether they had experienced each of eight events during a specified period due to a shortage of money. The time frame referred to the period since separation in Wave 1 and the period of the past 12 months in Waves 2 and 3. The events included incidences such as an inability to pay utility bills, car registrations, rent, or mortgage on time; inability to heat the home; missing meals; selling something; or seeking financial assistance from family or friends or a welfare or community agency. Respondents in SRSP were also asked about their experiences of these events since separation. They were further asked whether they experienced any periods of homelessness. The financial hardship variable was the count of the types experienced.

3.3.2.3 Parent-child relationship

The parent-child relationship was assessed based on responses to the question: "How satisfied or dissatisfied are you currently with your relationship with the child?" The response options ranged from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). This question was included in SRSP and LSSF Waves 2 and 3. In LSSF Wave 2, parents whose study child was less than 4 years old were not asked to respond to the question.

3.3.2.4 Care-time workability

In each wave of LSSF, parents were asked how well their parenting arrangements were working for them, their child, and the child's other parent (separate questions). Response options were: *really well, fairly well, not so well, and badly*. SRSP did not ask parents their perceived workability for the child's other parent. In three waves of LSSF, workability for the other parent had much higher levels of missing data (don't know or refused) than workability for respondents themselves and for children (21-24% vs 3-9%). If separated parents had

little to do with each other, they would be unlikely to know whether their child's care-time worked for the other parent. Indeed, further analysis revealed that most of the missing data in workability for other parents were from "don't know" responses. In each wave of LSSF and SRSP, parents were also asked how flexible their parenting arrangements were, with response options being *very flexible, somewhat flexible, somewhat inflexible, and very inflexible*.

A scale of overall flexibility and workability of care-time was generated by mean ratings of three items: care-time workability for self, care-time workability for children, and the flexibility item. The three items had reasonable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.75). The item regarding care-time workability for the other parent was excluded given the high level of missing data in LSSF and that it was not asked in SRSP. Scores of the flexibility and workability scale originally ranged from 1-4, with a higher score indicating better flexibility and workability. The scores were then rescaled to 0-10, with higher scores indicating more positive flexibility and workability. For succinctness, this is also referred to as the care-time workability scale in this report.

3.3.2.5 Parenting stress

Parenting stress was tapped in LSSF Waves 1 and 2 alone. Parents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each of the four statements⁹:

- a) Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be.
- b) I often feel tired, worn out, or exhausted from meeting the needs of my child(ren).
- c) I feel trapped by my responsibility as a parent.
- d) I find that taking care of my child(ren) is much more work than pleasure.

The response options were: *strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree*. The responses were coded on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The four items retained a reasonable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.688). A parenting stress scale was formed by taking the mean of the responses to the four items. If parents responded to only three of the four items, the scale was created based on the mean of the three responses. To make the scale easier to interpret, it was then rescaled to 0-10, with higher scores indicating a higher level of parenting stress.

⁹ This parenting scale has been used in HILDA since 2001 to present (2014, the latest wave) and was also used in Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) Child Development Supplement 1997–University of Michigan. Although there are more comprehensive parenting scales, LSSF used this scale for two reasons: the possibility of comparing with HILDA (general population), and the items are short and simple, which is particularly important in a survey with competing demands for space.

3.3.2.6 Child wellbeing

Child wellbeing was assessed by parents' reports on the following aspects:

- a) overall health (children of all ages);
- b) developmental progress compared with other children (children aged 4+ years);
- c) social emotional development (children aged 4+ years); and
- d) social and emotional development (children aged 1-3 years).

It is important to note that some measures were unavailable in SRSP and some waves of LSSF.

In relation to children's general health, parents were asked to rate their child's health with the following response options: *excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor*. This question was in SRSP and all three waves of LSSF. The analysis focused on the proportion of parents who rated their child's health as fair or poor.

The measure of children's developmental progress was derived from parents' ratings of their child compared with other same-age children in each of the three areas: a) learning or school work; b) getting along with other children of the same age; and c) in most areas of his or her life. Parents were asked to choose one of five response alternatives: *much better, somewhat better, about the same, somewhat worse, and much worse*. These questions were included in both SRSP and LSSF and applied to children aged 4 years and older. Given that the great majority of parents chose one of the three responses—*much better* and *somewhat better* than other same-aged children or *about the same* (see Qu et al., 2014, p. 138)—a binary form of this measure was derived: whether or not children were worse (much or somewhat) than other same-aged children in one or more areas

In LSSF Waves 2 and 3, a set of questions on the child's socio-emotional development were introduced for children aged 4 years and older. Parents were asked to indicate how often their child:

- a) is a happy child/person;
- b) is a confident child/person;
- c) tends to get anxious or worried about things;
- d) behaves in a mature or sensible manner; and
- e) loses his/her temper.

Response options ranged from *all of the time, some of the*

time, sometimes, rarely, and never. Parents' responses were coded from 1 (all of the time) to 5 (never). The five items had a reasonable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.694). A scale of child's socio-emotional development was constructed by taking the mean of responses to the five items. Parents who answered four of the five items were included by taking the mean of their four responses. The scores were then rescaled to 0-10, with higher scores indicating better socio-emotional outcome.

For children aged 1-3 years in LSSF Wave 1 and SRSP, child wellbeing other than general health was measured by the Brief Infant-Toddler Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA) (Briggs-Gowan & Carter, 2006). The measure is designed to identify children who show signs of socio-emotional problems (e.g. unhappiness, nervousness, tenseness, fearfulness, getting angry, crying for no apparent reason, destructiveness, biting or kicking parents, not making eye contact, avoiding physical contact). There were 14 questions about the children's behaviours in the last month prior to the interview. Parents' ratings to each item were: 0 (not true/rarely), 1 (somewhat true/sometimes), or 2 (very true/often). The behavioural problem scale for children aged 1-3 years was derived by the sum of responses to the 14 items. Possible scores range from 0-28, with higher scores indicating relatively problematic socio-emotional development.

3.3.3 Analytical approach

This part of the report first describes separated parents' reports of their experiences of family violence across waves of LSSF and SRSP and the persistence of such experience, then presents the reports on the quality of the inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, and financial hardships, as well as their link with experiences of family violence. The analysis was taken from both cross-sectional and longitudinal perspectives.

The report examines the extent to which parent-child relationships, parenting stress, care-time workability, and child wellbeing were linked with parents' reported experiences of family violence, and these outcome domains form separate sections throughout the rest of this part. For each outcome variable, both bivariate and multivariate analyses were carried out for fathers and mothers separately. The bivariate analyses for each gender were taken separately for three broad care-time groups: a) 100 percent of nights with the mother (the father may or may not have daytime contact with the study child); 66-99 percent of nights with the mother and 1-34 percent of nights with the father; b) shared time (35-65% with each parent); and c) 66-100 percent of nights with the father and 0-34 percent of nights with the mother. These categories were

3.4 Experience of family violence, quality of inter-parental relationships, and safety concerns

consistent with previous reports based on the two datasets (Kaspiew et al., 2009; de Maio et al., 2013). For each outcome variable, the analyses first examined its cross-sectional link with parents' reports of experiences of family violence in SRSP and each wave of LSSF, then its longitudinal link focused on the outcome after separation (e.g. LSSF Wave 3, about 5 years since separation), and experiences of family violence before or during separation.

The multivariate analyses were conducted for each outcome variable for fathers and mothers separately. Again, the analyses were from both cross-sectional and longitudinal perspectives. The cross-sectional multivariate analyses (also called multivariate analyses based on cross-sectional data) are adopted so that potential confounding variables such as demographic characteristics are controlled. In this part, the analyses of family violence for an outcome variable (e.g. parent-child relationship) involved a series of regression models with progressively more blocks of control variables—children's characteristics (age and gender) and care-time arrangements; parental characteristics (e.g. education, employment status); inter-parental relationship and safety concerns; financial hardship; and parents' emotional health. This approach enabled the examination of whether the strength of the relationship between experiences of family violence and the outcome variable changed with the inclusion of a new block of control variables. Similarly, the longitudinal multivariate analyses were based on the LSSF data. The analyses examined whether any link between the outcome variable at about 5 years after separation and experiences of family violence before or during separation continued or became weakened with progressively more blocks of control variables (with an additional block on recent experiences of family violence in the past 12 months before the interview at Wave 3).

This section provides an overall description of parents' reports of experiences of family violence inflicted by the other parent of their child before, during, and after separation, as well as the extent to which parents said they continued to have such experiences. The analyses then direct attention to the impacts of violence or abuse on the quality of inter-parental relationships, safety concerns, and financial difficulties.

3.4.1 Prevalence of violence and abuse

Table 3.2 shows parents' reports of experiences of physical hurt, emotional abuse alone, or neither in SRSP and each LSSF wave. As indicated in Table 3.2, of parents who reported experiences of physical hurt in SRSP and each LSSF wave, at least 95 percent also reported that their child's other parent had engaged in at least one form of abusive behaviour (i.e. emotional abuse). For this reason, we derived the proportions of parents who reported experiencing physical hurt or emotional abuse alone.¹⁰ Also, as noted in Table 3.1, forms of emotional abuse enquired about during the surveys varied across SRSP and LSSF waves (varying from seven to 11 forms). In Table 3.2, the experiences of emotional abuse refer to having experienced at least one of all the forms asked in SRSP and each LSSF wave. The overall pattern of trends did not change significantly when attention was restricted to physical hurt and the seven forms of emotional abuse asked about in each survey wave (results not shown).

Firstly, the gendered patterns of reports of experiences of violence or abuse were apparent. Regardless of the time frames in relation to experiences of violence or abuse, mothers were more likely than fathers to indicate that their child's other parent had physically hurt them. Around one-quarter of mothers had been physically hurt before separation (LSSF Wave 1: 24%; SRSP: 26%), compared with one in six fathers (LSSF Wave 1: 17%; SRSP: 16%). The reports of experiences of physical hurt substantially reduced after separation (Wave 2: 4-5%; Wave 3: around 2%; SRSP: 5-6%), although a gendered

¹⁰ All forms of physical hurt would also represent emotional abuse, assuming that victims would generally appreciate that the perpetrator is capable of repeating such behaviour. Indeed, some may conclude that the perpetrator might well inflict new forms of abuse than any so far experienced or that the frequency and severity of abuse experienced could escalate. It should also be noted that some parents may not appreciate that certain behaviours are abusive. On balance, it was decided to classify the Wave 3 question on attempts to force unwanted sexual activities as emotional abuse, even though such behaviour may have involved bodily assault. As noted above, more than half of those who reported experiencing these attempts also indicated that the other parent had never hurt them physically. Some of the other behaviours, here classified as emotionally abusive, may have also entailed direct physical assault (e.g. attempts to prevent use of the telephone or car).

Table 3.2 Reports of experiences of violence or abuse by gender, LSSF waves and SRSP (2012)

	LSSF			SRSP	
	Wave 1 Before/during separation (%)	Wave 2 Last 12 months (%)	Wave 3 Last 12 months (%)	Before/during separation (%)	Since separation (%)
Father's report					
Physical hurt ^a	16.8	3.9	1.5	16.0	4.7
Emotional abuse (any form) and no physical hurt	36.4	41.6	36.4	43.2	51.7
Neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse	46.8	54.5	62.1	40.9	43.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Any emotional abuse (with or without physical hurt)	52.1	45.3	37.9	58.2	55.8
Mother's report					
Physical hurt ^a	26.0	4.7	2.2	23.9	6.3
Emotional abuse (any form) and no physical hurt	39.0	48.7	41.0	45.4	56.5
Neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse	35.0	46.6	56.8	30.8	37.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Any emotional abuse (with or without physical hurt)	63.9	53.3	43.2	68.4	62.5

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. LSSF Wave 3 data were based on the combined reports of the continuing and top-up samples. The number of parents represented in each survey wave varies.

a. Includes a small number of parents who had been physically hurt but did not report whether they received any emotional abuse. Some of these forms of emotional abuse may have included direct physical assault that did not cause physical hurt. Percentages may not total exactly 100% due to rounding.

pattern was still visible in the data.¹¹ Therefore, separation did come with a reduction in the extent to which physical hurt was reported by a majority of parents who had experienced this form of violence or abuse before or during separation, particularly for mothers.

Mothers were also more likely than fathers to report experiences of at least one form of emotional abuse. Mothers were slightly more likely than fathers to report experiences of emotional abuse alone, both before and after separation for both surveys. With the diminution of physical hurt over time, the continuation of violence or abuse reported post-separation was largely in the category of emotional abuse alone (i.e. “past 12 months” in LSSF Waves 2 and 3, and “since separation” in SRSP).

Overall, the proportion of parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse fell with time for both fathers and mothers. This is evident from the three waves of LSSF (fathers: from 53% in Wave 1 to 38% in Wave 3; mothers: from 65% in Wave 1 to 43% in Wave 3), and SRSP data also suggested a slight but significant fall for both fathers (from 59% before or during separation to 56% since separation) and mothers (from 69% to 63%). Mothers were more likely than fathers to report experiences of violence or abuse in each LSSF wave and each SRSP time frame (i.e. before or during and since separation). Conversely higher proportions of fathers than mothers indicated having no experiences of violence or abuse across the LSSF waves and in SRSP.

11 It should be noted that parents in LSSF Waves 2 and 3 reported their experience only on the previous 12 months while their reports in Wave 1 were in relation to before and during separation—an unspecified time frame that likely covered a much longer period for many parents.

Although the surveys collected information on different forms of violence and abuse that separated parents reported to have experienced, such data provided no information as to the nature of the violence or abuse (e.g. severity, motivation, initiation or response, context, etc.) or other nuance regarding the violence or abuse experienced. In other words, the variables of violence or abuse used in this report were quite crude. In SRSP and LSSF, a subgroup of participants were former couples (i.e. both members of a former couple participated in the survey) and their reports of experiences of violence or abuse may provide some indication of directions of the violence or abuse.

Table 3.3 focuses on the sub-sample of separated parents who were former couples in LSSF Wave 1 (1843 former couples) and shows each parent's report of violence or abuse before and during separation. For nearly eight in ten former couples, at least one parent reported experiencing physical hurt or emotional abuse before or during separation. Bi-directional experiences of physical hurt before or during separation (i.e. both father and mother reported experiences of physical hurt inflicted by the other parent) applied to one in ten of all former couples and bi-directional experiences of emotional abuse alone applied to nearly one-fifth of the former couples. Of former couples, 7 percent had the mother report physical

hurt but the father report neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse before or during separation, but less than 2% had the father report physical hurt and the mother indicate neither. One-directional emotional abuse alone that was perpetrated by the father (i.e. the mother reported emotional abuse alone before or during separation but the father reported no experiences of violence or abuse at all) was twice as common as the opposite direction of emotional abuse alone (18% vs. 9%). These patterns also applied to SRSP and similar patterns emerged in the data of the two later waves of LSSF (the data are not shown here).

3.4.1.1 Experiences of violence and abuse over time

Table 3.4 sheds some light on experiences of violence and abuse over time. The top panel shows the proportions of the continuing LSSF sample (i.e. parents who participated in three LSSF waves) who reported experiencing some form of violence or abuse in one, two, or all three waves, or reported no such experience in all three waves. The majority of these fathers and mothers indicated that they had experienced violence or abuse during at least one of the periods assessed, with the overall prevalence being higher for mothers than fathers (80% vs. 69%). Conversely, 31 percent of fathers and 20 percent of

Table 3.3 Each parent's report of experiences of violence or abuse before and during separation, former couples of LSSF Wave 1

		Mother's report, before/during separation			
		Physical hurt	Emotional abuse alone	Neither	Total
Father's report before/during separation	Physical hurt	9.5	4.7	1.5	15.7
	Emotional abuse alone	9.8	18.7	8.7	37.2
	Neither	6.7	18.3	22.1	47.2
	Total	26.0	41.6	32.4	100.0

Notes: The table was based on 1843 former couples in LSSF Wave 1. Percentages may not total exactly 100% due to rounding.

mothers indicated that they had not experienced violence or abuse in any of these periods. A higher proportion of mothers than fathers reported experiencing violence or abuse in all three waves (29% and 21% respectively), suggesting, overall, a significant minority of parents had ongoing experiences of violence or abuse in some form.

The middle panel in Table 3.4 shows the experiences of violence or abuse before or during and after separation according to LSSF, and the last panel presents this data from SRSP:

- Fathers and mothers most commonly reported experiencing violence or abuse both before or during and after separation, with mothers being more likely than fathers to indicate such experience.

- The second most common experience reported was no violence or abuse in either period, which was reported by more fathers than mothers.
- The other two scenarios were less commonly reported (LSSF: 14-16%; SRSP: 6-13%) and applied to similar proportions of mothers and fathers. These two groups' experiences of violence or abuse over time were: such experience before or during separation but not after separation; and such experience after separation but not before or during separation.

Table 3.4 Reports of experiences of violence or abuse before and after separation, by gender, LSSF and SRSP

	Fathers (%)	Mothers (%)
LSSF: Violence and abuse experiences		
Indicated in all three waves	21.4	28.5
Indicated in one wave alone	24.8	25.8
Indicated in two waves	23.0	25.4
Not indicated in any wave	30.8	20.3
LSSF: Before/during or since separation		
Both before/during and since separation	40.2	49.8
Before/during separation, not since separation	13.6	15.8
Since separation, not before/during separation	15.4	14.1
Neither before/during nor since separation	30.8	20.3
Number of parents	2136	2304
SRSP: Violence and abuse experiences		
Both before/during and since separation	48.4	56.6
Before/during separation, not since separation	10.7	12.6
Since separation, not before/during separation	8.2	6.4
Neither before/during nor since separation	32.7	24.4
Number of parents	2811	3215

Note: Percentages were based on weighted data

The reported experiences of violence or abuse over time suggest that violence or abuse appeared to persist or re-occur for some parents. Specifically, the number of parents who reported experiencing violence or abuse both before or during and after separation was greater than that of parents who indicated this experience in one of the two time periods. Table 3.5 further reveals the link between violence or abuse post-separation and such experiences during and before separation. The table sets out the extent to which parents reported experiences of violence or abuse in the two later waves of LSSF, or since separation in SRSP, according to whether they reported experiences of physical hurt, emotional abuse, or neither before or during separation (in LSSF this was reported in Wave 1). Regardless of gender, parents who indicated physical hurt before separation were the most likely to report experiences of violence or abuse after separation (82-88%),

followed by those who experienced emotional abuse alone (71-80%). Parents who did not experience violence or abuse at all before or during separation were the least likely to report violence or abuse after separation (20-33%). LSSF data on the proportions experiencing violence or abuse in both Waves 2 and 3 provide further support to the link between post-separation and pre-separation violence or abuse experiences.

Table 3.5 Reports of experiences of violence or abuse since separation by experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse before and during separation, by gender, LSSF and SRSP

	Experience before/duration separation		
	Physical hurt	Emotional abuse no physical hurt	Neither
LSSF: violence or abuse in Wave 2 and or Wave 3			
Fathers	83.9%	70.9%	33.4%
Both Wave 2 and Wave 3	55.7%	33.0%	9.1%
One wave: Wave 2 or Wave 3	28.2%	37.9%	24.3%
Mothers	82.8%	71.8%	40.9%
Both Wave 2 and Wave 3	54.4%	36.9%	11.9%
One wave: Wave 2 or Wave 3	28.4%	34.9%	29.1%
SRSP: violence or abuse since separation			
Fathers	87.3%	79.9%	20.0%
Mothers	88.1%	78.5%	20.7%

Note: Percentages were based on weighted data.

3.4.2 Experiences of family violence and inter-parental relationships

Most parents were able to get along or maintain a working relationship with each other after separation (see Qu et al. 2014; de Maio et al., 2013). In SRSP and each LSSF wave, most fathers and mothers described their relationship with their child's other parent as either friendly or cooperative (fathers: 60-64%; mothers: 56-63%). A distant relationship was the third most common depiction (fathers and mothers: 19-27%), followed by the type of relationship with a lot of conflict (fathers: 11-14%; mothers: 11-13%). Few parents described the relationship as fearful (fathers: 3% across waves; mothers: 5-7%). LSSF data suggest that distant relationships increased with time, while friendly relationships declined (Table 3.6). There was no apparent change across three LSSF waves in the proportions of parents who reported a fearful relationship with their child's other parent.

Table 3.6 Quality of inter-parental relationship by gender, LSSF waves and SRSP

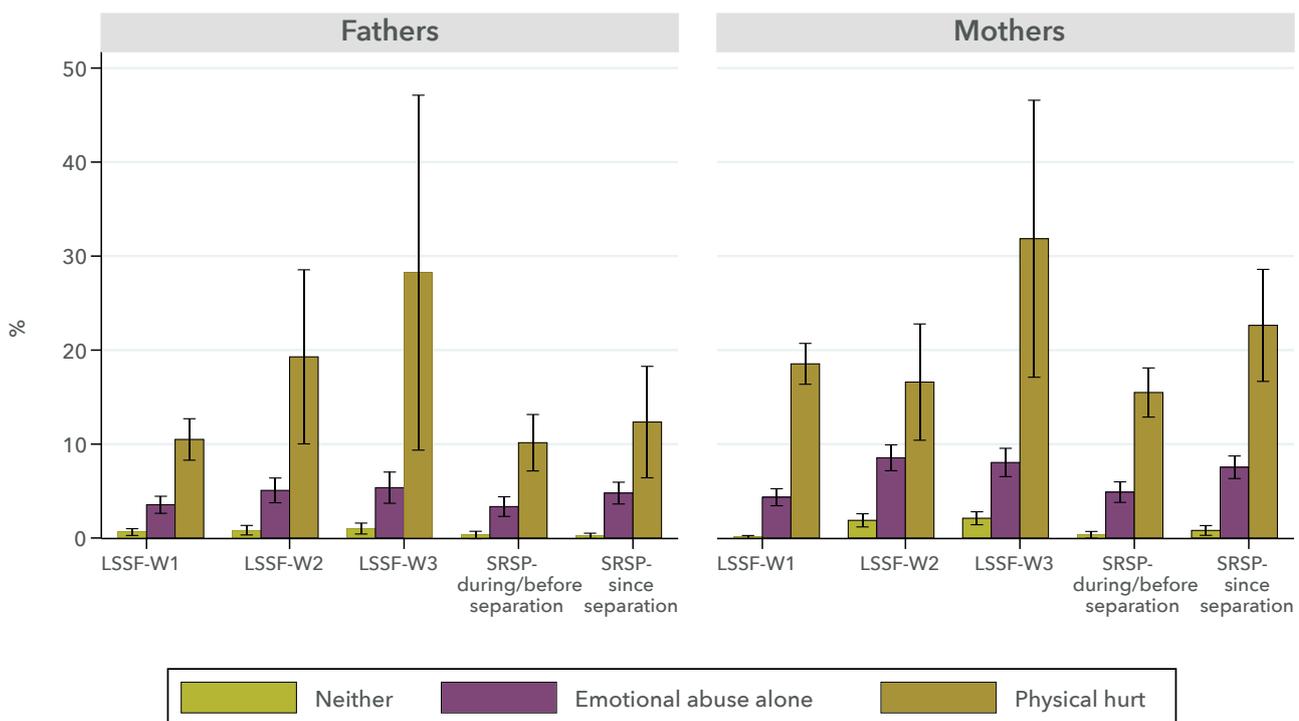
	LSSF			SRSP
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	
LSSF: Violence and abuse experiences	%	%	%	%
Friendly	35.7	31.1	29.1	32.1
Cooperative	27.8	29.1	30.8	30.0
Distant	19.2	24.4	26.5	22.5
Lot of conflict	14.0	12.2	10.7	12.3
Fearful	3.4	3.3	3.0	3.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of parents	4860	3203	4409	2795
Mothers' reports	%	%	%	%
Friendly	34.2	28.5	28.2	30.4
Cooperative	27.5	28.4	28.2	32.1
Distant	18.8	24.1	27.0	19.0
Lot of conflict	13.1	13.1	11.3	12.6
Fearful	6.5	5.8	5.3	5.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of parents	4927	3355	4149	3208

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Parents' reports of experiences of violence and abuse were also reflected in their reports of the perceived quality of inter-parental relationships, with two variables being clearly correlated. Although a small proportion of parents reported a fearful relationship with their child's other parent overall, this was far greater among parents who experienced violence or abuse than parents who did not report these experiences. Figure 3.1 depicts the proportion of parents reporting fearful relationships by whether parents indicated experiences of physical hurt, emotional abuse alone, or neither. Of the three groups, fathers and mothers with experiences of physical hurt were the most likely to indicate a fearful inter-parental relationship, followed by those who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone. Parents who did not have experiences of violence or abuse were the least likely to report a fearful inter-parental relationship. This pattern applied to both fathers and mothers in each LSSF wave and SRSP. Mothers who reported experiences of physical hurt in the last 12 months in LSSF Wave 3 were the most likely of all gender-violence or

abuse groups to have a fearful relationship with their child's other parent (32%). Fearful inter-parental relationships were also high among fathers who reported experiences of physical hurt in the last 12 months in LSSF Wave 3 (28%). It is worth reiterating that, as discussed above (Table 3.2), experiences of physical hurt diminished with time, dropping to around 2 percent of parents indicating such experiences by Wave 3 (about five years after separation).

Figure 3.1 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as fearful by reports of experience abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP



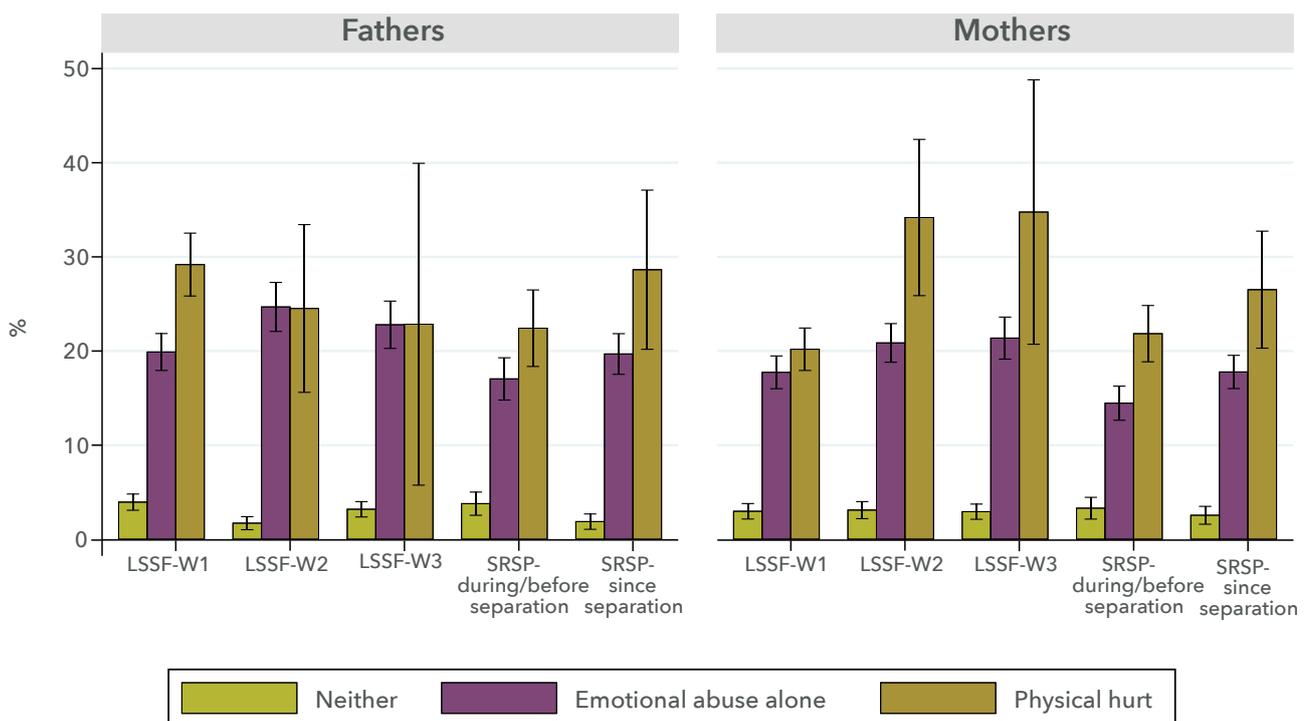
Note: The I bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars between violence/abuse categories represent significant differences.

Figure 3.2 shows the proportion of parents reporting a conflictual inter-parental relationship by experiences of violence or abuse. Parents who indicated experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse alone were more likely than parents without experiences of violence or abuse to report a conflictual relationship. This was apparent for both fathers and mothers in all three LSSF waves and SRSP. However, the differences between parents who reported experiences of physical hurt and those who had experiences of emotional abuse alone were less apparent in reports of conflictual relationships than in reports of fearful relationships.

It is clear that the poor quality of inter-parental relationship was associated with violence or abuse. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 suggest that experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation appear to have longer-term associations with the quality of inter-parental relationship. Fearful and conflictual relationships in LSSF Waves 2 and 3 were the most common among fathers and mothers who had experienced physical

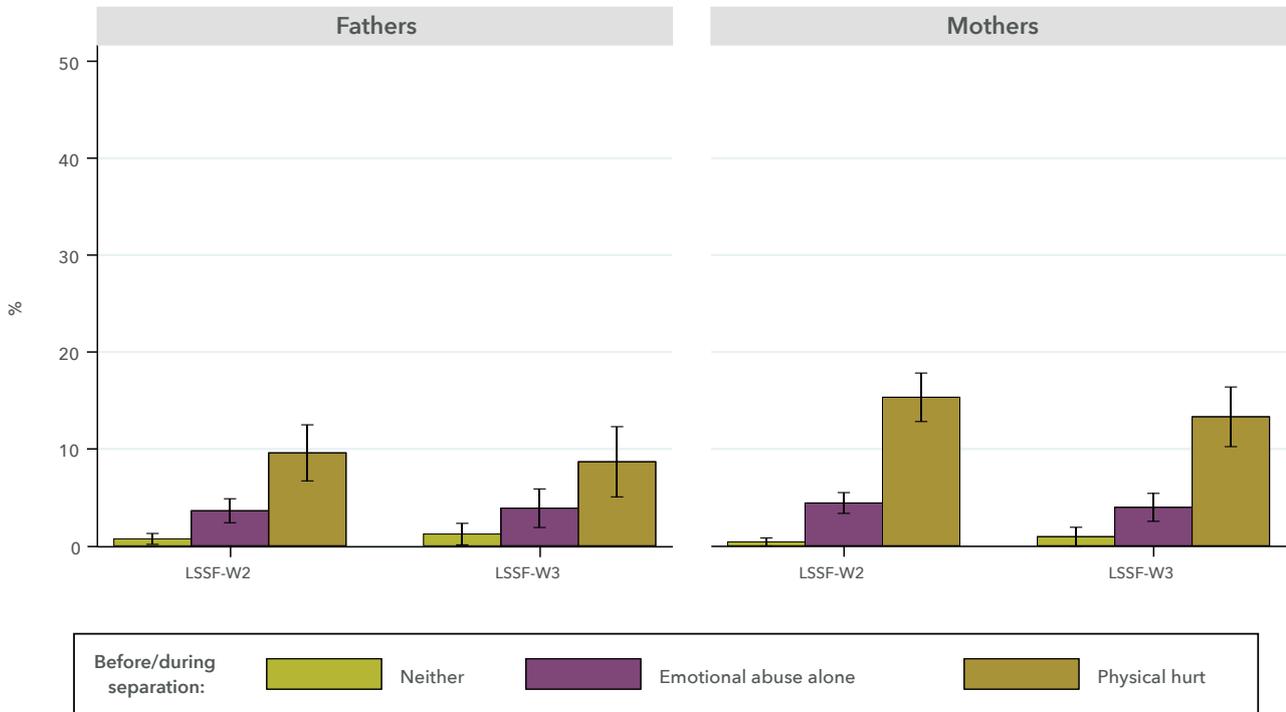
hurt before separation, followed by those who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone before or during separation. Parents who reported no violence or abuse before or during separation were the least likely to report a poor quality of inter-parental relationship. For example, 27 percent of mothers who reported physical hurt before separation described the relationship with their child's other parent as either fearful or having a lot of conflict in Wave 3, and 15 percent of mothers who reported emotional abuse alone before or during separation provided such a depiction. By contrast, fearful and conflictual relationships were reported in Wave 3 by 5 percent of mothers who indicated no experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation.

Figure 3.2 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as featuring lots of conflict by reports of experience abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP



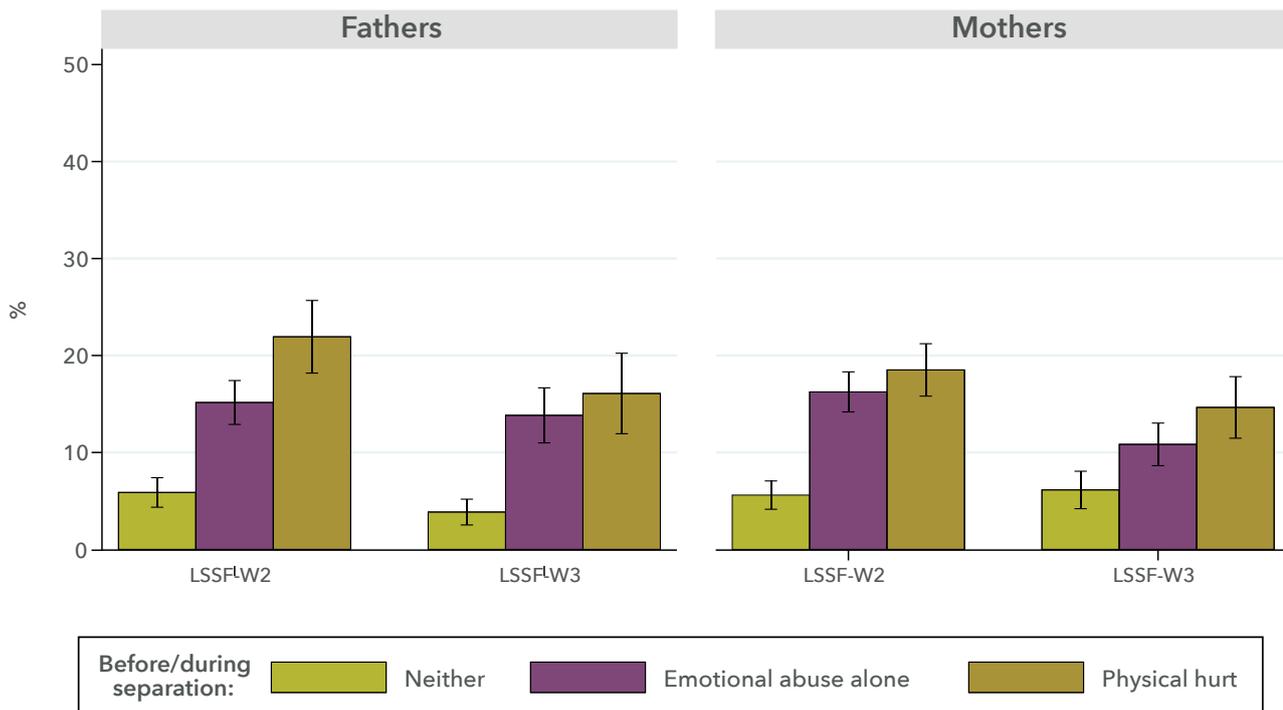
Note: The I bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars between violence/abuse categories represent significant differences.

Figure 3.3 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as fearful by reports of experiencing abuse or violence before or during separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF



Note: The I bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars between violence/abuse categories represent significant differences.

Figure 3.4 Proportion of parents who described the quality of inter-parental relationship as featuring lots of conflict by reports of experiencing abuse or violence before or during separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF



Note: The I bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars between violence/abuse categories represent significant differences.

3.4.3 Experiences of family violence and safety concerns

The earlier discussion shows that pre-separation violence affected the quality of the inter-parental relationship after parental separation and the influence continued even 5 years after separation. This section examines whether there is a link between family violence and parents' safety concerns. As shown in Table 3.7, a substantial minority of parents in each LSSF wave and in SRSP expressed that they had safety concerns for themselves or their child as a result of the child's ongoing contact with the other parent, with safety concerns being reported more by mothers (18-20%) than by fathers (13-17%). LSSF data suggests that safety concerns appeared to diminish slightly (but statistically significantly) with the duration of separation, from 16 per cent in Wave 1 to 13 per cent in Wave 3 as reported by fathers and from 20 per cent to 18 per cent during the same period based on mothers' reports.

The strong link between experiences of violence or abuse and the report of safety concerns is apparent in Figure 3.5, and the pattern was also apparent in each LSSF wave and the SRSP. The reports of safety concerns were particularly prevalent among parents who had also reported experiences of physical hurt (fathers: 31-48%; mothers: 40-54%), and, to a lesser extent, among parents who had reported emotional abuse alone (fathers: 18-25%; mothers: 22-32%). By contrast, few parents who reported not experiencing violence or abuse had expressed having safety concerns (fathers: 3-5%; mothers: 3-7%).

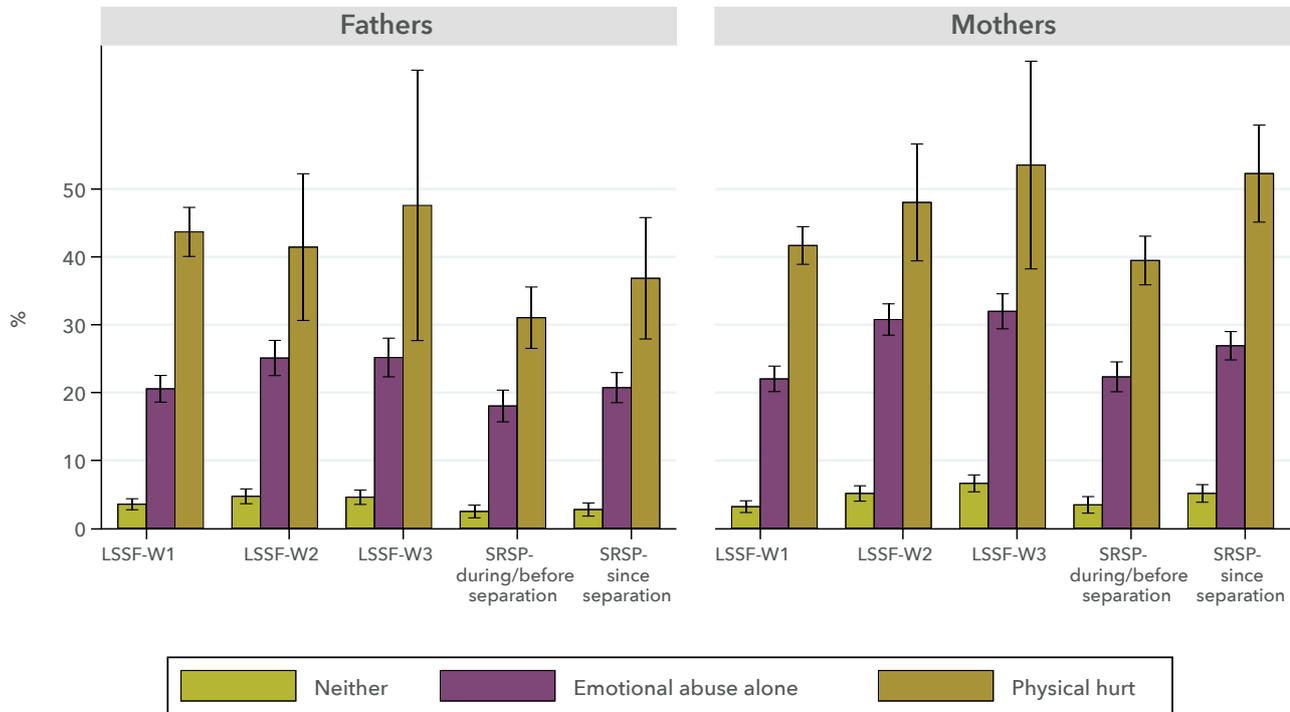
Figure 3.6 shows the continuing link between experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation and safety concerns at two later waves of LSSF. Over one-third of parents who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation also reported having safety concerns in Wave 2, though the proportions fell slightly by Wave 3 (30% of fathers and mothers). Of parents who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone before or during separation, 17 percent of fathers and 21 percent of mothers had safety concerns in Wave 2, and the prevalence reduced slightly to 15 percent and 18 percent respectively in Wave 3. The

Table 3.7 Proportions of parents who reported having safety concerns as a result of child's ongoing contact with other parent

	LSSF			SRSP 2012
	Wave 1 (%)	Wave 2 (%)	Wave 3 (%)	(%)
Fathers' reports				
Had concerns	16.4	14.6	12.9	13.7
No concerns	83.6	85.4	87.2	86.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of parents	4871	3220	4375	2797
Mothers' reports				
Had concerns	20.4	19.6	18.0	20.3
No concerns	79.6	80.4	82.0	79.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of parents	4919	3399	4141	3199

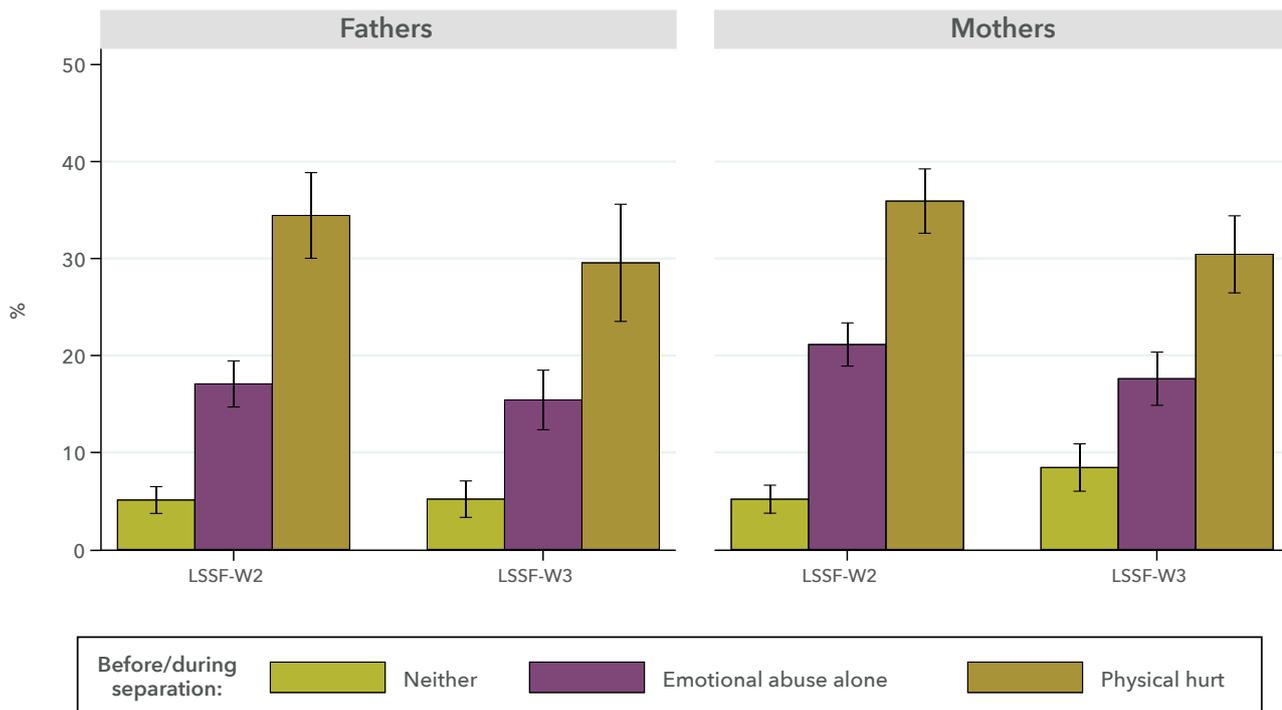
Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0% due to rounding.

Figure 3.5 Proportion of parents who had safety concerns by reports of experiences of abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP



Note: The I bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars between violence/abuse categories represent significant differences.

Figure 3.6 Proportion of parents who had safety concerns by reports of experiences of abuse or violence during or before separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF



Note: The I bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars between violence/abuse categories represent significant differences.

proportions of parents without pre-separation experiences of violence or abuse who had safety concerns were small in the two later LSSF waves—5-8 percent of fathers and mothers without experience of violence or abuse before or during separation. The continuing effect of violence or abuse on parents' safety concerns is not surprising, given that some form of pre-separation violence or abuse tended to continue after separation (as evident in Table 3.5).

3.4.4 Experiences of family violence and financial hardship

Prior research highlights the financial impacts of family violence on victims, especially for women (see the review by Lodge et al., 2011). The financial consequences can be indirect, such as through negative effects of violence or abuse on victims' employment. This section looks into the extent to which separated parents experienced financial hardship according to their experiences of violence or abuse.

Table 3.8 presents the extent to which all parents reported experiences of financial hardships after separation. About 1

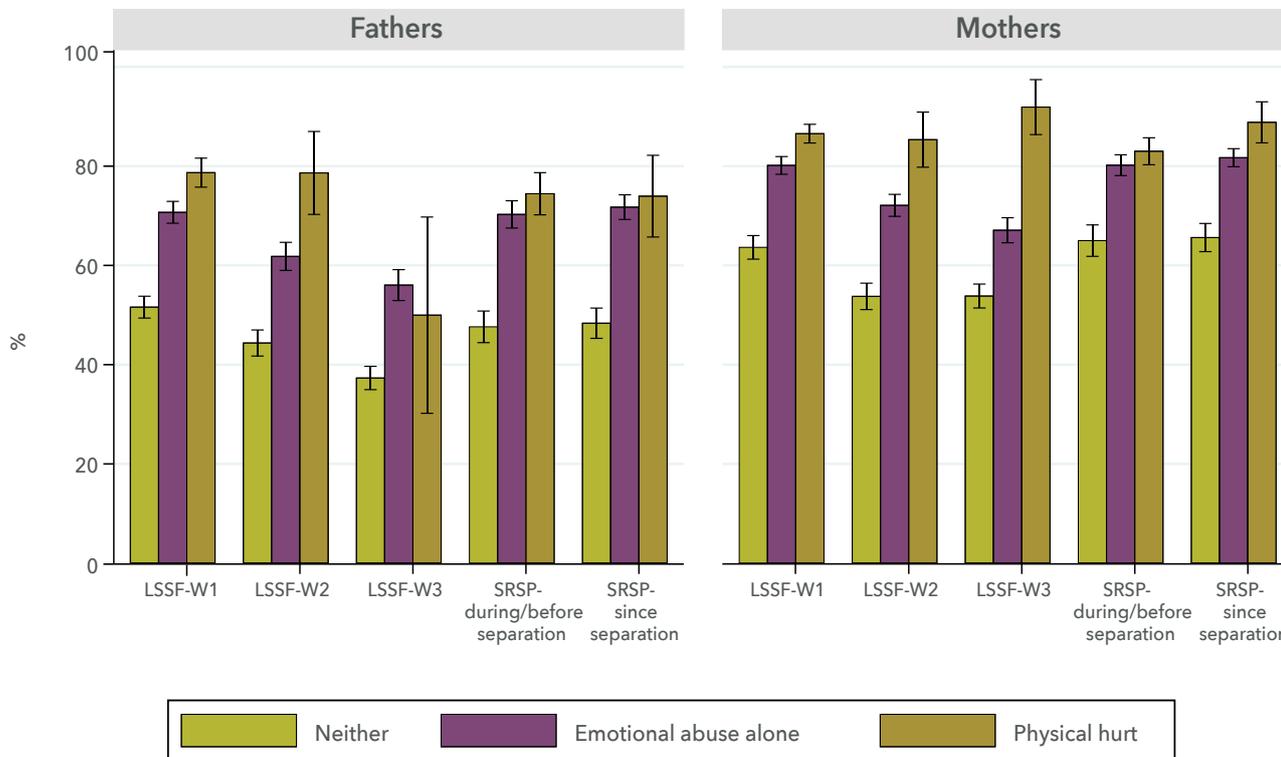
year after separation (i.e. LSSF Wave 1 and SRSP), the majority of parents reported at least one form of financial hardship (61-63% of fathers; 76% of mothers), with many parents reporting three or more forms of financial hardships (30-32% of fathers; 40-42% of mothers). The proportion of parents who reported experiences of financial hardship fell with the increasing duration of separation. By LSSF Wave 3 (about 5 years after separation), 46 percent of fathers and 60 percent of mothers reported experiencing at least one form of financial hardship in the 12 months prior to the interview. The fall in reports of multiple financial hardships over the three LSSF waves was also evident for both fathers and mothers. However, a higher proportion of mothers than fathers reported experiences of financial hardships across SRSP and three LSSF waves. Mothers were also more likely than fathers to have multiple financial hardships at the four data time points.

Table 3.8 Proportions of parents who reported experiencing financial hardship

	LSSF			SRSP 2012 (since separation)
	Wave 1 (since separation)	Wave 2 (in the last 12 months)	Wave 3 (in the last 12 months)	
Fathers' reports	%	%	%	%
None	37.0	47.0	55.5	38.6
One	19.5	17.3	14.3	17.3
Two	13.6	11.3	10.5	12.5
Three or more	29.9	24.3	19.7	31.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of parents	4970	3237	4509	2853
Mothers' reports	%	%	%	%
None	24.0	35.8	40.1	23.9
One	20.2	19.0	17.8	18.2
Two	16.8	14.4	14.7	15.7
Three or more	38.9	30.8	27.4	42.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Number of parents	5011	3412	4262	3262

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding. Three waves of LSSF included eight types of financial difficulties and SRSP 2012 contained nine types of financial difficulties.

Figure 3.7 Proportion of parents who experienced financial hardships by reports of experiences of abuse or violence, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3 and SRSP



Note: Three waves of LSSF included eight types of financial difficulties and SRSP 2012 contained nine types of financial difficulties. The time frame of financial difficulties referred to since separation for LSSF Wave 1 and SRSP, and the last 12 months for LSSF Wave 2 and Wave 3. The "I" bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars represent significant differences.

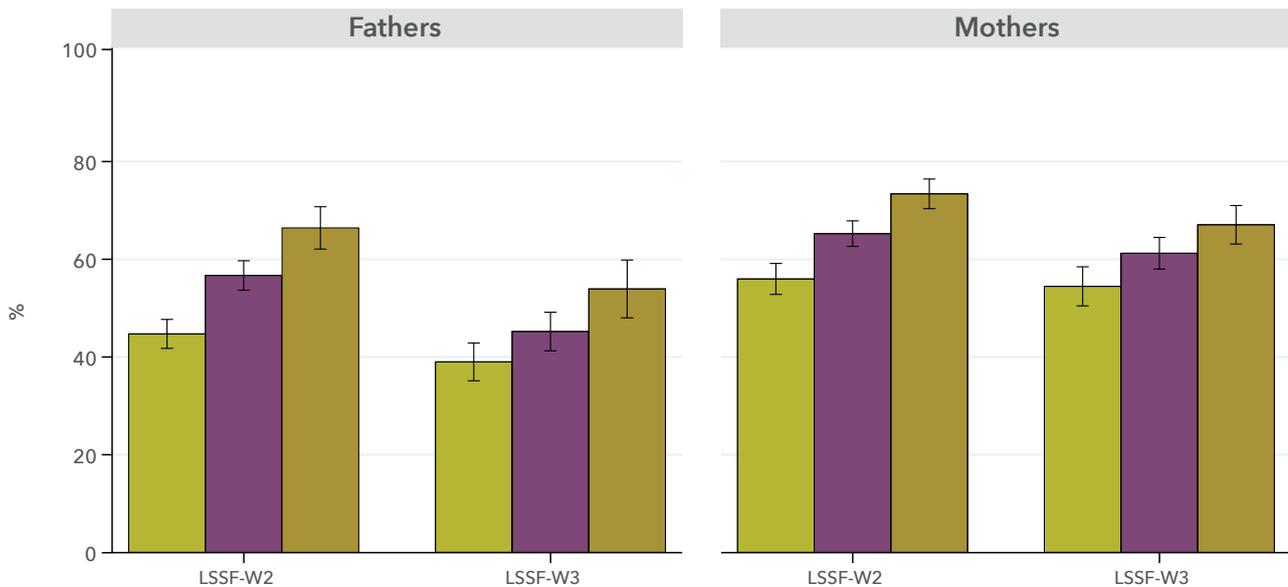
It is clear from Figure 3.7 that reports of financial hardship were associated with the experiences of violence or abuse for both fathers and mothers. Regardless of gender, parents who reported experiences of physical hurt were the most likely of the three groups to report financial hardship (of at least one form), followed by those who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone. Parents who reportedly experienced neither emotional abuse nor physical hurt were the least likely to report any financial hardship. These patterns were consistent across SRSP and the three LSSF waves with one exception. The exception concerns fathers in LSSF Wave 3, where the proportion of fathers who experienced emotional abuse alone and financial hardship was higher than it was among fathers who experienced physical hurt and financial hardship, though the difference between these two groups of fathers was not statistically significant.¹² Nevertheless, both father groups were more likely than fathers who reported

neither emotional abuse nor physical hurt to experience any financial hardship.

While the cross-sectional data show a clear link between the experiences of violence or abuse and financial hardship, the question is whether this link continued in the longer term. Figure 3.8 sheds some light on this issue, with LSSF data suggesting that the link continued to be apparent 5 years after separation. In LSSF Wave 3, parents with pre-separation experiences of physical hurt were the most likely of the three groups to experience any financial hardship (54% of fathers and 67% of mothers), followed by those with pre-separation emotional abuse (45% of fathers and 61% of mothers). By contrast, parents without pre-separation experiences of violence or abuse were comparatively less likely to report any financial hardship in LSSF Wave 3 (39% of fathers and 55% of mothers), 5 years post-separation. Similar patterns applied to LSSF Wave 2 (about 2-3 years after separation).

¹² The number of fathers who reported experiences of physical hurt in the 12 months prior to the wave 3 interview was very small (n = 48 out of 4522).

Figure 3.8 Proportion of parents who had financial difficulties by reports of experiences of abuse or violence during or before separation (reported in Wave 1), LSSF



Note: Three waves of LSSF included eight types of financial difficulties. The time frame of financial difficulties referred to the last 12 months for LSSF Wave 2 and Wave 3. The "I" bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals. Non-overlapping bars represent significant differences.

3.4.5 Summary

The two surveys of separated parents provide evidence that suggests experiences of family violence were fairly common. Around one-quarter of mothers and less than one-fifth of fathers reported experiences of physical hurt before separation and almost all of these parents also reported experience of at least one form of emotional abuse. Reports of experiences of emotional abuse alone before or during separation were even more prevalent—around four in ten fathers and mothers. Separation appeared to reduce the risk of experiencing physical hurt, with around 2 percent of parents reporting such experiences in the previous 12 months when interviewed approximately 5 years after separation. Nevertheless, experiences of emotional abuse alone remained prevalent over time. Gendered patterns were apparent, with a higher proportion of mothers than fathers reporting having experienced physical hurt. The analysis further revealed that parents who had experienced violence or abuse before or during separation were at greater risk of experiencing some form of violence or abuse after separation.

The experience of violence or abuse had negative associations with the quality of the inter-parental relationship, and was associated with safety concerns and experiences of financial hardship. These patterns were consistent with the two survey datasets at different post-separation time points. More importantly, the data suggest that experiences of violence or abuse had longer-term effects on these aspects. Specifically, parents who experienced violence or abuse before or during separation had poorer inter-parental relationships, and were more likely to have safety concerns and to experience financial hardship about 5 years after separation compared with parents who had not reported experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation.

3.5 Parent-child relationships

This section focuses on parent-child relationships. It first outlines general patterns of parents' ratings of their satisfaction with their relationships with their children and then examines how their views differed according to their reported experiences of violence or abuse at different time points of separation. The analysis also looks into whether experiences of violence or abuse have longer term effects on parent-child relationships. Multivariate analyses are also applied in examining links between violence or abuse and parent-child relationships.

3.5.1 General patterns in parent-child relationships

Separated parents in general provided high ratings of satisfaction with their relationship with their child, more so for mothers than for fathers overall. On a scale of 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied), the mean ratings ranged from 7.74 to 8.0 for fathers and from 8.81 to 9.05 for mothers, as shown in Table 3.9. The proportions of parents who reported high satisfaction (ratings of 8-10) were 68-73 percent for fathers and 87-89 percent for mothers across two LSSF waves and SRSP (data not show in the table). The two LSSF waves and the SRSP represent different time points after separation, with the mean duration of separation being 17 months for SRSP, 28 months for LSSF Wave 2, and 5 years for LSSF Wave 3. The general sentiment of satisfaction with their relationship with their children applied to the different lengths of time after separation that are represented by SRSP and the two later LSSF waves.¹³

Most children spend most or all of their care-time with their mother after parental separation and thus the differential ratings of parent-child relationship satisfaction between fathers and mothers may reflect this pattern of care-time arrangements. In Table 3.9, parents were divided into three groups:

- 1) those whose child was in their care for 66-100 percent of nights per year (here called parents with majority care-time);
- 2) those whose child was in their care for 0-34 percent of nights per year (here called parents with minority care-time); and
- 3) parents in shared care-time (35-65% of nights per year).

Of parents with majority care-time, fathers and mothers showed a similar level of satisfaction in their relationship with their child in SRSP and LSSF Wave 2. Nevertheless, mothers were slightly more satisfied than fathers by LSSF Wave 3 (meaning ratings: 9.13 and 8.93 respectively) and the difference was

statistically significant. Fathers and mothers with shared care-time were similar in their ratings of satisfaction in their relationship with their child, and none of the gender differences were statistically significant in the two LSSF waves and SRSP.

Of parents with minority care-time, mothers were less satisfied than fathers and this pattern was more apparent over time in LSSF Wave 3 than it was in LSSF Wave 2 and SRSP. Nevertheless, the gender difference in LSSF Wave 2 was not statistically significant and it is worth noting that the number of mothers in LSSF Wave 2 in this category was small (3.3% of mothers had minority care-time at LSSF Wave 2).

Parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their child was strongly associated with the gender of the parent, as well as with care-time arrangements. Overall, mothers reported significantly higher satisfaction with their relationships to the study child than did fathers. Parents who had majority care-time were more likely to report being satisfied with their relationship with their child than those who had minority care-time. Parents with shared care-time were also more satisfied on average than those who had minority care-time but less satisfied than parents with majority care-time. These patterns applied to both fathers and mothers across SRSP and the two LSSF waves. For example, in SRSP, mean ratings of relationship satisfaction with children were 9.15 for fathers with majority care-time, 8.79 for shared care-time fathers, and 7.18 for fathers with minority care-time, while the mean ratings for the three groups of mothers in SRSP were 9.23, 8.78 and 6.60, respectively.

¹³ Parents in LSSF Wave 2 whose child was younger than 4 years old were not asked this question.

Table 3.9 Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child

Survey	Mean satisfaction with relationship with study child	
	Fathers	Mothers
SRSP	7.74	9.05***
LSSF Wave 2 (children aged +4 years)	8.00	8.81***
LSSF Wave 3	7.81	8.98***
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)		
SRSP	9.15	9.23
LSSF Wave 2 (children aged +4 years)	8.88	8.95
LSSF Wave 3	8.93	9.13*
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights per year)		
SRSP	7.18	6.60*
LSSF Wave 2 (children aged +4 years)	7.46	7.17
LSSF Wave 3	7.25	6.57**
Shared care-time parents (35-65% of nights)		
SRSP	8.79	8.78
LSSF Wave 2 (children aged +4 years)	8.81	8.86
LSSF Wave 3	8.87	8.98

Notes: Figures were based on weighted data. Whether difference between fathers and mothers is statistically significant is tested based on regression analysis (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

3.5.2 Experiences of family violence and parent-child relationships

Parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their child was linked to their experiences of family violence, as shown in Table 3.10. The table presents mean ratings of parental satisfaction with their relationship with their child compared to reports of experiences of violence or abuse in SRSP and two LSSF waves. For the two LSSF waves, experiences of violence or abuse referred to the time frame of the 12 months prior to the interview. For SRSP, violence or abuse referred to two time frames: a) before or during separation; and b) since separation. Due to the small numbers of parents who reported physical hurt inflicted by the child's other parent after separation (as discussed previously in Section 3.4.1), parents who reported experiences of physical hurt and those

who reported emotional abuse alone were combined as one group. The analysis was carried out separately for fathers and mothers across the three broad care-time groups, given the influence of care-time arrangements on parental satisfaction with the parent-child relationship.

Regardless of gender, care-time arrangements, and survey periods (i.e. SRSP and two LSSF waves), parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse were less satisfied with their relationship with their child compared to those parents without reported experiences of violence or abuse. The differences were statistically significant, with the exception of three groups of parents in LSSF Wave 2 (fathers and mothers with majority care-time and mothers with minority care-time).

Table 3.10 Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their child by experiences of violence or abuse, fathers and mothers

	SRSP				LSSF			
	Violence/abuse before/during separation		Violence/abuse since separation		Wave 2: Violence/abuse in the last 12 months		Wave 3: Violence/abuse in the last 12 months	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Parents with majority time (66-100% of nights)								
Fathers	9.35	9.05*	9.22	9.11	9.00	8.77	9.08	8.68*
Mothers	9.39	9.17***	9.37	9.17***	8.99	8.92	9.18	9.07*
Parents with minority time (0-34% of nights)								
Fathers	8.05	6.54***	7.93	6.54***	7.83	7.06***	7.72	6.59***
Mothers	8.36	6.03***	7.96	6.07***	7.42	6.96	7.27	6.03**
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)								
Fathers	9.06	8.61***	9.02	8.62***	8.92	8.68*	9.06	8.55***
Mothers	9.02	8.63**	9.08	8.60***	9.03	8.74*	9.10	8.84*

Notes: Figures were based on weighted data. Whether difference between fathers and mothers is statistically significant is tested based on regression analysis (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.11 further shows the link between parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their child by experiences of violence or abuse over a longer period of time. The left panel presents the mean ratings of SRSP parents by three groups experiencing violence or abuse:

- neither before or during nor after separation (no violence or abuse reported);
- either before or during separation alone, or since separation alone (one period of violence or abuse reported); and
- both before or during and since separation (violence or abuse reported in both time points).

The right panel shows mean ratings of LSSF parents by their reports of experiences of violence or abuse in all three waves:

- no violence or abuse in all three waves (none);
- violence or abuse reported in one wave only;
- two waves with experiences of violence or abuse reported; and of violence or abuse reported in all three waves.¹⁴
- separate analysis applied to fathers and mothers in the three broad care-time groups.

In SRSP, fathers and mothers who reported experiencing violence or abuse both before or during and since separation were the least satisfied in their relationship with their child, followed by those who reported experiencing violence or abuse either before or during, or since, separation (but not both time frames). Fathers and mothers without reported experiences of violence or abuse were the most satisfied in their relationship with their child. These patterns were consistent across the three care-time groups. These patterns were similarly apparent among LSSF parents: those who reported experiencing violence or abuse in all three waves were the least satisfied in their relationship with their child, while those who had no experiences of violence or abuse reported in all three waves were the most satisfied. Although differences in parental satisfaction with parent-child relationships for LSSF mothers with shared care-time and SRSP fathers with majority care-time were not statistically significant, the patterns were consistent in general.

¹⁴ Reports of experiences of violence or abuse in LSSF Wave 1 referred to incidences that occurred during or before separation.

Table 3.11 Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child (reported in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3) by experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers

	SRSP: Reports of experiences of violence/abuse			LSSF: Number of waves reporting experiences of violence/abuse			
	Neither before nor after separation	Before/during alone or since separation alone	Both before/during and after separation	None	One	Two	Three
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)							
Fathers	9.33	9.10	9.09	9.22	9.00	9.15	8.58*
Mothers	9.45	9.18***	9.17***	9.20	9.16	9.14***	8.95***
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)							
Fathers	8.21	7.25***	6.40***	8.14	7.68	7.31	6.18*
Mothers	8.49	7.11 [#]	5.93***	–	–	–	–
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)							
Fathers	9.05	9.04	8.54***	9.02	9.20	8.86	8.53*
Mothers	9.12	8.83	8.57***	9.31	8.86	9.07	9.04

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. For SRSP, ratings of each of two groups with experiences of violence or abuse were compared with those of the group without such experience. For LSSF, ratings of each of three groups with experiences of violence or abuse were compared with the group having no violence or abuse in all three waves, and statistical significance is marked (based on regression analysis) (# $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$). Numbers of mothers with minority care-time were too small and thus not shown.

The issue of whether experiences of violence or abuse pre-separation had longer-term effects on parent-child relationships was examined using LSSF data. Table 3.12 reports the mean ratings of parental satisfaction with the parent-child relationship as reported by parents in LSSF Wave 3 (about 5 years since separation) according to their reports of experiencing violence or abuse before or during separation, as reported in Wave 1. Parents who reported experiences of physical hurt before or during separation were the least satisfied with their parent-child relationship out of the three groups, followed by parents who reported experiences of emotional abuse before or during separation. Parents who reported neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse were the most satisfied with their relationship with their child. The patterns were apparent across each care-time and gender group, with the differences being particularly marked among fathers and mothers with minority care-time arrangements. Differences lacked statistical significance among fathers and mothers with shared care-time.

Table 3.13 shows a relationship between satisfaction in parent-child relationships and other factors, including the quality of inter-parental relationships, the presence of safety concerns, financial hardship, and parental emotional health. Parents with a conflictual or fearful relationship with their child's other parent were the least satisfied in their relationship with their child, while parents with a friendly or cooperative relationship were the most satisfied out of the three groups. Parents' ratings of satisfaction with parent-child relationships were also significantly lower for those who reported having safety concerns compared to those parents without such concerns. Parents with multiple forms of financial hardship reported lower satisfaction in their parent-child relationship compared with those parents without any hardship. Further, the poorer parental mental health was, the lower the average level of satisfaction that parents reported in their relationship with their child. These patterns applied to both fathers and mothers and were consistent across SRSP and LSSF waves.

Table 3.12 Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child in Wave 3 by experiences of violence or abuse before and during separation (reported in Wave 1), parents who cared for study child at least half of nights per year, LSSF

	Before or during separation (LSSF Wave 1)		
	None	Emotional abuse alone	Physical hurt
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)			
Fathers	9.19	9.05	8.44**
Mothers	9.25	9.04**	9.02**
Parents with minority time (0--34% of nights)			
Fathers	7.62	6.82**	6.73**
Mothers	7.53	6.71**	6.30#
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)			
Fathers	8.99	8.83	8.86
Mothers	9.13	9.05	8.84

Notes: Figures were based on weighted data. The difference in mean ratings between those having experienced abuse/violence and those without such experience is statistically significant as marked (based on regression analysis) (# $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.13 Mean ratings of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child by inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, financial hardship, and parental emotional health, SRSP and LSSF

	SRSP		LSSF Wave 2		LSSF Wave 3	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Inter-parental relationship						
Friendly/cooperative	8.48	9.21	8.49	8.94	8.61	9.1
Distant	6.88***	8.92***	7.57***	8.72**	6.96***	8.94***
Conflictual/fearful	6.14***	8.65***	6.93***	8.57***	6.17***	8.64***
Safety concerns						
No concerns	7.97	9.09	8.13	8.86	7.98	9.05
Had concerns	6.25***	8.92*	7.29***	8.66*	6.75***	8.83**
Financial hardship						
None	8.15	9.2	8.22	8.88	8.04	9.07
One	7.76*	9.06 [†]	7.86**	8.84***	7.74 [†]	9.06
Two or more	7.37***	8.99***	7.76***	8.74 [†]	7.40***	8.88***
Parental emotional health						
Excellent/very good			8.65	9.14	8.42	9.28
Good			8.11***	8.85***	7.61***	8.98***
Fair/poor			7.38***	8.47***	7.06***	8.52***

Notes: Figures were based on weighted data. The difference in mean ratings between a sub-group and the reference group is statistically significant as marked (based on regression analysis) (# $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$), the reference group for each variable is italicised.

3.5.3 Multivariate analysis of parent-child relationships

It is evident in the above bivariate analysis that experiences of violence or abuse are negatively associated with parental satisfaction in parent-child relationships. This negative effect applied to both fathers and mothers, regardless of whether parents had majority care-time, shared care-time, or minority care-time, and the findings were consistent across the SRSP and LSSF surveys. The analysis also suggests that experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation continued to be negatively associated with parental satisfaction in the parent-child relationship 5 years after separation. This section further examines the link between experiences of violence or abuse and parent-child relationships by controlling for characteristics and circumstances of parents and children that may potentially confound the results.

The discussions in sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3 described the link between violence or abuse and the quality of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns. The results showed that the pre-separation violence or abuse continued to have negative impacts on the quality of the inter-parental relationship and increased the risk of safety concerns. Thus, this section also examines the extent to which the negative effect of violence or abuse on the parent-child relationship was mediated through the negative effect violence or abuse had with inter-parental relationships as well as parental emotional health.

Two sets of multivariate analyses were carried out. The first set focused on the cross-sectional data, and the second set of analysis was based on the longitudinal data of LSSF.

Using the first set of cross-sectional analyses, as outlined previously in section 3.3.3, five models of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression were applied to SRSP and each of the two LSSF waves for fathers and mothers separately. In Model 1, children's characteristics (age and gender) and care-time were controlled for. Model 2 had additional control variables of parental characteristics (education, employment, country of birth, Indigenous status, and re-partnering). Model 3 further included variables of the quality of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns. Financial hardship was included in Model 4, while the parents' emotional health was entered in Model 5. (Model 5 was not applied to SRSP because it did not collect data on parent's emotional health.) The results are shown in Tables 3.14.¹⁵ See Box 3.1 for interpretation of the coefficient of OLS models.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that because the parents' ratings of their satisfaction with their relationship with their child were on an ordinal scale of 0-10, the OLS regression may be regarded as a less suitable model choice compared with other regression modelling such as ordered logit model. For this reason, the ordered logit models were applied and these generated similar results. Nevertheless, the results of OLS regressions are presented in Table 3.14 instead because of their relative simplicity in the interpretation of results.

Box 3.1 Interpretation of coefficients of OLS regression

OLS coefficients represent the change in the dependent variable for each unit change in an independent variable. For example, Table 3.14 shows the OLS regression results for parental satisfaction with their relationship with their child as the dependent variable and the coefficients refer to the variable of violence or abuse (coefficients of other variables not shown in this table). The variable of violence or abuse is binary (0 or 1). In this table, the coefficient in the cell for SRSP mothers of Model 1 is -0.312, meaning that mothers' ratings of satisfaction with their relationship with their child would reduce by 0.312 if mothers reported experiences of violence or abuse, after holding children's characteristics and care-time arrangements constant.

For both fathers and mothers across three cross-sectional analyses, results of Model 1 indicated that reports of experiencing violence or abuse (at different time frames and durations of separation) were associated with lower parental satisfaction with their parent-child relationship after controlling children's characteristics and care-time arrangements, and the effects were statistically significant. In the three survey groups of LSSF Wave 2, LSSF Wave 3, and SRSP, the size of the coefficient was larger for fathers than for mothers, suggesting greater negative effect on fathers' ratings of satisfaction in their parent-child relationship.

The negative effect of violence or abuse continues to hold after further controlling for parental characteristics, except for mothers in LSSF Wave 2. The results in Model 2 only changed slightly compared with those in Model 1 across the three survey groups (i.e. LSSF Wave 2, LSSF Wave 3, and SRSP) of both fathers and mothers.

In Model 3, which further controlled for the quality of inter-parental relationships and safety concerns, the negative effect of experiences of violence or abuse was still statistically significant for fathers and mothers in SRSP and fathers in LSSF Wave 3. It was no longer statistically significant for both fathers and mothers in LSSF Wave 2 and mothers in LSSF Wave 3. It is also worth noting that the sizes of coefficients were much

Table 3.14 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with study child, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	-0.704	***	-0.664	***	-0.257	**	0.214	*		
LSSF Wave 2 (children aged 4+ years)										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.429	***	-0.395	***	-0.130		-0.116		-0.047	
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.663	***	-0.625	***	-0.202	**	-0.179	*	-0.112	
Mothers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	-0.312	***	-0.302	***	-0.178	**	-0.143	*		
LSSF Wave 2 (children aged 4+ years)										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.113	#	-0.091		-0.003		0.016		0.067	
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.210	***	-0.195	***	-0.077		-0.051		0.004	
Factors controlled										
Study child's characteristics & care-time arrangements	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parent's characteristics			Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship & safety concerns					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship							Yes		Yes	
Emotional health									Yes	

Notes: # $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The final full model results are in Appendix B.

reduced across the six groups of gender and time points. In other words, the negative effects of violence or abuse on the parent–child relationship appeared largely mediated through the negative effects of the inter-parental relationship and the presence of safety concerns.

With the addition of the financial hardship variable in Model 4, the patterns were similar to those of Model 3, with a somewhat further reduction in the sizes of the coefficients. Model 5 also included the variable of parental emotional health using LSSF data, and the results showed that the negative effect was no longer statistically significant for fathers in LSSF Wave 3. Again, the sizes of the coefficients were further reduced, suggesting the mediation effect occurred through parental emotional health. That is, violence or abuse had a negative impact on parental emotional health, which in turn had a negative effect on parental satisfaction with their relationship with their child.

3.5.4 Longitudinal analysis of parent-child relationship satisfaction and violence or abuse

The second set of multivariate analysis examines the longer-term effect of violence and abuse on parent–child relationships, specifically by linking the reports of violence or abuse before or during separation (reported in LSSF Wave 1) and parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their child 5 years after separation (reported in LSSF Wave 3). The analysis assessed the extent to which the longer-term effect of violence or abuse before or during separation on the parent–child relationship was mediated through its strong link with violence or abuse continuing after separation. The analysis also assessed whether the longer-term effect of violence or abuse before or during separation on the parent–child relationship was indirectly influenced through the effect of violence or abuse on the quality of the inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns, as well as parental emotional health.

A series of OLS regressions were applied:

- Model 1 controlled for children's characteristics and care-time arrangements at Wave 3 and parental characteristics.
- Model 2 entered reports of violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to interview at Wave 3.
- Model 3 included the quality of inter-parental relationship at Wave 1 and change between Waves 1 and 3.
- Model 4 introduced safety concerns at Wave 3.
- Model 5 included the financial hardship variable.
- Model 6 controlled for parental emotional health.

As reported previously in section 3.4.1, experiences of pre-separation physical hurt were reported by a substantial proportion of parents and the variable of violence or abuse before or during separation was classified into three groups: physical hurt, emotional abuse alone, and neither.

The results of Model 1 in Table 3.15 show that experiences of violence or abuse reported as occurring before or during separation had a longer term negative effect on parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their child after controlling children's and parents' characteristics and care-time arrangements. This negative effect was greater for those who reported experiences of physical hurt before or during separation. These patterns were apparent for both fathers and mothers.

Once the variable of experiencing violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to participation in the Wave 3 interview was included in the model, the longer-term negative effects of physical hurt or emotional abuse alone on the parent–child relationship, before or during separation, continued to hold for fathers. Nevertheless, the sizes of coefficients were reduced by more than one-third (from Model 1 to Model 2). For mothers, physical hurt before or during separation was still statistically significant after controlling for experiences of violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to the Wave 3 interview. The sizes of coefficients were also reduced, but to lesser magnitudes (in terms of both absolute and proportional changes in the coefficients) relative to the reductions in the coefficients for fathers. As anticipated, part of the longer-term negative effect of violence or abuse occurring before or during separation was indirect; that is, pre-separation violence or abuse was likely to continue after separation, and violence or abuse after separation negatively impacted on parent–child relationships.

Controlling for the quality of the inter-parental relationship and its change between Waves 1 and 3, as well as for the presence of safety concerns (Model 3), the negative effects of violence or abuse before or during separation were no longer statistically significant for fathers. In addition, the coefficient size for violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to the Wave 3 interview was more than halved for both fathers and mothers, though this was not statistically significant for mothers. Introducing the financial hardship variable hardly changed the coefficient of violence or abuse in Wave 3 for fathers, and the results of Model 5 with the inclusion of parents' emotional health showed that the significance level of violence or abuse in Wave 3 was reduced for fathers.

Table 3.15 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with the relationship with study child that fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
Family violence or abuse before or during separation Wave 1										
(Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.385	***	-0.246	**	-0.120		-0.112		-0.115	
Physical hurt	-0.646	***	-0.371	**	-0.102		-0.093		-0.088	
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months Wave 3			-0.642	***	-0.275	**	-0.262	**	-0.200	*
Mothers										
Family violence or abuse before or during separation Wave 1										
(Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.132	*	-0.106		-0.084		-0.072		-0.062	
Physical hurt	-0.211	**	-0.168	*	-0.121		-0.104		-0.092	
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months Wave 3			-0.112		-0.047		-0.027		0.018	
Control variables										
Study child's characteristics; care-time arrangements Wave 3	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parental characteristics	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship Wave 1 and change in inter-parental relationship, Wave 1-Wave 3					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Safety concerns Wave 3					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship Wave 3							Yes		Yes	
Parental emotional health Wave 3									Yes	

Notes: # $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The full model results are in Appendix B.

3.5.5 Summary

Although separated parents, and mothers in particular, provided high ratings of their satisfaction with their relationship with their child, parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse expressed lower levels of satisfaction. This negative effect was consistent for both fathers and mothers regardless of surveys or time points of post-separation. The multivariate analyses reveal that part of the negative effect of violence or abuse was mediated through the negative effects on inter-parental relationships and safety concerns, and also through the negative effect on parental emotional health.

More importantly, the analysis suggests that experiences of violence or abuse reported as occurring before or during separation continued to be negatively associated with parental satisfaction with their parent-child relationship 5 years after separation. Part of the longer term negative effect of violence or abuse before or during separation was indirect through its link with continuing violence or abuse after separation. The negative effect of violence or abuse before or during separation on parent-child relationships in the longer term was also partly mediated through the negative effect on the quality of inter-parental relationships and safety issues, which had detrimental effects on parent-child relationships.

3.6 Parenting stress

Parenting stress not only has negative impacts on parental wellbeing but also can affect child wellbeing (e.g. Haapsamo et al., 2013; Huang, Costeines, Kaufman, & Ayala, 2014). Separated parents are likely to be more prone to parenting stress when they experience difficulties on multiple fronts. For example, an experience of violence or abuse can be another difficulty that may affect how parents meet their parenting demands in a stressful family environment. This section examines the effects of violence or abuse on parenting stress. Consistent with the structure used in the previous section, the following analysis first outlines general patterns in levels of parenting stress and then examines how parenting stress differed according to parents' experiences of violence or abuse. For the latter, both bivariate and multivariate analyses were carried out.

3.6.1 Overall patterns of parenting stress among separated parents

Overall, parents indicated that they coped well in their parenting role after separation and this was evident in the mean scores on the parenting stress scale (Table 3.16). On a scale of 0-10, with higher scores indicating a greater level of parenting stress, the mean scores ranged between 3.29 and 3.10 for fathers in LSSF Waves 1 and 2 and between 4.23 and

4.11 for mothers in the two LSSF waves. (Note that parenting stress questions were not asked in LSSF Wave 3 and SRSP.)

Specifically, 77 percent of fathers and 59 percent of mothers in LSSF Wave 1 had a parenting stress score under five (i.e. below the mid-point, thereby indicating a lower level of parenting stress), while 15 percent of fathers and 28 percent of mothers had scores above the mid-point of five (i.e. a higher level of parenting stress). The remainder were fathers and mothers with the mid-point score of five. In LSSF Wave 2, 79 percent of fathers and 61 percent of mothers recorded lower levels of parenting stress, while the proportions with higher levels of parenting stress were 13 percent and 26 percent respectively for fathers and mothers (these results are not shown in the table). Mothers had higher levels of parenting stress than fathers in each of the two LSSF waves.

Levels of parenting stress are obviously influenced by the amount of day-to-day care responsibility that parents need to carry out. As shown in Table 3.16, parents with majority care-time had higher levels of parenting stress compared to parents with minority care-time and shared care-time, while the two latter groups of parents reported similar levels of parenting stress. These patterns applied to both fathers and mothers in each of the two LSSF waves. Regardless of care-time groups and LSSF waves, mothers reported greater parenting stress than fathers.

It should be kept in mind that questions on parenting stress were rather general without linking to any specific child or time point. Parents' reports may also reflect their overall assessment of their parenting experience since they became parents rather than a more recent time frame.

3.6.2 Family violence experiences and parenting stress

Table 3.17 presents the mean scores of parenting stress for fathers and mothers compared to violence or abuse experiences reported in each of the two LSSF waves. A separate analysis was applied to parents in the three broad care-time groups. Of those with majority care-time, fathers and mothers who reported experiencing violence or abuse had a higher level of parenting stress compared to their same-gender counterparts who reported no experiences of violence or abuse. This pattern emerged in the data of both the LSSF waves; however, the difference was not statistically significant for fathers in LSSF Wave 2.

In both the LSSF waves, reports of violence and abuse experiences were linked with higher levels of parenting stress for fathers with minority care-time. There was no statistically

Table 3.16 Mean scores of parenting stress, by care-time arrangements and gender of parents, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 2

	Mean parenting stress score	
	Fathers	Mothers
All Parents		
LSSF Wave 1	3.29	4.23***
LSSF Wave 2	3.10	4.11***
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)		
LSSF Wave 1	4.00	4.28*
LSSF Wave 2	3.58	4.17***
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights per year)		
LSSF Wave 1	3.26	4.11***
LSSF Wave 2	3.02	3.64**
Shared care-time parents (35-65% of nights)		
LSSF Wave 1	3.23	3.91***
LSSF Wave 2	3.13	3.77***

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. The difference between fathers and mothers is statistically significant as marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

significant difference in levels of parenting stress between minority care-time mothers with reports of violence or abuse experiences and those who did not report such experiences, regardless of LSSF waves. For both fathers and mothers in shared care-time arrangements in each of the two LSSF waves, there was no apparent link between experiences of violence or abuse and levels of parenting stress.

Are reports of experiencing violence or abuse over time associated with increased levels of parenting stress? This issue is examined as shown in Table 3.18. For parents with majority care-time, those who reported experiences of violence or abuse in both the LSSF waves had the highest level of parenting stress, followed by those who reported experiencing violence or abuse in one out of the two waves. Those who indicated no experiences of violence or abuse in either of the LSSF waves had the lowest level of parenting stress. While the trends applied to both fathers and mothers with majority care-time, the two groups of fathers with experiences of violence or abuse were not statistically different from the fathers without reports of violence or abuse, and the lack of statistical significance for majority care-time fathers was partly due to small numbers.¹⁶

Minority care-time fathers who reported experiences of violence or abuse in one or both of the LSSF waves had higher levels of parenting stress compared with the equivalent minority care-time group of fathers without any violence or abuse reported in both the waves. The results for minority care-time mothers were not shown due to very small numbers.¹⁷

Of shared care-time fathers, levels of parenting stress were not linked to experiences of violence or abuse reported over the two LSSF waves. On the other hand, shared care-time mothers who reported experiencing violence or abuse in both the waves appeared to have a higher level of parenting stress compared with mothers in shared care-time arrangements who did not report experiencing violence or abuse in both waves. However, this trend was not statistically significant, even though the shared care-time pattern in parenting stress for mothers and reports of violence or abuse was similar to that for mothers with majority care-time.

Another question is whether reports of experiencing violence or abuse had any longer-term association with the level of parenting stress. Table 3.19 presents average scores of parenting

¹⁶ The numbers of majority-time fathers ranged 94-137 across the three over-time violence or abuse groups.

¹⁷ The numbers of minority-time mothers ranged 22-70 across the three over-time violence/abuse groups.

stress that fathers and mothers indicated in LSSF Wave 2 according to their reports of violence or abuse occurring before or during separation (as reported in Wave 1). This analysis applied to parents in the three care-time groups in Wave 2.

Mothers with majority care-time who indicated experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse before or during separation had significantly higher levels of parenting stress (at about 2 years after separation) compared with those mothers who reported neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse before or during separation.

Of parents with a minority care-time arrangement, both fathers and mothers who indicated emotional abuse alone before or during separation had higher levels of parenting stress in LSSF Wave 2 compared to their same-gender counterparts who had no reported experiences of either physical hurt or emotional abuse. However, the difference approached statistical significance marginally for fathers ($p < .10$) and it was not statistically significant for mothers.

On the other hand, fathers and mothers with minority care-time who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation had similar levels of parenting stress as their same-gender counterparts who indicated experiencing neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse during or before separation.

For both fathers and mothers with shared care-time, there was no apparent link between reports of experiencing violence or abuse before or during separation and increasing parenting stress 2 years after separation.

Table 3.20 presents the mean scores of the parenting stress scale according to the quality of inter-parental relationships, safety concerns, financial hardship, and parental emotional health. These cross-sectional results suggest that higher levels of parenting stress were associated with a poorer quality of inter-parental relationships, greater financial hardship, and poorer parental emotional health.

Table 3.17 Mean scores of parenting stress, by experiences of violence or abuse, care-time arrangements, and gender of parents, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 2

	LSSF			
	Wave 1: Violence/abuse before/during separation		Wave 2: Violence/abuse In the last 12 months	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)				
Fathers	3.60	4.18*	3.40	3.75
Mothers	4.01	4.45***	4.04	4.29**
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)				
Fathers	3.19	3.32#	2.89	3.18**
Mothers	4.02	4.13	3.70	3.60
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)				
Fathers	3.20	3.27	3.16	3.09
Mothers	4.02	3.86	3.63	3.86

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. The difference between fathers and mothers is statistically significant as marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.18 Mean scores of parenting stress (as reported in LSSF Waves 1 and 2) by experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers

	LSSF: violence or abuse in Wave 1 and Wave 2		
	Neither wave	Either Wave 1 or Wave 2	Both waves
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)			
Fathers	3.30	3.53	3.81
Mothers	3.96	4.15#	4.33**
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)			
Fathers	2.83	3.14*	3.14*
Mothers	-	-	-
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)			
Fathers	3.28	3.03	3.10
Mothers	3.63	3.69	3.86

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Ratings of each of the two groups with experiences of violence/abuse were compared with the group in italics without violence/abuse in both the waves, and statistical significance is marked (based on regression analysis) (# $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$). The number of mothers with minority care-time who reported no violence/abuse in both waves was too small ($n = 22$) and the comparisons were not made.

Table 3.19 Mean scores of parenting stress (as reported in LSSF Wave 2) by experience of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers

	Before or during separation (LSSF Wave 1)		
	None	Emotional abuse alone	Physical hurt
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)			
Fathers	3.32	3.71	3.75
Mothers	4.01	4.29**	4.24*
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)			
Fathers	2.95	3.17#	2.93
Mothers	3.40	3.94	3.51
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)			
Fathers	3.23	2.94#	3.36
Mothers	3.68	3.79	3.82

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data.

Table 3.20 Mean scores of parenting stress (as reported in LSSF Wave 2) by inter-parental relationship, safety, financial hardship, and parental emotional health, LSSF

	LSSF Wave 1		LSSF Wave 2	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Inter-parental relationship				
Friendly/cooperative	3.29	4.13	3.07	4.06
Distant	3.46*	4.36**	3.18	4.21
Conflictual/fearful	3.13*	4.43***	3.16	4.17
Safety concerns				
No concerns	3.32	4.23	3.1	4.12
Had concerns	3.16#	4.22	3.12	4.02
Financial hardship				
None	3.12	3.80	2.99	3.8
One	3.27#	4.14***	3.1	4.06*
Two or more	3.46***	4.46***	3.25**	4.37***
Parental emotional health				
Excellent/very good			2.60	3.26
Good			3.19***	4.08***
Fair/poor			3.45***	5.02***

Notes: Figures were based on weighted data. The difference in mean ratings between a sub-group and the reference group is statistically significant as marked (based on regression analysis) (# $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$), the reference group for each variable is italicised.

3.6.3 Multivariate analysis of parenting stress

This section presents a multivariate analysis for parenting stress to examine the link between experiences of violence or abuse and parenting stress while controlling for parents' characteristics and circumstances. The multivariate analyses are conducted with a focus on cross-sectional data.¹⁸

The multivariate cross-sectional analysis contains five OLS regression models, which progressively include more control variables. A separate multivariate analysis is applied to fathers and mothers and the two LSSF waves. Table 3.21 presents the results of the violence/abuse variable.

According to Model 1, reports of experiencing violence or abuse were associated with increased levels of parenting stress after controlling for children's characteristics and care-time arrangements. The effect was statistically significant for both fathers and mothers across the two LSSF waves, though the violence/abuse variable approached statistical significance ($p < .10$) for fathers in Wave 1 and mothers in Wave 2.

The link between the violence/abuse variable and parenting stress for fathers and mothers in both the LSSF waves remained statistically significant after controlling parental characteristics (Model 2), and the quality of inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns (Model 3). When the financial hardship variable was introduced (Model 4), then violence and abuse was no longer statistically significant for parenting stress in mothers in both waves. This suggests the effect on parenting stress was being mediated through financial hardships for mothers. This means experiences of violence and abuse were associated with higher financial hardship (as shown in Section 3.4.4), and the latter in turn led to greater parental stress for mothers. In comparison, this variable for fathers in Wave 2 remained statistically significant. The link between violence or abuse and parenting stress was weakened with further control of parents' emotional health (LSSF Wave 2 data, Model 5).

¹⁸ The data on parenting stress were not collected in LSSF Wave 3

To further understand the results in Model 5, additional multivariate analyses restricted the sample to those parents who had their child in their care for at least 50 percent care-time (results not shown in Table 3.21). The results revealed that for fathers, the association between violence or abuse and parenting stress was no longer statistically significant after controlling for children's and parents' characteristics. This suggests that the continuing statistical significance of the effects of violence or abuse on parenting stress for fathers in Model 5 was likely due to the inclusion of fathers with minority care-time. It is possible that reported experiences of violence or abuse and having minority care-time with their child may lead these fathers to have particular issues with their parenting role; however, the LSSF measures do not illuminate why this might be the case.

The multivariate longitudinal analysis, using the first two waves of LSSF, was also conducted to examine whether reports of experiencing family violence before or during separation were linked with parenting stress for fathers and mothers. Once care-time arrangements and children's characteristics were controlled for, there was no significant link between experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation (i.e. physical hurt or emotional abuse alone) and parenting stress in Wave 2. Further analysis focusing on mothers who had the study child in her care for at least 50 percent of nights per year did not alter the results. These results are not shown.

3.6.4 Summary

Although separation may generate difficulties on multiple fronts for parents as they forge their new life, the data from LSSF Waves 1 and 2 suggest that parents were generally coping well in their parenting role. This was evident in the mean scores on the parenting stress scale, with the majority of fathers and mothers indicating low levels of parenting stress overall. However, mothers had higher levels of parenting stress than fathers, and parents with a majority care-time arrangement had higher levels of parenting stress compared to those parents with minority care-time and shared care-time arrangements.

As expected, parents who reported having experienced violence or abuse had a higher level of parenting stress compared to those parents who did not report having this experience. The effects were statistically significant for parents with majority care-time. Higher levels of parenting stress were particularly marked for parents who continued to have experiences of violence or abuse (i.e. both before or during, and after, separation). Multivariate analyses suggest that the effects of the violence/abuse variable on parenting stress for mothers were partly because of the negative effect of violence on financial hardship—the violence or abuse had a negative effect on financial circumstances and the latter, in turn, increased the level of parenting stress. It also appeared that the effects of violence or abuse on parenting stress were mediated, to some extent, through parental emotional health for both fathers and mothers.

Over time, mothers with majority care-time who indicated having experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse before or during separation had higher levels of parenting stress (about 2 years after separation) compared with those mothers who reported neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse before or during separation. It is not possible to examine whether this link continued beyond 2 years of separation.

Table 3.21 Coefficients of OLS regression of parenting stress, by gender of parents, LSSF Wave 1-Wave 2

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	0.102	*	0.118		0.196	**	0.125			
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	0.259	***	0.276	***	0.302	***	0.276	**	0.200	*
Mothers										
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	0.231	***	0.228	***	0.226	**	0.101			
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	0.151	#	0.152	*	0.179	*	0.056		-0.113	
Control variables										
Study child's characteristics and care-time arrangements	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parent's characteristics					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship and safety concerns					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship							Yes		Yes	
Emotional health									Yes	

Notes: # $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The full model results are in Appendix B.

3.7 Flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements

A key element of parenting arrangements after parental separation is when and how much time children spend with each parent. The “best” care-time arrangements should promote children’s development, wellbeing, and safety. Factors such as each parent’s parenting capacities, quality, and the needs of children and other family members can also affect the arrangements. Arrangements that suit one parent may not work well for the child’s other parent, or the child, and tensions can arise as a result. Conflicts may emerge when one parent seeks to alter the arrangements while the other wants to maintain the status quo. Any care-time arrangements would require some degree of flexibility in order to respond to new or unexpected developments for children and parents. At the same time, inconsistent arrangements may be unworkable because they do not provide sufficient predictability and stability for children and parents. Parents’ views about the flexibility and workability may change as their circumstances transform in the process of post-separation adjustment. Children’s development needs also change as they become older and with emerging family circumstances. All in all, the flexibility and workability of parent’s care-time arrangements can have great impact on their families, especially the children. This section examines parents’ views about the workability of the care-time arrangements for their child and the effects of parental experiences of violence or abuse on their views about care-time.

3.7.1 Overall patterns in care-time flexibility and workability

Parents were generally positive about the care-time arrangements for their child; that is, the arrangements contained a degree of flexibility and worked reasonably well for themselves and their child, as illustrated by the data shown in Table 3.22 and Table 3.23. Table 3.22 presents fathers’ and mothers’ responses to the questions on flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements for their child and Table 3.23 shows the mean scores of a workability scale (derived from the responses shown in Table 3.22) of fathers and mothers across SRSP and the three LSSF waves.

Across SRSP and the three LSSF waves, around one-third of parents (31-42%) considered their care-time arrangements to be “very flexible” and similar proportions (35-41%) indicated their care-time arrangements were “somewhat flexible”. The remaining parents were of the opposite view, with around one-tenth (10-12%) reporting “somewhat inflexible” arrangements and higher proportions (12-18%) reporting “very inflexible” arrangements. Mothers reported greater levels of flexibility than fathers, though the difference was not statistically significant in LSSF Wave 2. For example, 1-6 percent more mothers than fathers indicated arrangements were “very flexible”, whereas 2-6 percent more fathers than mothers rated arrangements as “very inflexible”.

In considering whether the care-time arrangements for their

child worked for themselves, parents typically responded that they worked “fairly well” (42-45%), followed by the response of “really well” (25-39%). The two negative response options when combined (“not so well” and “badly”) were provided by 17-30 percent of parents. Similar patterns were apparent in parents’ views about workability of care-time arrangements for their child, with the “fairly well” response option being the most common (42-51%) and the “really well” response option the second most common (26-38%). Although the general views on workability of care-time arrangements were similar among fathers and mothers, mothers were more likely than fathers to indicate that the care-time arrangements worked well for themselves and their child.

Consistent with the general patterns of responses to flexibility of care-time arrangements and degree of workability for parents and their children, mothers’ ratings on the flexibility and workability scale were higher on average than fathers’ ratings (mothers 6.86-7.07 vs. fathers 6.12-6.37, using a calculated scale of 0-10). Although the average ratings between mothers and fathers were not widely different and were all above the mid-point of 5.0, these differences were nevertheless significant and indicated mothers held more favourable views about the flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements. This was evident across SRSP and the three LSSF waves.

Parents’ flexibility and workability ratings were further compared according to care-time arrangements. Table 3.23 also shows the mean scores of the flexibility-workability scale of fathers and mothers in the three broad care-time groups: majority care-time, minority care-time, and shared care-time. Parents with majority care-time were most positive about flexibility and workability, followed by parents with shared care-time. Parents with minority care-time held less favourable views on the flexibility and workability of their care-time arrangements than the other two groups. These patterns were evident among both fathers and mothers across SRSP and the three LSSF waves.

Although the discussion above indicates that fathers were less positive than mothers, this appears largely due to the fact that majority care-time was most common among mothers and minority care-time applied more frequently to fathers. As shown in Table 3.23, fathers with majority care-time had higher mean scores on the flexibility-workability scale compared with mothers with majority care-time across all the data points, though the differences were not statistically significant for SRSP and LSSF Wave 1. Likewise, fathers with minority care-time had higher flexibility-workability scores than mothers with minority care-time, though only LSSF Wave 1 data reached statistical significance. Of parents in shared care-time, fathers had significantly higher mean scores of flexibility-workability than mothers across all the three LSSF waves. The mean scores were similar between SRSP fathers and mothers in shared care-time.

Table 3.22 Workability of care-time arrangements by gender of parents, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3

	LSSF						SRSP	
	Wave 1		Wave 2		Wave 3		Fathers	Mothers
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers		
Flexibility (1 very inflexible, 4 very flexible)								
Mean	2.94	3.07***	2.87	2.90	2.85	2.98***	2.83	3.03***
Very flexible (%)	37.9	42.2	33.6	34.3	33.5	37.6	30.9	37.0
Somewhat flexible (%)	34.9	35.2	37.9	37.7	36.7	36.9	39.4	41.0
Somewhat inflexible (%)	10.2	9.8	10.5	12.0	11.1	11.0	11.8	10.3
Very inflexible (%)	17.1	12.9	18.0	16.0	18.7	14.5	18.0	11.7
No. of parents	4601	4464	3054	3093	4084	3646	2705	3007
Workability for self (1 really well, 4 badly)								
Mean	2.84	3.15***	2.87	3.14***	2.83	3.20***	2.79	3.15***
Really well (%)	29.1	39.4	28.8	38.5	29.0	41.7	25.2	37.8
Fairly well (%)	41.9	43.0	44.2	43.8	41.3	42.1	44.6	45.0
Not so well (%)	12.9	10.7	12.3	11.1	13.4	11.2	14.0	11.2
Badly (%)	16.2	6.9	14.7	6.7	16.3	5.1	16.1	6.1
No. of parents	4868	4883	3209	3367	4310	4051	2783	3182
Workability for study child (1 really well, 4 badly)								
Mean	3.00	3.14***	2.95	3.11***	2.96	3.12***	2.94	3.18***
Really well (%)	31.1	38.2	28.9	37.0	28.3	36.3	25.8	38.2
Fairly well (%)	45.8	42.2	46.4	43.2	47.0	44.0	51.4	45.3
Not so well (%)	15.6	14.9	15.3	13.9	17.2	14.9	14.1	12.6
Badly (%)	7.6	4.6	9.4	6.0	7.5	4.7	8.8	3.9
No. of parents	4511	4736	3036	3298	4018	3956	2575	3111

Notes: Percentages and means were based on weighted data. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding. Whether the difference in mean ratings between fathers and mothers is statistically significant is tested based on regression analysis (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.23 Mean score of flexibility-workability scale of care-time arrangements by gender of parents, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3

	Fathers	Mothers
All		
SRSP	6.12	7.07***
LSSF Wave 1	6.37	7.07***
LSSF Wave 2	6.27	6.86***
LSSF Wave 3	6.22	7.04***
Majority care-time parents (66-100% of nights)		
SRSP	7.26	7.19
LSSF Wave 1	7.27	7.20
LSSF Wave 2	7.23	6.94#
LSSF Wave 3	7.67	7.17***
Minority care-time parents (0-34% of nights per year)		
SRSP	5.66	5.27
LSSF wave 1	6.02	5.50*
LSSF Wave 2	5.87	5.55
LSSF Wave 3	5.61	5.42
Shared care-time parents (35-65% of nights)		
SRSP	6.99	6.94
LSSF Wave 1	7.24	6.77***
LSSF Wave 2	7.05	6.58**
LSSF Wave 3	7.20	6.79**

Notes: Percentages and means were based on weighted data. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding. Whether the difference in mean ratings between fathers and mothers is statistically significant is tested based on regression analysis (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

3.7.2 Family violence and parents' views on flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements

Family violence and abuse was associated with parents' perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements. This is evident in the data in Table 3.24, which presents mean scores of the scale compared to reports of experiencing violence or abuse. Parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse had lower levels of flexibility-workability¹⁹ compared to parents who reported no experiences of violence or abuse, regardless of parent gender, type of care-time arrangements, and the time points after separation (i.e. SRSP and three LSSF waves up to 5 years). It is also noticeable that the gaps in mean scores of perceived flexibility-workability between parents with experiences of violence or abuse and those who

did not report such experiences were larger for those who had minority care-time arrangements than for those with majority care-time, irrespective of parent gender. This appears to indicate that the negative impact of family violence on perceived flexibility-workability was greater for parents with minority care-time than for parents with majority care-time.

Table 3.25 shows the effects of continuing violence or abuse on perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements evident in both surveys. In SRSP, and consistent with the analyses in sections 3.5 and 3.6, parents were divided into three groups: reports of experiences of violence or abuse both before or during and after separation, one period alone

¹⁹ The scale and question items used to measure flexibility/workability are explained in Section 3.3.2.4.

Table 3.24 Mean score of care-time arrangement flexibility-workability by experiences of violence or abuse, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3

	SRSP				LSSF					
	Violence/abuse before/during separation		Violence/abuse since separation		Wave 1: Violence/abuse before/during separation		Wave 2: Violence/abuse in the last 12 months		Wave 3: Violence/abuse in the last 12 months	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)										
Fathers	8.16	6.83***	8.11	6.70***	7.80	7.00***	7.69	6.70**	8.03	7.07***
Mothers	8.02	6.83***	7.99	6.73***	7.95	6.74***	7.61	6.33***	7.71	6.43***
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)										
Fathers	7.11	4.57***	7.05	4.50***	7.34	4.73***	7.02	4.49***	6.64	4.05***
Mothers	7.62	4.51***	7.92	4.23***	7.74	4.76***	6.86	4.39***	7.10	4.04***
Parents with shared care-time (35-65% of nights)										
Fathers	7.79	6.43***	7.80	6.41***	8.14	6.57***	7.87	6.13***	8.00	5.79***
Mothers	7.85	6.44***	7.93	6.31***	8.17	6.18***	8.07	5.56***	7.86	5.57***

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Whether difference in mean scores between those having experienced abuse/violence and those without such experience is statistically significant is marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

(either before or during, or after, separation, but not both), or neither time period. Of the three groups, parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse both before or during and after separation had the lowest scores of flexibility-workability, while parents who did not report experiences of violence or abuse at all had the highest average score of flexibility-workability. Parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse in one period alone (either before or during, or after, but not both) indicated:

- higher levels of flexibility-workability than those who reported experiences of violence or abuse both before or during and after separation; but
- lower flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements than parents who did not report experiences of violence or abuse, regardless of the care-time groups.

Of fathers in LSSF with minority care-time, their flexibility-workability rating level was lower with three waves in which fathers reported violence or abuse. However, the mean scores for fathers who reported experiences of violence or abuse in one or two waves did not differ statistically significantly from those who reported no violence or abuse both before and after separation.²⁰

Of LSSF parents with majority care-time, the level of flexibility-workability was lowest for parents who indicated experiencing violence or abuse in all three waves, and highest for those who reported no violence or abuse in all three waves. The levels of flexibility-workability for parents with majority care-time who reported experiences of violence or abuse in one or two waves were similar to parents who indicated no experiences of violence in all three waves (no significant differences).

The patterns of flexibility-workability for fathers with shared care-time according to the number of waves in which they reported experiences of violence or abuse were similar to those patterns among fathers with majority care-time. Of LSSF mothers with shared care-time, there were no statistically significant differences in levels of flexibility-workability by the number of waves reporting experiences of violence or abuse, although mothers in shared care-time who reported no experiences of violence or abuse in all three waves indicated a higher average level of flexibility-workability than other shared care-time mothers with an experience of violence or abuse in one or more waves.

We examined whether experiences of family violence have longer-term effects on parents' perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements. Table 3.26 focuses on this, specifically by examining perceived flexibility-workability in LSSF Wave 3 by comparing reports of experiences of physical

20 The sample sizes for mothers with minority care-time by number of waves with reports of experiences of violence or abuse were too small to calculate averages, and results were not presented.

Table 3.25 Mean score of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements (reported in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3) by experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers

	SRSP: Reports of experiences of violence or abuse			LSSF: Number of waves reporting experiences of violence/abuse			
	Neither before nor after separation	Before or during alone or since separation alone	Both before or during and after separation	None	One	Two	Three
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)							
Fathers	8.33	7.57**	6.63***	9.22	9.00	9.15	8.58*
Mothers	8.19	7.50***	6.66***	9.20	9.16	9.14	8.95*
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)							
Fathers	7.39	5.93***	4.26***	8.14	7.68	7.31	6.18***
Mothers	8.42	6.01***	4.20***	–	–	–	–
Parents with shared care-time (35-65% of nights)							
Fathers	7.95	7.30**	6.25***	9.02	9.20	8.86	8.53*
Mothers	7.95	7.72	6.13***	9.31	8.86	9.07	9.04

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. For SRSP, ratings of each of two groups with experiences of violence/abuse were compared with those of the group without such experience. For LSSF, mean scores of each of three groups with experiences of violence/abuse were compared with the group without violence/abuse in all three waves. Statistical significance is marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$). Numbers of mothers with minority care-time were too small and thus not shown.

Table 3.26 Mean score of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements in Wave 3 by experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation (reported in Wave 1)

	Before or during separation (LSSF Wave 1)		
	None	Emotional abuse alone	Physical hurt
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)			
Fathers	8.14	7.89	6.72**
Mothers	7.57	6.94***	7.16**
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)			
Fathers	6.41	5.12***	4.46***
Mothers	6.13	6.50	4.42***
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)			
Fathers	7.79	7.08**	5.94***
Mothers	7.77	6.49***	5.68***

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Whether difference in mean ratings between those having reported experiencing abuse/violence and those without such reported experience is statistically significant is marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

hurt, emotional abuse alone, or neither forms before or during separation (reported in Wave 1).

Regardless of care-time arrangement groups, fathers who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation had the lowest level of flexibility-workability, followed by fathers who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone before or during separation. Fathers who reported experiences of neither had the highest level of perceived flexibility-workability of their care-time arrangements.

Such patterns were also apparent among mothers with shared care-time. Patterns in perceived flexibility-workability and experiences of violence and abuse before or during separation among the two other groups of mothers differed somewhat:

- Of mothers with majority care-time, those who reported experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse alone indicated a lower average level of flexibility-workability of their care-time than those mothers who reported experiences of neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse.

Those who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone had the lowest average rating level of flexibility-workability.

- For mothers with minority care-time, those who experienced physical hurt before separation had a lower level of perceived flexibility-workability than the other two groups of mothers. It is puzzling that mothers with minority care-time who experienced emotional abuse alone before or during separation indicated a higher level of perceived flexibility-workability than mothers who experienced no violence or abuse at all before or during separation, although the difference was not statistically significant. This puzzling pattern was likely due to the very small number of mothers with minority time (e.g. only a sub-sample of 29 mothers with minority care-time reporting neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse before or during separation who had also rated flexibility-workability in Wave 3).

In addition, Table 3.27 shows that parents' perceptions on flexibility-workability of the care-time arrangements were

Table 3.27 Mean score of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements in Wave 3 by inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, financial hardship, and parental emotional health, SRSP and LSSF

	SRSP		LSSF Wave 1		LSSF Wave 2		LSSF Wave 3	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
Inter-parental relationship								
Friendly/cooperative	7.45	7.83	7.59	7.82	7.53	7.63	7.53	7.75
Distant	4.66***	6.33***	5.01***	6.31***	5.01***	6.30***	4.88***	6.54***
Conflictual or fearful	2.99***	5.24***	3.45***	5.38***	3.34***	5.18***	3.02***	5.36***
Safety concerns								
No concerns	6.54	7.46	6.83	7.44	6.72	7.21	6.61	7.35
Had concerns	3.53***	5.58***	4.05***	5.64***	3.76***	5.42***	3.70***	5.66***
Financial hardship								
None	6.78	7.59	6.99	7.73	6.84	7.3	6.63	7.33
One	6.14***	7.14***	6.61***	7.29***	6.28***	6.99***	5.95***	7.20
Two or more	5.53***	6.84***	5.72***	6.70***	5.52***	6.44***	5.58***	6.71***
Parental emotional health								
Excellent/very good					7.18	7.57	6.90	7.56
Good					6.35***	6.92***	6.16***	6.98***
Fair or poor					5.39***	6.03***	5.19***	6.30***

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Whether difference in mean scores between a sub-group and the reference group is statistically significant is marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$), the reference group for each variable is italicised.

linked with other factors. Lower levels of perceived flexibility-workability were associated with reports of poorer quality of their inter-parental relationship, having safety concerns, experiences of financial hardship, and poorer parental emotional health. These patterns were evident for both fathers and mothers.

3.7.3 Multivariate analysis of workability of care-time arrangements and experiencing family violence

This section presents a multivariate analysis of the flexibility-workability scale of care-time arrangements, specifically examining whether the link between parents' perceived flexibility-workability and experiences of violence or abuse continues to hold after controlling parental and child characteristics, the quality of inter-parental relationships, safety concerns, and parental emotional health. Table 3.28 presents cross-sectional results based on SRSP and each of the three LSSF waves. As in the previous sections, five OLS regressions by gender of parents were applied with progressively more control variables in each model.

Parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse perceived lower flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements for their child compared with their counterparts who reported no experiences of violence or abuse. This pattern applied to both fathers and mothers in all five models, with progressively more control variables across the four datasets.

However, once variables of the quality of the inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns were included, the coefficients of violence or abuse were significantly reduced—by more than one-half from Model 2 and Model 3 across the four datasets for both fathers and mothers. This suggests the association between violence or abuse and parental perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements was to some extent mediated by the effect of violence or abuse on the quality of the inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns. The association between violence or abuse and parents' perceived flexibility-workability of arrangements only reduced slightly after further controlling for financial hardship and parental emotional health based on the data from LSSF Waves 2 and 3 (Models 4 and 5).

Another pattern emerges in Table 3.28: the link between violence or abuse and parents' perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements was somewhat stronger for fathers than mothers in Models 1 and 2. This pattern was persistent with each of the four models across SRSP and three LSSF waves. However, when controlling for the quality of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns, the coefficients of violence or abuse for fathers and mothers were more similar.

Table 3.29 presents the results for whether reported experiences of violence or abuse had a longer term effect on parents' perceived flexibility-workability of their care-time arrangements. The analysis was based on the LSSF data and focused on any link between reports of experiences of violence or abuse occurring before or during separation and parents' perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements at 5 years after separation (reported in Wave 3). The approach adopted is consistent with the analyses sections 3.5 and 3.6.

For both fathers and mothers, reported experiences of violence or abuse occurring before or during separation continued to be linked with their self-perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements after about 5 years since separation. Model 1 shows that reports of violence or abuse experiences before or during separation led to lower perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements over time. This negative link of perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements was stronger with reports of experiencing physical hurt than with reports of experiencing emotional abuse alone.

After introducing the variable of violence or abuse reported in the last 12 months at Wave 3 (Model 2), the variables of violence or abuse reported from before or during separation remained statistically significant for lower levels of perceived flexibility-workability. However, the coefficients of both violence or abuse variables (emotional abuse alone and physical hurt) before or during separation were nearly halved compared with Model 1. Unsurprisingly, part of the longer term negative association between violence or abuse occurring before or during separation and parents' perceived flexibility or workability of care-time arrangements was mediated through the continuation of violence or abuse for some parents. This is consistent with the results in section 3.4, which previously showed those parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation were more likely to also report having experiences of violence or abuse after separation than those parents who did not report any violence or abuse.

Once controlling for both the quality of the inter-parental relationship and its change between LSSF Waves 1 and 3, as well as the presence of safety concerns (Model 3), reports of experiences of violence or abuse from before or during separation were no longer statistically significant. In addition, the coefficients for reports of violence or abuse at Wave 3 were halved. Further, inclusion of financial hardship and parental emotional health did not result in much change in the coefficients of violence or abuse before or during separation and violence or abuse reported in Wave 3.

Table 3.28 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements, by gender of parents and waves of LSSF and SRSPr abuse over time, fathers and mothers

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	-1.908	***	-1.844	***	-0.562	***	-0.516	***		
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	-1.971	***	-1.929	***	-0.780	***	-0.725	***		
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-1.838	***	-1.790	***	-0.648	***	-0.613	***	-0.566	***
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-2.031	***	-1.992	***	-0.763	***	-0.706	***	-0.651	***
Mothers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	-1.448	***	-1.407	***	-0.495	***	-0.425	***		
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	-1.317	***	-1.283	***	-0.404	***	-0.298	***		
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-1.413	***	-1.392	***	-0.564	***	-0.473	***	-0.388	***
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-1.498	***	-1.459	***	-0.620	***	-0.570	***	-0.511	***
Factors controlled										
Study child's characteristics; care-time arrangements	Yes									
Parent's characteristics			Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship and safety concerns					Yes					
Financial hardship							Yes		Yes	
Emotional health									Yes	

Notes: # $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The full model results are in Appendix B.

Table 3.29 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangement as reported in LSSF Wave 3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
Family violence or abuse before/during separation Wave 1										
(Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.836	***	-0.461	***	-0.099		-0.078		-0.079	
Physical hurt	-1.651	***	-0.897	***	-0.149		-0.120		-0.115	
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months Wave 3			-1.751	***	-0.729	***	-0.689	***	-0.638	***
Mothers										
Family violence or abuse before or during separation Wave 1										
(Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.619	***	-0.321	**	-0.095		-0.067		-0.056	
Physical hurt	-0.793	***	-0.290	*	0.180		0.221		0.233	
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months Wave 3			-1.328	***	-0.679	***	-0.632	***	-0.579	***
Control variables										
Study child's characteristics; care-time arrangements Wave 3	Yes									
Parental characteristics	Yes									
Inter-parental relationship Wave 1 and change in inter-parental relationship, Wave 1–Wave 3					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Safety concerns Wave 3					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship Wave 3							Yes		Yes	
Parental emotional health Wave 3									Yes	

Notes: # $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The full model results are in Appendix B.

3.7.4 Summary

Overall, parents held positive views about care-time arrangements, with the great majority of parents reporting their care-time arrangements as flexible, and that arrangements worked well for themselves and for their child. Analyses using the flexibility-workability scale showed that the type of care-time arrangements influenced parents' views about the level of flexibility-workability. Parents with majority care-time held the most favourable views and those with minority care-time held the least favourable views about flexibility-workability.

Although parents' general views about perceived flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements were similar among fathers and mothers, mothers held more favourable views than fathers about their care-time arrangements. Nevertheless, further analyses suggest this pattern appeared largely because majority care-time was most common among mothers and minority care-time more frequently applied to fathers.

Experiences of family violence or abuse were found to be negatively linked with parents' perceived flexibility-workability about their care-time arrangements. Parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse provided lower average levels of perceived care-time flexibility-workability compared with parents who did not report experiences of violence or abuse (regardless of parent gender and type of care-time arrangements). The multivariate analysis results showed these patterns continued to hold after controlling for child and parental characteristics, inter-parental relationship quality, presence of safety concerns, and financial hardships. However, the association between violence or abuse and parents' perceived care-time flexibility-workability was substantially reduced once the quality of the inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns were controlled. This result suggests a mediation effect—experiences of violence or abuse were negatively associated with the quality of the inter-parental relationship, which in turn was negatively associated with parents' perceived care-time flexibility-workability.

Experiencing violence or abuse appeared to be associated with parents' perceived flexibility-workability of their care-time arrangements in the longer term. Specifically, parents who reported experiences of physical hurt occurring before or during separation reported the lowest level of workability at about 5 years after separation, followed by those who experienced emotional abuse alone before or during separation. In contrast, parents who did not report physical hurt or emotional abuse occurring before or during separation had the most positive views about their care-time arrangements for 5 years after separation. These patterns were apparent for both fathers and mothers and continued to hold after controlling for child and parental characteristics. Multivariate

analyses further revealed that the negative link between perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements was stronger with reports of experiencing physical hurt than with emotional abuse alone. The analyses also found that part of this longer term negative association between violence or abuse occurring before or during separation and parents' perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements was mediated through the continuation of violence or abuse for some parents and also through the quality of inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns (also see the summary in 3.9.2).

3.8 Child wellbeing

The previous reports using LSSF and SRSP data have established that children who are exposed to family violence and other negative family dynamics, such as an inter-parental relationship marked by conflict or fear and the presence of safety concerns, have fared less well compared to other children (see e.g. Kaspiw, et al., 2009; Kaspiw et al., 2015a). This section builds on that previous work to further examine the extent to which there is any longer term link between children's exposure to violence or abuse and their wellbeing.

3.8.1 Overall patterns of child wellbeing

Before examining the effects of parental experiences of violence and abuse on child wellbeing, it is useful to understand the overall patterns of parental reports about their child's wellbeing. Table 3.30 provides parents' descriptions of their child's wellbeing across four measures:

- whether their child's general health was "fair or poor";
- whether their child was worse than other same-aged children in at least one of three areas (learning, getting along with peers, and how the child was doing in most areas of their life);
- scores of socio-emotional development for children aged 4 years and older; and
- scores on the behavioural problems scale (BITSEA) for children aged 1-3 years.

Overall, parents provided favourable reports of their child's wellbeing across LSSF waves and SRSP. Only small proportions of parents in SRSP and each LSSF wave reported their child's general health was "fair or poor" (3-6%). Conversely, the great majority of parents at each data collection provided ratings of "excellent", "very good", or "good". The minority of parents (13-21%) in SRSP and each LSSF wave considered their child to be doing less well than other same-aged children in one or more areas. Mean scores of the socio-emotional development scale ranged from 6.8-7.0 (on a scale of 0-10, with higher scores meaning better outcomes), thereby indicating that children aged 4 years and older fared well in this area of child development. Similarly, for children aged 1-3 years, mean scores for the behavioural problem scale were between 2.7 and 3.1 (on a range of 0-28, with higher scores meaning more problems), which suggests that these children had few problems on the whole. Both fathers and mothers provided these positive descriptions of their child's wellbeing.

Nevertheless, there were a few notable differences between mothers' and fathers' assessments of their child's wellbeing. A significantly higher proportion of fathers than mothers considered their child's general health as fair or poor. By comparison, mothers' reports were less positive than

those of fathers for the more specific measures of poor child development in one or more areas, socio-emotional development, and behavioural problems, and these differences were significant for five out of eight survey time points.

The overall generally positive descriptions that fathers and mothers provided about their child's wellbeing continued to be evident when comparing across the three broad care-time groups (Table 3.30). However, parents with minority care-time provided a less positive picture of their child's development than parents with majority care-time and shared care-time arrangements. This was apparent for both fathers and mothers, with the pattern stronger for mothers.

It is also worth noting that gendered differences in reports of child wellbeing were most apparent between fathers and mothers with minority care-time, consistent with our earlier findings about minority care-time arrangements for other outcome measures. Mothers with minority care-time provided less favourable descriptions of their child's wellbeing than fathers with the same care-time arrangements on all the measures. In fact, reports by mothers with minority care-time about their child's wellbeing were the least favourable of all six gender-disaggregated care-time groups across all the measures except for the score for behavioural problems in children aged 1-3 years at LSSF Wave 1. Of parents with majority care-time and shared time:

- mothers provided less positive reports of their child's socio-emotional development than did fathers; and
- fathers and mothers were similar in reports of their child's general health and poor development in one or more areas, although higher proportions of mothers than fathers reported the child did not fare well in at least one area.

Table 3.30 Parents' reports of children's wellbeing by gender of parents, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3

	General health— fair or poor (%)		Poor child development in one or more areas (%)		Mean score of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome)		Mean score BITSEA behavioural problems scale (children aged 1-3 years, 0-28, higher score = worse outcome)	
	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers
All parents								
SRSP	6.2	4.2***	16.9	21.2***			3.05	3.10
LSSF Wave 1	5.8	4.4**	17.2	19.8*			2.70	2.91*
LSSF Wave 2	4.9	3.3**	13.3	15.1	6.98	6.79***		
LSSF Wave 3	6.1	4.1***	16.1	17.1	7.03	6.93***		
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)								
SRSP	4.6	4.0	16.6	21.1			3.33	3.04
LSSF Wave 1	4.3	4.1	20.0	19.7			2.95	2.86
LSSF Wave 2	4.0	2.9	12.7	14.8	7.14	6.79***		
LSSF Wave 3	3.3	3.5	15.5	16.7	7.11	6.96***		
Non-resident parents (0-34% of nights per year)								
SRSP	7.7	10.6	18.2	31.4***			2.99	
LSSF Wave 1	6.6	12.0	18.4	29.2**			2.70	3.22
LSSF Wave 2	6.1	10.2	12.6	22.6*	6.94	6.47**		
LSSF Wave 3	6.9	14.7***	17.3	28.3**	6.99	6.26***		
Shared-time parents (35-65% of nights)								
SRSP	3.2	3.5	15.2	18.8			3.07	3.56
LSSF Wave 1	3.9	4.3	13.8	17.3			2.64	3.48**
LSSF Wave 2	2.0	2.4	13.6	15.2	7.03	6.85*		
LSSF Wave 3	4.9	2.9	13.5	16.0	7.11	6.96*		

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Whether difference between fathers and mothers is statistically significant is marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.31 Proportion of parents who reported child's health as "fair or poor" by reports of experiences of violence or abuse, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1-Wave 3

	SRSP				LSSF					
	Violence or abuse before or during separation		Violence or abuse since separation		Wave 1: Violence or abuse before or during separation		Wave 2: Violence or abuse in the last 12 months		Wave 3: Violence or abuse in the last 12 months	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)										
Fathers (%)	5.7	4.2	1.9	6.4*	3.6	4.7	3.0	5.1	1.4	6.1**
Mothers (%)	3.4	4.3	3.1	4.5	2.7	4.9**	2.4	3.5	3.1	4.1
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)										
Fathers (%)	4.7	10.1***	4.9	10.3***	2.8	10.4***	2.4	11.0***	4.1	11.5***
Mothers (%)	8.2	11.6	8.7	11.4	4.5	14.3*	8.4	11.8	6.8	21.6***
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)										
Fathers (%)	1.3	4.3*	0.7	5.0***	2.4	5.2*	0.5	3.8***	2.2	9.6**
Mothers (%)	1.0	4.2*	2.3	4.0	1.3	5.5*	1.0	3.4	1.7	4.2

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. Whether difference by experiences of violence/abuse is statistically significant is marked (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.32 Proportion of parents who indicated child's development worse in one or more areas by reports of experiences of violence or abuse, LSSF and SRSP

	SRSP				LSSF					
	Violence or abuse before or during separation		Violence or abuse since separation		Wave 1: Violence or abuse before or during separation		Wave 2: Violence or abuse in the last 12 months		Wave 3: Violence or abuse in the last 12 months	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)										
Fathers (%)	14.0	18.0	18.0	15.7	17.3	21.6	9.7	15.5	13.0	19.6
Mothers (%)	12.7	24.5***	14.8	24.6***	13.7	22.5***	11.2	17.8***	13.7	21.2***
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)										
Fathers (%)	13.8	21.4**	13.4	22.5***	10.9%	25.1***	9.6	16.4**	11.7	27.0
Mothers (%)	12.5	36.6*	29.5	32.0	21.9%	30.9	18.3	26.7	18.3	37.2*
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)										
Fathers (%)	10.1	18.7**	11.1	18.1*	6.5%	19.3***	7.5	20.8***	9.7	19.7***
Mothers (%)	16.7	20.4	12.9	22.4*	7.4%	20.9***	4.1	22.8***	11.4	21.6**

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. Whether difference by experiences of violence/abuse is statistically significant is marked (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

3.8.2 Experiences of family violence and child wellbeing

Despite the generally positive descriptions of child wellbeing overall, parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse provided poorer descriptions of their child's wellbeing compared to parents who did not report experiencing violence or abuse. This pattern was evident in the four measures of child wellbeing that were reported by fathers and mothers across the three care-time groups (Table 3.31–Table 3.34). In other words, the presence of parental violence or abuse was associated with lower child wellbeing.

Table 3.31 shows that fathers and mothers who reported experiences of violence or abuse were more likely than other parents to indicate their child's general health was "fair or poor", although the differences were not statistically significant for all comparisons (e.g. fathers with majority care-time in LSSF Wave 1). One exception concerns SRSP fathers with majority care-time: those who experienced violence or abuse during or before separation were less likely than fathers who did not report such experiences to rate their child's general health as "fair or poor" (4% vs. 6%); however, this was not statistically significant. The differences in child's general health provided by parents with experiences of violence or abuse and those without such experience were particularly marked among fathers and mothers with minority care-time compared to fathers and mothers with shared care-time or majority care-time.

Parental views about whether their child was not faring as well as other same-aged children in one or more developmental areas compared to parents' reported experiences of violence or abuse are shown in Table 3.32. Fathers and mothers who reported experiences of violence or abuse were more likely to indicate their child inferior to other children in one or more development areas compared with parents who reported no experiences of violence or abuse. This pattern was consistent regardless of care-time arrangements, though it was not statistically significant for some parents (e.g. fathers with majority care-time in LSSF Wave 1).

Table 3.33 and Table 3.34 also show parents' views about their child's socio-emotional development (for children aged 4 years and older) or their child's behavioural problems (for children aged 1-3 years) according to whether parents reported experiencing violence or abuse at different time frames. Consistent with the patterns discussed in relation to the two previous child wellbeing measures, parents who experienced violence or abuse at each time frame reported less favourably about their child's socio-emotional development and behavioural problems compared to parents without reported experiences of violence or abuse.

Table 3.33 Mean scores of children's socio-emotional development by whether parents experienced violence or abuse, LSSF Wave 2-Wave 3 (score 0-10, higher = better outcome)

	LSSF			
	Wave 2: Violence or abuse in the last 12 months		Wave 3: Violence or abuse in the last 12 months	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)				
Fathers	7.24	7.05	7.23	6.91*
Mothers	6.94	6.66***	7.09	6.78***
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)				
Fathers	7.10	6.74***	7.19	6.66***
Mothers	6.83	6.16*	6.80	5.80***
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)				
Fathers	7.18	6.84***	7.30	6.77***
Mothers	7.13	6.66***	7.15	6.73***

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Whether difference by experiences of violence/abuse is statistically significant is marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.34 Mean scores for the child's BITSEA behavioural problem scale by whether parents experienced violence or abuse, SRSP and LSSF Wave 1

	SRSP				LSSF	
	Violence or abuse before or during separation		Violence or abuse since separation		Wave 1: Violence or abuse before or during separation	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Fathers	2.44	3.60***	2.49	3.60***	2.13	3.32***
Mothers	2.54	3.40***	2.55	3.47***	2.37	3.28***

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Whether difference by experiences of violence/abuse is statistically significant is marked (based on regression analysis) (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Table 3.35 Proportion of parents who reported child's health as "fair or poor" (reported in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3) by reports of experiences of violence or abuse over time, fathers and mothers

	SRSP: Reports of experiences of violence or abuse			LSSF: Number of waves reporting experiences of violence or abuse			
	Neither before nor after separation	Before or during alone or since separation alone	Both after separation and before or during	None	One	Two	Three
Parents with majority time (66-100% of nights)							
Fathers (%)	0.6	12.3***	4.1*	3.4	0.0	3.7	4.4
Mothers (%)	3.4	3.0	4.6	1.8	3.4	4.0*	4.4*
Parents with minority time (0-34% of nights)							
Fathers (%)	4.7	5.0	11.3***	1.6	7.5***	5.5**	15.3***
Mothers (%)	10.0	3.6	12.4				
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)							
Fathers (%)	0.9	1.2	5.2**	1.5	5.0	2.0	13.9**
Mothers (%)	1.3	2.7	4.1	1.6	3.4	2.2	4.0

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. Whether difference between each of the groups with experiences of violence/abuse and the reference group (without experiences of violence/abuse) is statistically significant is marked (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Negative associations between parental experiences of violence or abuse and views about their child's wellbeing are evident in Tables 3.35–3.37. In the SRSP, parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse both before and since separation were more likely than other parents to rate their child's general health as "fair or poor" and child's development as poor in at least one area. The pattern applied to fathers and mothers across the care-time arrangements, except for fathers with

majority care-time. Among the SRSP fathers with majority care-time, those who experienced violence or abuse both before and after separation rated their child's wellbeing lower on both the two measures compared with other majority care-time fathers. However, it should be noted that the number of SRSP fathers who reported violence or abuse in one time period alone was very small ($n = 65$).

Table 3.36 Proportions of parents who reported child poor-development in one or more areas in SRSP and LSSF Wave 3 by reports of experiences of violence or abuse over time

	SRSP: Reports of experiences of violence/abuse			LSSF: Number of waves reporting experiences of violence or abuse			
	Neither before nor after separation	Before or during alone or since separation alone	Both after separation and before or during	None	One	Two	Three
Parents with majority time (66-100% of nights)							
Fathers (%)	15.1	19.1	16.5	8.0	12.6	25.6	16.1*
Mothers (%)	13.4	15.0	26.1***	14.4	15.1	17.5	22.3*
Parents with minority time (0-34% of nights)							
Fathers (%)	12.6	17.1	23.0***	7.6	16.8**	19.2**	34.6***
Mothers (%)	–	–	–				
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)							
Fathers (%)	10.7	10.7	19.8**	10.6	13.4	9.9	19.2
Mothers (%)	16.2	11.2	23.5	12.4	12.1	18.4	21.9

Notes: Percentages were based on weighted data. Whether difference between each of the groups with experiences of violence/abuse and the reference group (without experiences of violence/abuse) is statistically significant is marked (* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

Regarding the LSSF data, parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse in all three waves rated their child's wellbeing poorer in Wave 3 than the other three groups of parents across all three child wellbeing measures (poorer general health, poor development in at least one area, poor socio-emotional development) irrespective of parent gender and care-time groups.²¹ The only exception to this pattern were the reports by fathers with majority care-time on the measure of child development in one or more areas relative to other children. Fathers with majority care-time who reported experiences of violence or abuse in all three waves rated their child's development better compared with the fathers who reported experiences of violence or abuse in two out of three waves. Conversely, parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse in none of the three LSSF waves rated their child's wellbeing better than other parents on all three of the child wellbeing measures, regardless of parent gender and care-time arrangements.

²¹ The questions related to BITSEA measure were not asked in LSSF Wave 3 when the study children became older and outside of the suitable age range designed for this measure.

To what extent did parents' reports of their child's wellbeing continue to be linked with their experiences of violence or abuse (and thus inferring a child's potential exposure to violence or abuse) in the longer term? Table 3.38 compares parents' views of child wellbeing in LSSF Wave 3 according to reported experiences of violence or abuse occurring before or during separation and care-time arrangements.

Of fathers and mothers with majority care-time, those who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation reported their child's wellbeing in Wave 3 to be significantly poorer than did parents without experiences of pre-separation violence or abuse on two measures. Parents who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone before or during separation provided a poorer rating of their child's socio-emotional development compared with parents without experiences of pre-separation violence or abuse. Of mothers with majority care-time of their child, those who experienced either physical hurt or emotional abuse before or during separation were more likely than those who had no such experience to have rated their child's health as "fair or poor" in Wave 3 (4% vs. 2%). This pattern did not apply to fathers with majority care-time. These differences were statistically significant.

For fathers with minority care-time arrangements, those who reported physical hurt or emotional abuse before or during separation rated their child's wellbeing less well on the three measures (general child health, child development, socio-emotional development) at Wave 3 than fathers who did not report either form of violence or abuse in the same care-time arrangement. Ratings of poorer child wellbeing were particularly marked by those fathers who reported experiences of physical hurt. Similarly, mothers with minority care-time who reported experiencing physical hurt before separation had rated their child's wellbeing less well on the three measures at Wave 3 compared to mothers who did not report experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse (although one measure was not statistically significant).

In terms of shared care-time arrangements, the two groups of fathers with reported experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation rated their child's socio-emotional development at Wave 3 poorer than did the fathers without violence or abuse reports, with the fathers reporting physical hurt providing the least positive ratings on this measure. Although fathers with shared care-time who experienced physical hurt before separation also reported their child's wellbeing less well on the two other measures than did fathers who experienced neither, the differences were not statistically significant.

3.8.3 Multivariate analysis of child wellbeing

Multivariate analyses were carried out for each of the child wellbeing variables available in the LSSF and SRSP. Taking the same approach as previous sections, the control variables were progressively introduced in order to assess whether the effects of parental experiences of violence or abuse continued to be significant for child wellbeing. The analyses were based on the cross-sectional data as well as longitudinal data.

3.8.3.1 Cross-sectional analysis of child wellbeing

Tables 3.39–3.42 present the results of the multivariate analyses for the child wellbeing measures based on the cross-sectional data. A series of logit regressions were applied to two measures: whether a child's general health was rated "fair or poor", and whether the child's development was rated poor compared to same-aged children in at least one of the three areas. The analyses were conducted separately for SRSP and the three LSSF waves and the results are shown in odds ratios (see Box 3.2 for interpretation of the logit regression results).

A series of OLS regressions were applied to the other two measures: parents' rating of the child's socio-emotional development and the BITSEA behavioural problems scale.

The results of Model 1, which control for the child's characteristics and care-time arrangements, indicate that

Table 3.37 Mean scores of child's socio-emotional development (score range 0-10, higher = better outcome) by whether parents experienced violence or abuse over time, LSSF Wave 3

	LSSF: Number of waves reporting experiences of violence or abuse			
	None	One	Two	Three
Parents with majority time (66-100% of nights)				
Fathers	7.41	6.87*	7.18	6.83**
Mothers	7.07	7.05	6.89	6.71**
Parents with minority time (0-34% of nights)				
Fathers	7.28	7.14	6.95**	6.63***
Mothers	–	–	–	–
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)				
Fathers	7.53	7.11**	7.11**	6.77***
Mothers	7.42	7.20	7.05#	6.82**

Notes: Figures in the table were based on weighted data. Whether difference between each of the groups with experiences of violence/abuse and the reference group (no violence/abuse in all waves) is statistically significant is marked (# $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse were less favourable about their child's wellbeing on all four measures compared to other parents. That is, the former group of parents were more likely to describe their child's general health as "fair or poor", development poor in at least one area, having poorer socio-emotional development, and having poorer behavioural aspects (for children aged 1-3 years). These patterns were consistent in both fathers' and mothers' reports in all four cross-sectional datasets. Further controlling for parents' characteristics did not meaningfully alter the results in Model 1.

Prior research using the same LSSF and SRSP datasets has shown that parents who reported a poorer quality of inter-parental relationships and had safety concerns also reported poorer outcomes for their child's development (Kaspiew et al., 2009; Kaspiew et al., 2015a). However, the strength of the association between parents' experiences of violence or abuse

and their child's wellbeing was weakened somewhat when controlling for the quality of inter-parental relationships and safety concerns in Model 2 of Tables 3.39 and 3.40.

With regard to the measure of child's general health as "fair or poor", the odds ratios of violence or abuse for fathers were reduced by at least one-third in Model 3 compared to the results of Model 2 and the statistical significance levels were also reduced, while for mothers the associations were no longer statistically significant. For children's development as poorer than their peers in at least one area, the odds ratios of violence or abuse in Model 3 were reduced by at least one-quarter for fathers compared with the results of Model 2, and the statistical significance levels were also weakened. Likewise, the association between mothers' experience of violence or abuse and their reports of their child's development were also reduced, and the statistical significance levels were weakened as well. Such patterns also were evident in the results for the

Table 3.38 Parents' reports of children's wellbeing (reported in LSSF Wave 3) by experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation (reported in Wave 1 LSSF)

	General health: fair or poor (%)			Poor child development in one or more areas (%)			Mean score of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome)		
	Before or during separation (LSSF Wave 1)			Before or during separation (LSSF Wave 1)			Before or during separation (LSSF Wave 1)		
	None	Emotional abuse alone	Physical hurt	None	Emotional abuse alone	Physical hurt	None	Emotional abuse alone	Physical hurt
Parents with majority care-time (66-100% of nights)									
Fathers	4.9	1.0*	2.8	9.5	9.0	33.6***	7.45	7.02**	6.88**
Mothers	2.2	4.1*	4.2*	12.5	16.8	22.0***	7.11	6.94*	6.75***
Parents with minority care-time (0-34% of nights)									
Fathers	3.3	7.5*	15.1***	10.1	22.2***	27.6***	7.21	6.87**	6.76***
Mothers	4.5	8.5	24.1*	25.8	23.0	36.3	6.94	6.48	5.85*
Parents in shared time (35-65% of nights)									
Fathers	4.3	4.4	11.8	12.4	16.3	10.2	7.34	7.05*	6.87**
Mothers	2.1	3.4	1.3	14.2	16.9	16.5	7.00	7.07	6.88

Notes: Percentages and mean scores were based on weighted data. Whether difference between each of the groups with experiences of violence/abuse and the reference group without experiences of violence/abuse is statistically significant is marked (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$).

measure of the socio-emotional development scale (Table 3.41) and the BITSEA scale (Table 3.42).

Further controlling financial hardship (Model 4) did not alter the results of Model 3 regarding the children's general health measure. This pattern was apparent for poorer child development than peers in at least one area according to fathers' reports. However, the associations based on mothers' reports on this measure were weakened somewhat further after controlling for financial hardship. Regarding the measures of the socio-emotional development scale and the BITSEA behavioural problem scale, the links were weakened with violence or abuse for both fathers and mothers after controlling for financial hardship (Model 4). The results of Model 5,

which controlled for parental emotional health, also further weakened the link for all four measures for both fathers' and mothers' reports of child wellbeing and violence or abuse.

Box 3.2 Interpretation of logit regression odds ratios

In logit regression, the dependent variable is in a binary form. For example, in Table 3.39, the child's health was coded as "1" for being "fair or poor", and "0" for not being "fair or poor". Results of the logit regression are presented as odds ratios (Table 3.39 and Table 3.40). In this instance, the "odds" of having the outcome represented by "1" (in the case of a child's general health, being "fair or poor"). Odds ratios are relative measures, representing how the "odds" of an outcome (e.g. general health as "fair or poor" as rated by the parent in this analysis) would take place given a particular characteristic (e.g. whether parents reported experiences of violence or abuse in Table 3.39 and Table 3.40), compared to the odds of a reference group (when a variable contained more than two groups) or when the characteristic was absent. An odds ratio of 1 indicates no difference between those with a particular characteristic and those in the reference group (or when the characteristics was not present).

For example, in relation to a child's general health being rated "fair or poor" based on mothers' reports using SRSP 2012 data, the odds ratio was 1.53 for mothers with experiences of violence or abuse. This means that the odds of a child having "fair or poor" health reported by mothers with experiences of violence or abuse was 1.53 times that of those children whose mothers did not report experiences of violence or abuse (Table 3.39).

The asterisks in the tables indicate if the odds ratio is statistically significant. If there are no asterisks on a figure, this indicates that the odds ratio does not differ significantly from 1, based on conventional levels of significance. More asterisks indicate we have greater confidence that this variable has a significant association with the child outcome measures. The size of the odds ratio in the tables indicates how much an outcome measure varies according to the violence or abuse variable. Therefore, if the odds ratio is greater than one, and the larger the number is, the greater the likelihood of a poorer child outcome (here "fair or poor" health, or poor child development) between those children whose parent reported experiences of violence or abuse and those whose parent did not. If the odds ratio is less than one, and the closer the number is to zero, the relative likelihood of a poor child outcome by parental experiences of violence or abuse is smaller.

Table 3.39 Odds ratios of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, fathers and mothers

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	2.514	***	2.808	***	1.888	**	1.867	**		
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	2.816	***	2.784	***	1.341		1.251			
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	3.719	***	3.752	***	1.786	*	1.721	*	1.639	*
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	2.823	***	2.799	***	1.521	*	1.451	*	1.366	
Mothers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	1.527	*	1.626	*	1.113		0.976			
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	2.031	***	1.993	***	1.186		1.018			
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	1.511	*	1.526	*	1.045		0.927		0.782	
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	1.578	**	1.535	**	1.311		1.169		1.103	
Factors controlled										
Study child's characteristics and care-time arrangements	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parent's characteristics			Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	
Inter-parental relationship and safety concerns					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship							Yes		Yes	
Emotional health									Yes	

Notes: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. The full model results are in Appendix B.

Table 3.40 Odds ratios of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas, fathers and mothers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5					
Fathers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	1.538	***	1.564	***	1.164	1.095				
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	2.287	***	2.376	***	1.697	***				
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	2.598	***	2.586	***	1.868	***	1.744	***		
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	2.179	***	2.121	***	1.452	***	1.399	**	1.330	*
Mothers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	1.865	***	1.858	***	1.311	*	1.215			
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	1.916	***	1.893	***	1.459	**	1.304			
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	1.897	***	1.847	***	1.411	*	1.271		1.140	
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	1.706	***	1.676	***	1.463	***	1.349	**	1.282	*
Factors controlled										
Study child's characteristics and care-time arrangements	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parent's characteristics			Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship and safety concerns					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship							Yes		Yes	
Emotional health									Yes	

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. The full model results are in Appendix B

Table 3.41 Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome), fathers and mothers

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation										
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation										
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.315	***	-0.323	***	-0.126	*	-0.095		-0.051	
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.455	***	-0.445	***	-0.206	***	-0.163	***	-0.116	*
Mothers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation										
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before and during separation										
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.311	***	-0.304	***	-0.166	**	-0.100		-0.040	
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months	-0.318	***	-0.307	***	-0.165	***	-0.123	**	-0.066	
Factors controlled										
Study child's characteristics and care-time arrangements	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parent's characteristics			Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship and safety concerns					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship							Yes		Yes	
Emotional health									Yes	

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. The full model results are in Appendix B

Table 3.42 Coefficients of OLS regression of BITSEA scale (higher score = worse outcome), fathers and mothers

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5					
Fathers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	1.123	***	1.148	***	0.741	*	0.690	*		
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	1.061	***	1.104	***	0.705	***	0.533	***		
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months										
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months										
Mothers										
SRSP 2012										
Violence or abuse since separation	0.965	***	1.035	***	0.754	**	0.567	*		
LSSF Wave 1										
Violence or abuse before or during separation	0.835	***	0.855	***	0.559	***	0.365	*		
LSSF Wave 2										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months										
LSSF Wave 3										
Violence or abuse in past 12 months										
Factors controlled										
Study child's characteristics and care-time arrangements	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parent's characteristics			Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship and safety concerns					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship							Yes		Yes	
Emotional health									Yes	

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The full model results are in Appendix B.

3.8.3.2 Longitudinal analysis of child wellbeing and family violence

The above discussion has focused on the link between reported parental experiences of family violence at different time periods before and after separation and parents' reports of child wellbeing, based on cross-sectional data. This next analysis assesses whether there is any longer term link between violence or abuse and child wellbeing.

Tables 3.43–3.45 show the results of multivariate analyses that focused on whether parents' experiences of violence or abuse reported before or during separation were linked with the child's wellbeing at 5 years after separation. For children's general health at 5 years after parental separation (Table 3.43), the multivariate analysis results showed different patterns between fathers and mothers. There was no statistically significant difference among mothers' reports at Wave 3 about their child's general health according to their reports of experiences of violence or abuse during or before separation. Fathers who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation were more likely than fathers who reported no experience of violence or abuse to rate their child's general health as "fair or poor" at Wave 3, as shown in Model 1. There was no statistically significant difference between fathers who reported experiences of emotional abuse alone and fathers who reported no experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation. The link between fathers' negative reports of their child's health in Wave 3 and their experiences of physical hurt before separation was weakened with progressive inclusion of control variables for violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to the Wave 3 interview and the quality of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns. However, the results changed little with further control of financial hardship and parental emotional health.

In relation to parents' reports of their child's development in Wave 3 (Table 3.44), both fathers and mothers who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation were more likely to consider their child's development as poor in at least one area than their same-gender counterparts who reported no experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation, after controlling for child and parental characteristics and care-time arrangements (Model 1). This pattern was also apparent, though to a lesser extent, for fathers and mothers who reported emotional abuse alone before or during separation. The links between experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse alone before or during separation were weakened for both fathers and mothers after controlling for experiences of violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to being interviewed at Wave 3 of the LSSF (Model 2) and controlling for the quality

of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns (Model 3). Nevertheless, the links were still statistically significant, except in Model 3 for fathers with reported experiences of emotional abuse alone. The results remained similar with further controls of financial hardship (Model 4) and parental emotional health (Model 5). However, the links for mothers between violence or abuse and a poor rating of their child's development were even further weakened in Model 4 and remained similar in Model 5.

Table 3.45 presents the longitudinal results for parents' ratings of their child's socio-emotional development about 5 years after separation. Both fathers and mothers with experiences of physical hurt before separation provided worse reports of their child's socio-emotional development compared with those parents who did not report experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation (Model 1). Likewise, both fathers and mothers with experiences of emotional abuse alone before or during separation also provided poorer ratings of their child's socio-emotional development compared to the reference group of parents with no experience of violence or abuse. Nevertheless, the links to child socio-emotional development were weaker for parental experiences of emotional abuse before or during separation than those for parental experiences of physical hurt. The link subsided between parental experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse alone before or during separation and parents' reports of their child's socio-emotional development after controlling for parental experiences of violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to the LSSF Wave 3 interview (Model 2). The link continued to be weakened with progressively added control variables (Model 3 to Model 5).

Table 3.43 Odds ratios of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
Family violence or abuse before or during separation (Wave 1) (Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	1.591		1.343		1.152		1.123		1.139	
Physical hurt	4.366	***	3.134	***	2.066	*	2.027	*	2.071	*
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months Wave 3			2.205	***	1.146		1.113		1.057	
Mothers										
Family violence or abuse before or during separation (Wave 1) (Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	1.366		1.270		1.058		0.979		0.962	
Physical hurt	1.665		1.468		1.103		1.028		1.007	
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months (Wave 3)			1.400		1.324		1.190		1.138	
Control variables										
Study child's characteristics, care-time arrangements (Wave 3)	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parental characteristics	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship Wave 1 and change in inter-parental relationship (Wave 1–Wave 3)					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Safety concerns (Wave 3)					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship (Wave 3)							Yes		Yes	
Parental emotional health (Wave 3)									Yes	

Notes: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$. The full model results are in Appendix B.

Table 3.44 Odds ratios of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas, fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fathers										
Family violence or abuse before or during separation (Wave 1) (Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	1.631	***	1.445	*	1.341		1.322		1.313	
Physical hurt	2.428	***	1.920	***	1.548	*	1.521	*	1.503	*
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months (Wave 3)			1.713	***	1.245		1.220		1.156	
Mothers										
Family violence or abuse before or during separation (Wave 1) (Reference = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	1.530	**	1.452	**	1.401	*	1.330		1.323	
Physical hurt	1.942	***	1.781	***	1.662	**	1.561	*	1.539	*
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months (Wave 3)			1.265	*	1.204		1.118		1.070	
Control variables										
Study child's characteristics, care-time arrangements (Wave 3)	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Parental characteristics	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	
Inter-parental relationship Wave 1 and change in inter-parental relationship, (Wave 1–Wave 3)					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Safety concerns (Wave 3)					Yes		Yes		Yes	
Financial hardship (Wave 3)							Yes		Yes	
Parental emotional health (Wave 3)									Yes	

Notes: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. The full model results are in Appendix B.

Table 3.45 Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome), fathers and mothers reported in LSSF Wave 3

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Fathers					
Family violence or abuse before or during separation (Wave 1)					
(Reference = neither)					
Emotional abuse alone	1.631	***	1.445	*	1.341
Physical hurt	2.428	***	1.920	***	1.548
				*	1.521
				*	1.503
					*
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months (Wave 3)			1.713	***	1.245
					1.220
					1.156
Mothers					
Family violence or abuse before or during separation (Wave 1)					
(Reference = neither)					
Emotional abuse alone	1.530	**	1.452	**	1.401
Physical hurt	1.942	***	1.781	***	1.662
				**	1.561
				*	1.539
					*
Violence or abuse in the last 12 months (Wave 3)			1.265	*	1.204
					1.118
					1.070
Control variables					
Study child's characteristics, care-time arrangements (Wave 3)	Yes		Yes		Yes
Parental characteristics	Yes		Yes		Yes
Inter-parental relationship Wave 1 and change in inter-parental relationship, (Wave 1–Wave 3)				Yes	Yes
Safety concerns (Wave 3)				Yes	Yes
Financial hardship (Wave 3)					Yes
Parental emotional health (Wave 3)					Yes

Notes: * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001. The full model results are in Appendix B

3.8.4 Summary

Parental separation represents one of the most disruptive and stressful life experiences, has negative effects on multiple fronts, and includes emotional, financial, and developmental consequences for both parents and children. In the face of these challenges, separated parents across the SRSP and LSSF waves provided favourable reports of their child's wellbeing overall based on four measures (general health, poor development in at least one of three areas compared to peers, socio-emotional development scale for children aged 4 years and older, and the BITSEA problematic behavioural scale for children aged 1-3 years). Only small proportions of parents reported that their child's general health was fair or poor, or their child's development was poor in at least one area when compared to other same-age children. The mean scores of the socio-emotional development scale and BITSEA problem scale also indicated that parents overall considered that their child was doing well or had few behavioural problems. These positive descriptions were evident in both fathers' and mothers' reports.

Despite the overall positive picture of children's wellbeing at different time points after separation, the reports on child wellbeing by separated parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse revealed concerns for children's wellbeing when compared to parents without experiences of reported violence or abuse. The analyses showed that the reports were particularly negative for their child's wellbeing when parents experienced ongoing violence or abuse. The patterns were evident in the four child wellbeing measures, regardless of parent gender and care-time arrangement groups.

The results of multivariate analyses suggest that the negative association between parental experiences of violence or abuse and their child's wellbeing was mediated through the negative effects on the quality of inter-parental relationships and parents' concerns about safety. In other words, parental experiences of violence or abuse led to a poorer quality of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns, which in turn negatively affected children's wellbeing. In addition, the indirect effect of parental experiences of violence or abuse on child wellbeing was also mediated through the negative effect on parents' emotional health and on financial hardships, though the latter applied most for mothers.

The analysis also highlighted that parental reports of violence and abuse were negatively associated with how they rated their child's wellbeing in the longer term after separation. Parents who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation provided the least positive ratings of their child's wellbeing at about 5 years after separation, followed by parents who experienced emotional abuse alone before or during separation, while parents who did not report experiencing either forms of violence or abuse provided the most positive description of their child's wellbeing. The multivariate analysis shows that these patterns continued to hold after controlling child and parental characteristics and care-time arrangements for both fathers and mothers on all three measures, except for mothers' reports of their child's general health. Similar to the multivariate analysis based on cross-sectional data, the longer-term effects of parental violence or abuse on perceived child wellbeing were mediated through the continuing experiences of violence or abuse after separation and the negative effect on the quality of inter-parental relationship and safety concerns, as well as through the negative effects on financial hardship and, to a lesser extent, parental emotional health.

3.9 Summary and discussion

This part of the report has examined the links between a history of family violence and parent–child relationships. It has also assessed whether poorer outcomes in the domains of parenting stress, perceived flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements, and parents’ assessment of their child’s wellbeing were significantly linked with parents’ reports of their experiences of violence and abuse. The analyses used data from two large national surveys on separated parents: the Longitudinal Study of Separated Families (2008–2012) and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents 2012.

Although the true prevalence of domestic and family violence is difficult to establish based on self-report survey data, and with the relevant studies using different definitions and measures and different populations, it is nevertheless clear that women are far more likely than men to experience violence perpetrated by their current or former partner. Gendered patterns in domestic and family violence were evident for separated parents’ experiences across the LSSF and SRSP datasets. Across the two datasets with different references to time frames, mothers were consistently more likely than fathers to experience violence or abuse (physical hurt, as well as emotional abuse alone). About one-quarter of mothers experienced physical hurt before separation, compared to about one-sixth of fathers. While reported experiences of physical hurt diminished with the increasing duration of separation, it was still reported by a small minority of parents 5 years after separation and the gendered patterns were still visible in the data. Despite the fall in reports of experiences of physical hurt after separation compared to before or during separation, reports of emotional abuse experiences remained prevalent even after 5 years of separation. The data of a sub-sample of former couples who participated in the LSSF provided further evidence that one-directional violence or abuse was more likely to be perpetrated by fathers than by mothers. The data also suggested that bi-directional physical hurt was less prevalent than one-directional physical hurt, though it was not possible to measure initiation and severity of such physical violence.

The longitudinal data of separated parents suggested that a significant minority of parents, mothers in particular, had experiences of ongoing violence or abuse (29% of mothers and 21% of fathers), with experiences of emotional abuse being more common than experiences of physical hurt long-term. Parents who experienced physical hurt before separation were mostly likely to report ongoing experiences of violence or abuse (mostly in the form of emotional abuse) in both time points after separation (about 2 and 5 years after separation), followed by those parents who reported emotional abuse alone before or during separation. Parents who did not report

experiences of physical hurt or emotional abuse before or during separation were the least likely to experience violence or abuse after separation.

3.9.1 Inter-parental relationships, safety concerns, and financial hardship

The quality of inter-parental relationships was clearly linked with reports of experiencing violence or abuse. Parents who experienced physical hurt were much more likely to report having a fearful relationship with the other parent than parents who experienced emotional abuse alone and those with no reported experiences of violence or abuse. The difference in fearful inter-parental relationships was particularly marked between the group of parents with experiences of physical hurt and parents without reports of violence or abuse, regardless of when the experiences of physical hurt occurred. The extent to which parents reported having a fearful relationship was most evident for mothers with experiences of physical hurt, compared with fathers with experiences of physical hurt and other fathers and mothers with emotional abuse alone or without experiences of violence or abuse. The report of a perceived fearful relationship with the other parent may well be the very manifestation of experiencing violence or abuse. Although it could not be ascertained which parent felt most fearful when fearful inter-parental relationships were reported, it is noticeable that mothers were more likely than fathers to report a fearful relationship with the other parent, despite the small proportions of both genders with such descriptions. The gendered pattern in reporting a fearful relationship with the other parent was consistent with the higher overall prevalence of experiences of violence among mothers than fathers in the separated parent samples and in other previous data, such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics Personal Safety Survey (2013b).

Furthermore, the LSSF data indicated that experiences of violence and abuse reported before or during separation appeared to have long-term effects on the quality of the inter-parental relationship. That is, fearful and conflictual relationships after 5 years separation were more prevalent among parents with experiences of physical hurt before separation, followed by those with experiences of emotional abuse alone before or during separation. Negative inter-parental relationships were the lowest among parents who experienced neither physical hurt nor emotional abuse before or during separation. These longitudinal links were evident for both fathers and mothers.

The analyses indicated the link between violence or abuse and parents’ reports of having safety concerns for themselves or their child as a result of the child’s ongoing contact with the

other parent. The link was evident in both cross-sectional and longitudinal data: parents with experiences of violence or abuse (physical hurt in particular) were more likely than those without such experience to have expressed safety concerns. Safety concerns after 5 years separation were more prevalent among those parents who had reported experiences of violence or abuse occurring before or during separation, especially physical hurt.

It is important to note that reports of financial hardship were more common overall among parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse. The link continued after 5 years separation, in that parents who had experiences of physical hurt before separation were most likely to report experiences of financial hardship at 5 years after separation.

The continuing link between having experienced pre-separation violence or abuse and the quality of inter-parental relationships, parents' safety concerns, and financial wellbeing was not surprising, given that the pre-separation violence or abuse tended to continue in some form after separation.

3.9.2 Parent–child relationship, parenting stress, and perceived flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements

Although separation may generate difficulty on multiple fronts for parents as they continue with their life, these data suggested that most parents generally coped well in their parenting role. More specifically, separated parents in general provided high ratings of satisfaction with the relationship with their child—more so for mothers than for fathers—and indicated low levels of parenting stress. In terms of perceived flexibility and workability of care-time arrangements for their children, separated parents also provided positive assessments as a whole, with the great majority of parents reporting their care-time arrangement to be flexible and workable for themselves and their child.

Despite this broadly positive picture, reports of parents on these aspects of parent–child relationships differed according to their reported experiences of violence or abuse. Parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse provided relatively negative accounts in the three parenting domains (i.e. the parent–child relationship, parenting stress, and flexibility-workability of care-time) compared to parents without experiences of violence or abuse. Experience of violence or abuse was associated with a lower level of satisfaction in the relationship with their child, a higher level of parenting stress, and a lower level of perceived flexibility-workability

in their care-time arrangements. These patterns applied to both fathers and mothers across the SRSP and three waves of LSSF. The negative association between experiences of violence or abuse and perceived flexibility-workability of care-time was particularly noticeable. In addition, parents who had experiences of continuing violence or abuse (that is, reports in SRSP or multiple waves in LSSF for before and after separation) provided the least favourable descriptions on these three domains.

The multivariate analyses based on cross-sectional data revealed that part of the negative association between violence or abuse and parenting appeared to be indirect, mediated through the negative effects on various post-separation aspects such as the inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, and parental emotional health. These, in turn, were negatively associated with the three outcome domains.

The negative link between parents' satisfaction with their relationship with their child and experiences of violence or abuse appeared to be indirect, via poorer inter-parental relationships, the presence of safety concerns, and poorer parental emotional health. The association between experiences of violence or abuse and parenting stress was indirect (i.e. mediated) through financial hardships for mothers, and also partly through parental emotional health for both fathers and mothers. Regarding perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements, the negative association with experiences of violence or abuse was also partly indirect through the quality of the inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns, but the link continued to hold after controlling for child and parental characteristics, inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, and financial hardships.

More importantly, in the long term, the analyses indicated that experiences of violence or abuse reported before or during separation continued to be negatively associated with parents' satisfaction with the parent–child relationship and perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements 5 years after separation. The limited longitudinal data also showed that experiences of violence or abuse reported before or during separation were associated with a higher level of parenting stress 2 years after separation.²² The negative associations were stronger for parents who reported experiences of physical hurt before separation.

The multivariate analyses suggest that the longer term link between experiences of violence or abuse and the two domains of parental satisfaction with the parent–child relationship and perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements at

²² Data on parenting stress were not collected in LSSF Wave 3.

5 years after separation for both fathers and mothers either continued to hold or were weakened after “full” controls were added (including parental and child characteristics, inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, financial hardship and parental emotional health). (Note that data on parenting stress was not collected in LSSF Wave 3 and multivariate analysis based on the longitudinal data was not applied.)

Regarding both measures of parental satisfaction with the parent–child relationship and perceived flexibility-workability of care-time, the longer-term negative associations with violence or abuse reported before or during separation appeared to be mainly indirect, through the link with continuing violence or abuse after separation. Once experiences of violence or abuse in the 12 months prior to the LSSF interview at Wave 3 were controlled for, experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation (physical hurt and emotional abuse alone) were no longer statistically significant.

3.9.3 Child wellbeing

This part of the report also examined the extent to which parents’ reports of their child’s wellbeing were linked to their experiences of violence or abuse, extending previous work by conducting systematic multivariate analyses. The analyses used four measures of child wellbeing as reported by the parents: child’s general health, poorer development than peers in at least one of the three areas for children aged 4 years and older, the socio-emotional development scale for children aged 4 years and older, and the BITSEA problematic behavioural scale for children aged 1–3 years.

Consistent with the generally positive pictures in the domains of parent–child relationships, parenting stress, and perceived flexibility-workability of care-time overall, separated parents across the SRSP and LSSF waves also had broadly favourable reports about their child’s wellbeing according to the four measures. Only in a small minority of cases did parents report that their child’s general health was “fair or poor”, their child’s development compared to other same-age children was poorer in at least one area, and the mean scores of the socio-emotional development scale and BITSEA problematic behaviour scale indicated concerns. The overall positive pictures of child wellbeing were apparent from both fathers’ and mothers’ reports across the SRSP and three LSSF waves (i.e. at different time points after separation).

However, the positive pictures were not evenly distributed across the sub-groups of separated parents who reported experience of violence or abuse. The reports on child wellbeing by separated parents who reported experiences of violence or abuse were less positive than those of parents without experiences of

violence or abuse, regardless of their duration of separation. Parents who experienced ongoing violence or abuse were particularly negative when rating their child’s wellbeing. The patterns were evident in the four child wellbeing measures regardless of parent gender. The results of multivariate analyses suggest that the negative associations between the parental reports of child wellbeing and parents’ experiences of violence or abuse were partly indirect through the negative effect of violence or abuse on the quality of inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns. This means that parental experiences of violence or abuse led to a poorer quality of inter-parental relationships and generated safety concerns, which in turn were negatively associated with the child’s wellbeing. The indirect association of parental experiences of violence or abuse with child wellbeing was transmitted through the negative effect of violence or abuse on parents’ emotional health as well as financial hardships, though the latter applied for mothers only.

The analysis further examined whether parental experiences of violence or abuse had longer-term association with their reports of their child’s wellbeing by child’s wellbeing at 5 years after separation according to their parents’ experiences of violence or abuse before or during separation. The results showed parents who reported experiences of physical hurt before or during separation provided the least positive description about their child’s wellbeing at about 5 years after separation, followed by parents who experienced emotional abuse alone before or during separation. Parents who had not reported either forms of violence and abuse provided the most positive description of their child’s wellbeing. The results of the multivariate analyses suggested that longer term effects of parental violence or abuse associated with child wellbeing were mediated through the continuing experiences of violence or abuse after separation and the negative effect on the quality of the inter-parental relationship and presence of safety concerns and, to a lesser extent, also through the negative effects on financial hardship and parental emotional health.

3.9.4 Understanding gender and violence or abuse for separated parents

The SRSP and multi-wave of LSSF data showed gendered patterns in reports of experiencing violence or abuse—mothers were more likely than fathers to have reported experiences of either physical hurt or emotional abuse, and marked gender differences were present in the reports of experiences of physical hurt before separation. The sub-sample of former couples further provided evidence that mothers were more likely than fathers to be the sole victim of violence or abuse.

While the experiences of violence or abuse tended to be

gendered, the negative effects of such experiences on parent-child relationships, levels of parenting stress, perceived flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements, as well as reports of their child's wellbeing were evident for both fathers and mothers. However, given that mothers were more likely than fathers to experience violence or abuse, the collective negative effects were larger for mothers than for fathers from the overall population perspective.

The data also suggested that pre-separation violence or abuse tended to continue after separation in the form of emotional abuse. Therefore, family violence does not necessarily end after separation, even though incidents of physical harm may reduce over time. This pattern was evident among both fathers' and mothers' reports. These findings lend further support to the importance of addressing violence or abuse as early as possible so as to reduce the likelihood of DFV continuing in some form, including after separation.

Straus (1999, cited by Hamberger & Larsen, 2015) emphasised that research findings on domestic violence based on large and representative population samples are relevant to the development of primary prevention but may not apply to clinical samples (e.g. samples recruited from agencies or services). In this sense, the findings in this component of the report may not be viewed as confirming or dis-confirming findings based on clinical samples, such as those in the qualitative component of Part 4 of this report, that come from mothers who have experienced DFV and had involvement with services or agencies. In addition, the analyses in this current part of the report should be viewed from the aggregate perspective of separated parents in general rather than individual parents.

3.9.5 Data limitations

It is important to point out some data limitations inherent in the SRSP and LSSF and thus the appropriate cautions when interpreting the results in this part of the report. Firstly, the information on reported experiences of violence or abuse in the two surveys should be considered crude measures. In the following qualitative component of this project, some mothers who experienced violence or abuse indicated that the father also made unsubstantiated allegations against them when the mothers sought separation in response to his violence. The data in the SRSP and LSSF surveys does not provide any nuances regarding the specific nature, power dynamics, and context of violence.

Secondly, the samples of the two surveys are likely to be under-representative of parents who experienced severe violence or abuse perpetrated by their child's other parent, whereas the

following qualitative component provides specific insights about mothers who experienced severe forms of violence or abuse. Such parents with a history of severe experiences of violence or abuse might be either less inclined than other parents to participate in the SRSP or LSSF studies or be more likely to withdraw from the study in the later waves of LSSF, for reasons including fear of their violent former partner. Another reason why the SRSP and LSSF are not representative of parents who have experienced severe family violence is the operation of child support. Participants in the SRSP and LSSF were from the child support registration database with the Department of Human Services. It should be acknowledged that victim parents of family violence can obtain a child support exemption due to their experiences of violence and fear of violence, and therefore such parents were not represented in the two surveys.

Finally, the measures on the domains of family violence were self-reporting according to parents' experiences. Post-separation adjustment and sensitivity to children's needs in this context may affect parents' self-reports on outcome measures (e.g. perceptions of their child's wellbeing, and the measures being indirect in nature).

4. Qualitative insights into mothering, domestic and family violence, and service approaches

4.1 Abstract

This chapter presents qualitative findings from 50 interviews with women who had used services in the family violence, child protection, and family law sectors. The interviews focused on their experiences of family violence and mothering, the qualities of their ex-partners (in some cases current partners) as fathers, their relationships with their children, and their experiences using services. The diverse sample included women from varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds who were at different points in their life course, from early parenthood to late adulthood.

All had experienced family violence that was severe in nature, and 45 of the women also reported their children had been abused in some form by the perpetrator of violence. More than half of the women in the sample had experienced financial abuse, with many reporting an escalation of this after separation, and 29 reported experiences indicative of systems abuse (where a father or ex-partner uses agencies, legal systems, family law services, or other services to further perpetrate abuse). Most also indicated that other forms of violence continued after separation.

The women's accounts indicated multiple direct and indirect negative effects on their capacity to meet their children's needs as a result of the violence, but also demonstrated significant strength and resilience in dealing with these material, physical, and psychological consequences. Consistent with the LSAC and AIFS Family Pathways findings, adverse consequences for children were also strongly evident, including anxiety, depression, behavioural and social problems, and difficulties at school. These data demonstrate that mothering in the context of family violence is very challenging.

In addition to direct child abuse, the women's reports indicated a spectrum of negative fathering qualities in their ex-partners and partners, including inconsistent and neglectful parenting, an inability to prioritise children's needs, and psychologically and financially manipulative behaviour. This behaviour undermined their relationships with their children, including fathers exposing children to explicitly denigrating and abusive attitudes to their mothers, attitudes that were then adopted by some children.

In terms of their interactions with services, most women reported positive experiences with refuges and domestic violence services. Therapeutic services for women and children were also valued but access to sustained and sufficient

expert support of this nature was difficult for some women. Across the child protection and family law systems, women reported receiving little support for recovery from family violence. In addition to this issue not being a focus for these agencies, other issues contributed to negative experiences. Issues included a lack of expertise in family violence among professionals in the family law system and the use of various systems, including child protection, family law agencies, and courts, by perpetrators to perpetuate abuse.

The material in this chapter illuminates the experiences of a group of women analogous to a clinical sample and illustrates the personal experiences behind some of the negative effects evident in the quantitative samples in parts 3 and 4. Moreover, it demonstrates that the service system may currently be inadequately configured to address the consequences of family violence for parenting.

4.2 Introduction

This section sets out insights from the qualitative component of the research program. It is based on interviews with 50 women who had a past or current experience of domestic and family violence (DFV) and had used services and agencies across the DFV, child protection, and family law sectors. The open-ended interviews were designed to elicit detailed insights into the participants' perceptions of how DFV affected their parenting capacity and their relationships with their children, as well as their views of their ex-partner's (and, in some cases, current partner's) capacities as a father. A further important focus of the interviews was the experiences participants had engaging with services and agencies across the DFV, child protection, and family law sectors and the extent to which these had been helpful or unhelpful. The findings from the interviews support a deeper understanding of how women with experiences of family violence have and have not been assisted by these services and agencies. The findings also help to understand what services and agencies can do better from the perspective of these participants, particularly in terms of supporting them personally and better supporting relationships between mothers and children who have experienced DFV.

The research evidence presented so far in this report and in previous literature suggests that concerns for children's wellbeing when they are living with family violence before and after separation are well placed. Consistent with previous

research (Holt, Buckley, & Whelan, 2008), the majority of children show that their cognitive functioning and emotional wellbeing is significantly negatively affected when compared to other children who are not living with family violence or inter-parental conflict. Previous literature also shows that perpetrators of family violence are also more likely than other fathers to be engaged in other forms of child abuse, while the mother's parenting capacity may also be impaired by the direct and indirect attacks on the mother-child relationship (Humphreys, Thiara, & Skamballis, 2010; Hooker et al., 2016).

Notwithstanding these issues, men who use violence in the home continue to have a significant fathering role with their children or step-children. A US study of 3824 men who had attended court-ordered evaluation after a conviction for assaulting an intimate partner showed that 65.5 percent of these men had a continuing and direct fathering role (Salisbury, Henning, & Holdford, 2009). Similar findings emerged through consultations with practitioners (Featherstone & Fraser, 2012) and some early evidence from Australian Men's Behaviour Change programs (Day et al., 2009). While many of the men have continuing involvement as fathers, there is little research evidence about the circumstances under which these men parent post-separation.

As set out previously in Table 1 of the introduction to this report, the qualitative component was essential to address research questions 1(d) to 3(c):

- 1) How does DFV affect mother-child and father-child relationships?
 - a) What is known about the parenting capacity of men who perpetrate DFV?
 - b) What is known about the tactics used by men who perpetrate DFV to undermine relationships between women and children?
- 2) How do mothers who have experienced DFV perceive this has affected their relationship with their children? In particular?
 - a) What impact do they report this experience has on their parenting capacity?
 - b) What impact do they report this experience has on their relationship with their children?

- c) How do they describe the emotional dynamics within the family in the context of the DFV, including the perpetrators' relationship with the children?
 - d) What support do victims of DFV say they need to enhance parenting in this context?
- 3) To what extent have these mothers had contact with services and agencies in the child protection, family law, and DFV systems?
 - a) How do they describe their experiences with these services and agencies?
 - b) What other support and therapeutic services have they used, with or without their children? Were these services helpful or unhelpful in supporting their relationships with children? Why or why not?
 - c) To what extent have these services been helpful in addressing any ongoing difficulties in their relationship with their ex-partner and the relationship between their ex-partner and their children?

The analysis of the interviews with women will contribute to the growing body of knowledge in this area. Part 4 is structured in the following order. Section 4.3 explains the research method. Section 4.4 presents a demographic profile of women who participated in an interview, care arrangements for children, and children's ages. The first of the thematic analysis findings is reported in section 4.5, about the interconnection between tactics of abuse and control, and consequences in parenting arrangements. Section 4.6 presents the findings about fathering and tactics of domestic and family violence, and section 4.7 focuses on mothering in this context. Section 4.8 reports on the consequences of domestic and family violence and tactics of abuse for relationships between mothers and children. Women's experiences of services and agencies and the impact of their relationships with children before and after separation are reported in section 4.9, including refuges and domestic violence services, parenting and therapeutic support, child protection agencies, and family law agencies and courts.

4.3 Conducting the qualitative interviews

A total of 50 qualitative interviews were conducted face to face or over the telephone with women. These qualitative interviews focused on exploring: (a) the mother's experiences of DFV and its impact on their parenting and mother-child relationships; and (b) their experiences engaging with services across: post-separation family law services, child protection services, domestic violence services, and any other services or agencies in these areas. The interview schedule reflected the research questions applicable to this component of the project. The in-depth interview schedule covered the following topics:

- demographic information;
- the participant's current situation;
- present and past qualities of relationships between: mothers and their children, women and their partner or former partner, their children and their former partner;
- contact with services and agencies in the identified areas and whether this had a positive, negative, or mixed impact on them and their relationship with their children; and
- what other needs the participant and her children might have in relation to recovery from DFV and to support their parenting.

Approval for this study was granted by the AIFS and University of Melbourne Human Research Ethics Committees. Consistent with ethics approval requirements, women were provided with a copy of the participant information sheet prior to the interview and a verbal consent process was used at the time of the interview.

Recruitment utilised two main strategies to reach a broad range of women. First, women were recruited through the services and agencies that were part of the advisory group and other post-separation family law services, child protection services, and domestic violence services who were willing to circulate information about the research. This strategy extended to snowball sampling to recruit additional participants within services. The circulation of the participant information statement and a Facebook message were used for these purposes.

Second, participants were recruited via an existing Australian Research Council (ARC) project, led by Professor Cathy Humphreys (Humphreys et al., *Fathering, family and domestic violence and intervention challenges*, ARC LP130100172). The aim of that study—to examine the fathering behaviour of men who have used behaviour change programs from the perspective of their current or former partners—was consistent with the aims of the qualitative component of this research. The fathering study involved interviews with the partners and (ex-partners) of men who had used men's behaviour change programs. Sharing recruitment across the two projects was

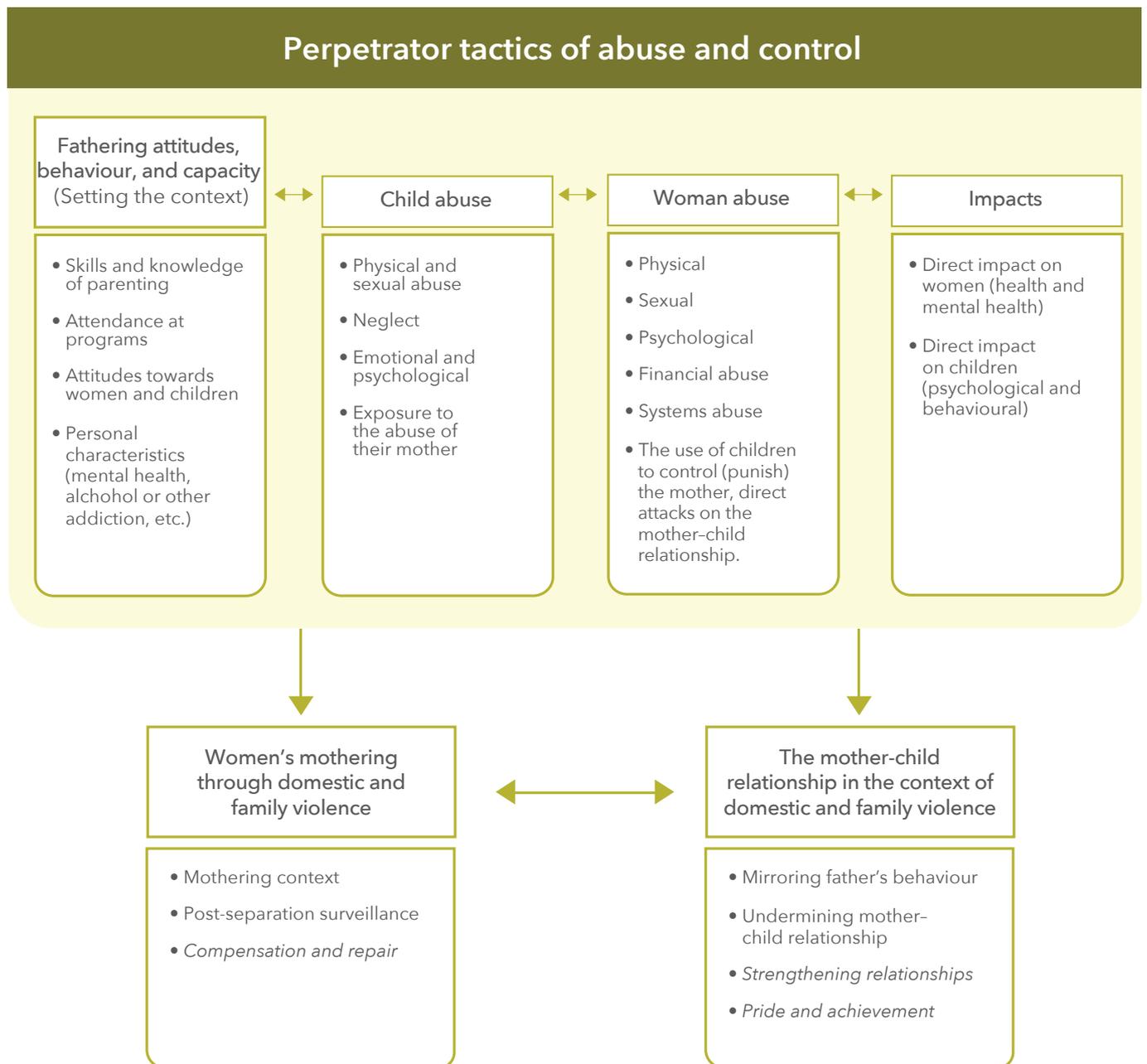
intended to minimise the risk of participant burden for this vulnerable population. Thirty-five of the participants (70%) provided interview data across both the fathering study and this study. The successful combination of these recruitment strategies is shown by the demographic profile of our 50 participants, including women from Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland, and New South Wales. Section 4.3 describes the demographic information of women who were interviewed.

An advantage of this research method was that the qualitative interviews provided personal insights about the quantitative findings from the LSAC and separated parents surveys, particularly perpetrators' tactics, the consequences of DFV for mothers and children, the disruption to mother-child relationships, and family law and other service responses. However, a limitation of this research is that the findings reflect individual experiences of DFV and services and are therefore not able to be generalised to the population of all women or families who have contact with the family law system and other services.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using a thematic analysis and a thematic template (Thomas & Harden, 2008). This template used the research questions and interview schedule as a starting point; themes could then be identified across responses. De-identification of the transcripts involved removing names of people, places, specific services, dates, and potentially identifiable events. An iterative process, which moved from the template (primary coding) to the development of secondary themes and concepts, provided the framework through which the results are discussed (see Figure 4.1). In the reporting of this interview data, numbers are sometimes provided to give an idea of the strength of the theme. However, if women did not volunteer information, this was not pursued. Therefore, numbers will often be an underestimate of the extent of the issue, and should only be understood as indicative of the strength of a pattern in the data.

The themes are organised in this part of the report in response to the research questions and illustrated in Figure 4.1. First, the evidence of the parenting capacity of men who perpetrate DFV (Q1(d), Q2(c)) and the tactics of abuse that are used on women and children (Q1(e)) are presented. Together, these then allow an exploration about how such experiences impact on women's mothering (Q2(a)) and the impact on their relationship with their children (Q2(b), Q2(c)). Services and agencies are addressed (Q3(a) to (c)).

Figure 4.1 Tactics of DFV and implications for father-child and mother-child relationships



The next results section begins with a demographic summary that describes the sample of women who were interviewed and a brief description of the circumstances under which the mothers and fathers were spending time with their children. Three short case studies are then provided to illustrate the inter-related nature of themes, before moving into the thematic analysis.

4.4 Demographic profile of participants and patterns of DFV and abuse

This section presents a summary of the demographic profile of the women who participated in the interviews, including their age, state, children, and the care arrangements under which their children were spending time with their mothers and fathers.

4.4.1 Demographics

Almost half the 50 participants were aged between 35 and 44 years (49%), while around one in seven were aged 25-34 years (16%) and 35 percent were aged 45 years or over. Participants in the study resided across five Australian states, with just over one-third living in Queensland (34%) and just less than a third living in South Australia (30%). A quarter of the participants resided in Victoria (26%), 6 percent in New South Wales, and 4 percent in Western Australia.

English was reported as the main language spoken at home by the vast majority of participants (92%). English was a second language at home for four women (8%). The majority of participants were non-Indigenous and Australian-born (59%), with 6 percent identifying as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent and 37 percent born overseas. Countries or regions of origin for those born overseas (from most to least frequent) included: the United Kingdom, New Zealand, South-East Asia, Pacific Islands, South America, Europe, and the Middle East.

The majority of the participants had post-secondary school qualifications, with 35 percent holding a bachelor's degree or higher, and 33 percent having another post-secondary qualification, such as a diploma or trade. Thirteen percent of participants had only completed Year 12, and 19 percent had completed Year 11 or less.

Participants were asked about their current labour force activities, namely whether they were working, studying, or receiving a disability or carer pension. All relevant activities were recorded and participants could select multiple activities.

Just over half the participants reported that they were currently working (52%), while 14 percent were studying, 22 percent were receiving a disability or carer pension, and 10 percent identified as unemployed. Half the participants identified themselves as having full-time caring responsibilities. A substantial minority of participants named multiple activities, reflecting the complexities of parenting while juggling other responsibilities. For example, almost one in five participants were working either full-time or part-time as well as having full-time caring responsibilities. Two participants who were studying full-time were also working part-time. Of the five participants who were studying part-time, four also identified as full-time carers—and two of these also worked part-time. Table 4.1 presents the frequencies for these demographic variables.

Table 4.1 Demographics of participants

Demographics	n	%
Age^a		
25-34 years	8	16.3
35-44 years	24	49.0
45+ years	17	34.7
Language		
English	46	92.0
English as second language	4	8.0
Cultural background		
Australian born	32	64.0
Non-Indigenous	(29)	(58.0)
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	(3)	(6.0)
Overseas born	18	36.0
State of residence		
Qld	17	34.0
SA	15	30.0
Vic.	13	26.0
NSW	3	6.0
WA	2	4.0
Education level^a		
Bachelor degree or above	17	34.7
Other post-secondary qualification (e.g. diploma)	17	34.7
Completed Year 12 (no post-secondary)	6	12.2
Year 11 or below	9	18.4
Labour force status^b		
Employed (total)	26	52.0
Employed or self-employed full-time	(8)	(16.0)
Employed or self-employed part-time	(12)	(24.0)
Casual employment	(5)	(10.0)
Retired	1	2.0
Unemployed	5	10.0
Studying (total)	7	14.0
Studying full-time	(2)	(4.0)
Studying part-time	(5)	(10.0)
Carer activities		
Full-time parenting/carers	25	50.0
Receiving a disability or carer pension	11	22.0
Total	50	

Notes: a. n = 1 missing data,

b. participants could select more than one option.

4.4.2 Relationship status and the time children spent with mothers and fathers, and contact with perpetrator

Examination of participants' relationship status, children's post-separation contact arrangements, and ongoing contact between women and perpetrators has highlighted the complex nature of ending violent relationships and the challenges associated when there are children from the relationship. Table 4.2 presents the frequencies of relationship status as described by participants. Four participants were still living with the perpetrator, though one of these women identified as being currently separated or divorced from her partner while living together. Half the participants identified as being currently separated or divorced and no longer living with the perpetrator. A further 32 percent of participants identified as single. Four participants had re-partnered. One participant was widowed from the perpetrator post-separation. Among the 46 women who no longer lived with the perpetrator, 54 percent reported ongoing contact in some form and 46 percent reported no contact or little. Contact between women and ex-partners was largely due to post-separation parenting.

Table 4.2 Participants' current relationship status

Relationship status	n	%
Living with perpetrator	4	8.0
Married or de facto	3	6.0
Separated or divorced	1	2.0
Not living with perpetrator	46	92.0
Re-partnered	4	8.0
Separated or divorced	25	50.0
Single	16	32.0
Widowed	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

4.4.3 Children

There was a total of 142 children across all participants, including biological, adopted, step or foster children. Participants had an average of three children. Twelve percent of participants had one child, 36 percent had two children, 24 percent had three children, and 28 percent had four or more children (to a maximum of seven). The majority of children were biologically related to the participant.

Approximately a third of the children were 18 years or older (Table 4.3). The next most common age range was primary school age (6-11 years), at 27 percent. A further 16 percent of children were each in the 12-17 and 2-5 years age groups, and 7 percent of children were aged less than 2 years.

Table 4.3 Ages of participants' children

Age	n	%
Under 2	8	5.6
2-5 years	22	15.5
6-11 years	38	26.8
12-17 years	22	15.5
18+ years	49	34.5
Not specified	3	2.1
Total	142	100.0

The majority of perpetrators were father to at least one biological child (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4 Perpetrator's relationship to the children

Categories	n	%
At least one biological child	45	90.0
Step-child	4	8.0
Other ^a	1	2.0
Total	50	100.0

Notes: ^a Other refers to no parental-type relationship with child; i.e. perpetrator lived with mother and child but did not act as a step-father.

The living arrangements for children were complicated and changing. The coding reflects at least one child per mother. However, not all children are reflected in this coding because different complex arrangements sometimes applied to multiple children within a family, and circumstances changed over time. The coding included the post-separation parenting period for children who are now adults.

A total of 70 percent (n = 35) of mothers who were separated from their ex-partner had at least one child living mainly with them as their regular post-separation parenting arrangement. However, within this group of mothers, six reported that at least one of their other children lived mainly with their father (i.e. siblings had different post-separation care arrangements). Six mothers reported all children lived mainly with their father and another six mothers reported having a shared care arrangement. Nine mothers reported that in circumstances where the child mainly lived with her, children had weekly or more overnight stays with their father (see Table 4.5). Cumulatively, this meant that 27 mothers had one or more children with care arrangements that required the child to live mainly with the perpetrator father on a shared care or full-time basis or to have substantial overnight care-time. Twelve mothers who had a child mainly living with them reported there were no overnight stays with the father (meaning only daytime contact or no contact occurred with him).

The demographic data and the time arrangements for children are relevant in understanding the interview sample in relation to mothering and fathering in the context of domestic and family violence (DFV).

Table 4.5 Mother's reports of children's main post-separation overnight care-time with father

Overnight care-time with father		%
No overnight stays (daytime only or no contact)	12	34.3
Once a week or more	9	25.7
Every second week	5	14.2
Other or occasional overnight (not regular)	9	25.7
Total	35	100.0

Note: Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding.

4.5 The interconnection between tactics of abuse and control, the impact on women and children, and parenting arrangements

Identifiable in the three case studies outlined below is the interconnected nature of the tactics of abuse and control, the impact that these have on women and their children, and the types of post-separation parenting arrangements. This analysis provides a foreground to the thematic analysis in which themes are presented discretely. However, it is important to keep in mind that the tactics of abuse and the consequences experienced by women and children are intertwined. For example, emotional and psychological abuse is a tactic that changes in its manifestations over time, and is also one in which children, women, and the relationship between them may all be impacted. It is therefore difficult to disentangle the abuse from its consequences.

The following case studies are used here to explain the interrelated issues of tactics of abuse and control and the consequences of these for mothers and children by describing the different care arrangements for where children spend their time post-separation.

4.5.1 Vicky: a mother whose children mainly live with her; the father's abusive controlling tactics have led to reduced contact with him

Vicky has two children under 5 years of age. When she first separated from the father of her children, Vicky obtained a protection order for her and her children. During these first few months the violence escalated through text messages and stalking behaviour. Her lawyers then filed for a no-contact order. After 6 months, it was recommended that she seek an application for supervised contact once a month through a contact centre. Her ex-partner started stalking her again around the pick-ups and drop-offs at the contact centre, which led to a return to court. The order for supervised contact with the children was upheld with an additional condition that he keep a specific distance from the centre at the time Vicky picks up or drops off the children. The contact centre eventually suspended the visits because he was repeatedly abusive to the staff, and the children witnessed this abuse. In order to regain contact he needed to apply for a place with a new contact centre. Instead of doing that, he lodged an application for full care of the children, a process that will now take longer to resolve in the family court. Vicky believes this move illustrates that he is not interested in contact but rather is asserting control and creating a situation emotionally and psychologically harmful to her and the children. At the time of the interview, the children had not had contact with their father for some months. Vicky believes they are becoming more relaxed and contented in their manner without regular contact with him.

4.5.2 Dana: shared care arrangements and abusive controlling tactics

Dana has two children in the 12-17 years age group and court orders specify a shared care arrangement with her ex-partner. Her ex-partner started stalking her and the children after separation, making threats, and removing the children from school without informing Dana. When the children have time with their father, he regularly returns them late (hours or days) and will not communicate with Dana about delays. He punishes Dana by controlling the time he has with the children so that she cannot plan her own time or prepare for their return. Dana describes her eldest son as acting increasingly like his father:

You know, very abusive, very angry. You know, would come out of his room and just start criticising me for no reason whatsoever...[he] would say things like my food tastes like dog shit and, you know, it was really horrible and really disrespectful and aggressive...he'd [oldest child] sit at the table and engage my youngest in conversation and if I tried to participate or join in the discussion or add an opinion, he'd turn around and he'd glare at me in the same way his father used to and he'd say, "Did we ask your opinion? Do you hear me talking to you?"

Dana said she is feeling pessimistic about her eldest son's future and her relationship with him. She has tried to get him into counselling but her ex-partner will not agree to it. The eldest son has recently decided to live with his father and has cut off all contact with Dana, although she continues to be the parent responsible for his school arrangements and other parenting matters. Dana believes that the father has been pressuring their children to live with him as the property settlement date draws nearer. She believes her older son is "lost to her" and fears her younger son is unfairly positioned by his father and brother and will soon follow his brother and "choose" to live with his father.

4.5.3 Lavinia: father has sole care of the children and uses abusive controlling tactics

About 2 years ago, Lavinia separated from her abusive partner. At the time of separation, one of her children was aged under 2 and the other was 6-11 years old. She described her relationship with the children as close and caring before separation. The older child, in particular, had been at times traumatised by the violence he had seen and this was part of her reason for separating from his father. She had also been the primary carer of her infant.

Before any court orders were in place, Lavinia initiated

arrangements for the older child to stay with his father for a few days in the school holidays. The father did not return the child when expected and continued to make alternative arrangements, on which he did not follow through. The younger child was missing her brother and Lavinia decided to allow the younger child to stay with her brother and father conditional upon the expectation that the father would return them both. The father subsequently refused to return both children and refused any contact with her.

Lavinia tried to negotiate access to her children on her own for a few weeks. By the time she realised that she needed legal support, it had been nearly a month without contact with either child. The lawyer she engaged did not see the issue as serious and did not take appropriate action to recover the children. By the time Lavinia was given a court date, she had not seen her children for 3 months. The court determined that the children were now settled with the father so they should remain in his care while the parents commenced family therapy and psychological assessments. This set off another series of delaying tactics by the father. He would not attend the therapy sessions or schedule his own psychological assessment.

Over 6 months later Lavinia finally received a court order that she could have 1 hour of supervised time with her children every fortnight, and the father was to be present. The father still did not comply on a regular basis, and, by this time, her relationship with both children was severely damaged. Neither child recognised her as their mother and would behave in a terrified manner toward her. Lavinia felt that the father was being manipulative in the contact sessions and prevented the children from engaging with her. In the end, Lavinia asked him not to bring her older child because she felt he was being traumatised by the contact. After 2 years, at least four different lawyers, and many court hearings, in which she held raised hopes of gaining meaningful time with her children only to face disappointment either in the ruling or the father's refusal to comply, she has now reached a point where she is considering giving up the fight for her children under medical advice, in order to preserve her own mental health.

4.6 Analysis of fathering and patterns of domestic and family violence tactics

A number of themes provide the framework through which to understand fathering capacity and the tactics of abuse and control in the context of DFV. These include an exploration of fathering capacity and incapacity, different forms of child abuse, and the tactics of abuse used directly against women.

4.6.1 Fathering capacity and incapacity

The interviews with women reveal that men's capacity to father was influenced by the overall context in which they were living. Some of this was under men's own control, such as acquiring parenting knowledge and skills, holding negative attitudes towards the mother, and their own need to control the relationship with both the mother and children without regard for children's needs. Other contextual factors were not always under men's control, such as mental health issues that women report had been diagnosed. There were also contexts that could be controllable with insight and support, including problematic drug, alcohol, and gambling issues, and treatment for some mental health issues. While most women reported that there were problematic contexts that negatively impacted on men's capacity to father, very few reported that men actively sought support to help them overcome these problems. A number of relatively positive attributes also came to light in relation to a small group of men as fathers.

4.6.1.1 Knowledge and skills as a father

As reported by the participants, there was a substantial group of men who had little knowledge or skill about how to parent prior to separation. Mothers reported that fathers had never performed daily care tasks for their children such as bathing, preparing meals, getting them to school and assisting with homework, or engaging in age-appropriate play. Furthermore, many of the mothers stated that their ex-partners did not know who their children's friends were, their personal interests, or what they did during the day. Reasons for a lack of knowledge or skill varied. In many cases it was perceived that fathers showed a lack of interest in the children until separation, other men identified their fathering role solely as the "breadwinner", and, in other cases, women engaged in protective measures to mitigate abuse from a child's father. The following examples provide illustrations of how fathers' knowledge and skills were issues for families against a background of DFV.

Caitlyn described the circumstances where her ex-partner didn't have the knowledge, skill, or interest to be an engaged father:

I feel he was a bit distant... How else could I—I felt that it was, I had to do it all and he had his role. He often used to

say that he's the breadwinner and I'm at home, you know... and he just didn't—he didn't realise I saw it in the other way. You know, he never saw it like that 'cause his father was like that... I think he was a bit unsure of parenting... His role models weren't there.

Kimberly exemplified a group of women who described their ex-partners as “hard on their children” and creating fear, combined with a lack of interest in having a close relationship with the children.

He was pretty tough on them and there was really no relationship with [the children]. Like his reality, he was just always angry and he used to just be constantly sending them out of the room if we were all in the room together. Or just quite cold really towards them. Didn't have a lot of time for them at all... well I couldn't really react a lot of the time when he'd send them out and I felt bad because it would just create an argument or a big fight or because I'm stepping up for my kids but—so yeah, it sort of—it affected them quite a lot... I was just always looking over my shoulder or trying to make them be quiet.

Audrey stated that her children initiated the contact with their father and that three of the four children say they love him. She sees that the children work hard to have a relationship with their father but he doesn't reciprocate meaningfully.

He has more relationships with people online, or playing games. Like he can sort of play games longer than he could have a talk with [his kids]. Just about normal things or not even normal things or talking about what he likes, what they like. I don't even think he knows that his [12-17 year old child] is left-handed. Little things that he should know. But they've always tried and put the effort in with him. Like they'll—[6-11 year old child] and [other 6-11 year old child] would sit with him next to the computer game and try and play the games that he likes playing. Just to try and have a relationship

Other women spoke of the lack of knowledge fathers had about child development that created unrealistic demands on children:

I was realistic about little kids and the mess they make. He demanded everything was tidy. There's no point in yelling at a 1-year-old because they've got the coffee out all over the floor. Like, you've left them unsupervised in that time for them to get the coffee all over the floor. (Eloise)

Only four women reported positive relationships between fathers and children, though they recognised that the abuse experienced by them as a mother was a moderator. A further 12 women reported mixed views of the father's parenting. Lavinia, for example, spoke of how her children's father was

involved and interactive with the kids before they separated:

Yeah, he was really good with the kids. Um, he was very interactive. He was really good with them when he was—when he had energy. If he didn't have energy, he would completely shut down. And if he'd had enough, then you know, he might have an outburst of some kind. So, but at nights he wasn't great. Ah, you know, the onus was pretty much on me to do everything, in the evenings. But you know, he would do lots of stuff with my eldest child and he was very loving and affectionate with the youngest as well.

But Lavinia also reflected on how the children witnessed abuse towards her and it was difficult to reconcile his positive actions as a father and the trauma he had caused the children.

But he didn't think verbally abusing me in front of them was a big deal or exploding if one of the children hurt themselves and kicking doors and screaming and hurling verbal abuse at the top of his lungs, didn't seem to count as verbal abuse of any kind to him. So you know, it was very one-sided on that one. So yeah, I think that, so yeah, I think that [the older child] definitely was involved in a couple of incidents that were extremely violent physically towards me. One when I was pregnant, eight-and-a-half months, and one when the baby was 5 months old.

A number of women spoke of fathers favouring one child over another. So while one child may have been parented well, or at least been given some attention, another child may not have had the same experience. In this way, parenting was compromised.

Well, he doesn't believe that his children are his. So he has this belief that I had affairs and so his children aren't his but he treats them pretty well I think. But I imagine that he just transferred his anger from me towards them. (Hannah)

Well, he's got DNA testing to say that he is the father. He had that for a good year before we got to final court orders, so he had a good year knowing he was the father to process that and come to terms with that... We've gone through a 2-year court battle and he's made the choice not to have anything to do with his youngest child; he actually refused to sign her birth certificate. He refused to acknowledge that he was the father... We had a family court report where he said that he just wasn't ready to be a father to three children, and he never asked for a third child, and it's really hard on him when she's, like, [age]; he still hasn't got his head around it. (Gayle)

The knowledge and skills in relation to fathering were clearly difficult to separate from the attitudes to women and children discussed in the next section.

4.6.1.2 Attitudes to women and children

Previous literature has argued that DFV is underpinned by disrespectful attitudes to women (Flood, Fergus, Heenan, & Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, 2009; Flood & Pease, 2009). Not all women overtly articulated in the interviews that their ex-partner or current partner had problematic attitudes to women. However, many women in the sample were concerned about the ways in which attitudes to women might be, or were being, conveyed to their children by men.

He's the kind of person that perceives women to just be there to pretty much serve him and be servants and to not exist, to not have any other need or role whatsoever...So they have a really skewed view of what it means to be a woman. (Yvette)

The way men and society conducts itself...that theme that [the children] picked up when they were little that, you know, just Mum, just a woman, ah, just staying at home, you know, and the disrespect is there. (Jana)

Less has been said in the literature about men's attitudes to children in the context of family violence and child abuse compared to attitudes toward women. Men's attitudes to children could be equally as problematic as their attitudes to women, with a number of women describing "seen and not heard" attitudes to children. Five women used the same phrase of "walking on eggshells" as a way to describe how children feared fathers and step-fathers.

My kids just started walking around on eggshells constantly. My kids weren't able to be kids really. They just—it was just always looking over my shoulder or trying to make them be quiet...it was just constant pressure trying to make them be silent and like silent little statues really. Ah yeah it was tough. (Kimberly)

4.6.1.3 Men's mental health issues and drug, alcohol, and gambling issues

Many women spoke during the interview in a way that sought to make sense of their partner or ex-partner's behaviour. Twelve women made reference to their partner or ex-partner's mental health problems, although it was difficult to glean how many of these men had received a clinical diagnosis. Several women referred to mood swings in this context.

[I wanted to] be able to have a normal...to raise my children normally...without the stress and the hassle of not knowing when he was going to fly off the handle, or, or offend physically as well as abusively...Just walking on eggshells all the time. Um, keeping the children quiet when he was around, when he was in a mood. (Aaliyah)

His anger, it just happens at a split second without even a warning. (Lea)

Other women spoke of depression exhibited by men.

My children also were aware that that's his behaviour and he, you know, suffers with depression and mental illness. (Annabelle)

And after he's bankrupt and after we have to move—move on to somewhere and he's got money then and he gets very sick, depressed. (Eliza)

While these references to mood swings and depression provided women with some context for the abuse they suffered, the descriptions also were indicative of the ways in which men used their emotions to control the women and children in the family. At least 13 women spoke of obsessive behaviour, enforcement of petty rules, and stalking behaviours from their partners or ex-partners. Some of these descriptions may be symptomatic of a mental illness while others could be the implementation of strategies intended to abuse and control. Either way, the behaviours had implications for men's fathering.

He insisted on the house always being clean and the girls tidy, lots of rules, etc., so they lived in fear of breaching his expectations. (Lara)

He had some really ridiculous rules about what had to happen and what didn't have to happen. So, you know, the tiny trivial enforcements on people getting into trouble if they didn't cut the toast to a certain thinness...like there were just a million tiny enforceable things that kept everybody stressed, I suppose, while he was there. So that was unhelpful. (Rita)

There was no physical abuse. Just this walking on eggshells. They [kids] were aware of the control he had over the household. (Gemma)

He's a bully basically...So he particularly bullies [the eldest child]...And just, um, very manipulative...the children are quite scared of him...They really don't want to—we're so used to walking on eggshells, that, that's how, particularly me and [eldest child] are around him. (Maria)

For other women, stalking behaviours were particularly frightening for them and the children.

I got the intervention order on the Monday and I stayed for a period of about ten weeks but he was stalking my house. He was stalking my work. He was going to parents of students I taught and my life was unbearable. So I ended up—I can't stay in the same town. (Tania)

A while back I walked onto my patio and there's a dead rat, and it's got its eyes cut out, and [the daughter]'s school uniforms get stolen even when they're hidden behind everything else in the washing line...normally we're not there, when the home is broken into, nothing taken usually, apart from my passport, like bank statements, breast milk, it's just stupid stuff. (Karla)

Obsessive jealousy was also prevalent in accounts from several women.

I've been accused of looking, perverting at other men in my rearview mirror on a rainy, windy night...I look in my rearview mirror while I'm driving. Like, "who are you looking at?" Like, are you kidding me? You know, that's got nothing to do with me, that's got everything to do with him and his past...paranoia. (Bridget)

From the analysis of the interviews, women generally only mentioned problematic drinking when prompted, while drugs and gambling problems tended to arise unprompted. At least 13 women mentioned problems with their partner's or ex-partner's problem drinking, ice (methamphetamine) use, or gambling addictions.

And he's also a chronic, chronic, chronic gambler. So, you know, the online gambling or gambling at the—you know, gambling almost took precedence over everything. (Dana)

He is volatile and addicted to ice. (Alice)

He drank a lot and gambled a lot. (Mackenzie)

I think there's mental health issues involved there, and drug and alcohol, definitely. That's proven—drug and alcohol issues—he was on [restricted prescription drug], which is like [restricted prescription drug], and he was a [medical professional], because he was stealing people's medication and he's been deregistered...because he was stealing dead, dying, sick people's—not really discriminatory whose drugs it was. (Gayle)

4.6.1.4 The need or demand for control and manipulative behaviour

Women referred consistently to their ex-partner's need for control, the manipulative behaviour that frequently underpinned this demand, and other traits that could be described as personality characteristics that provided the context for abusive parenting. Coercive and controlling behaviours towards women and their children were described by 37 women as occurring pre-separation, and 16 women said this continued or started post-separation. Controlling behaviour was most frequently mentioned.

I'm out of the house and what others don't realise is it's still domestic violence. He's controlling and intimidating and putting that same threat, threat of taking them. So his threat to me was always—if you don't do what I, you know, what is perfect for him, then it's a threat of my life and the kids' life, if that makes sense. (Vicky)

This is a man who had raped me, had beaten me, had said he was going to kill me and throw me in the dam, like, he wasn't going to muck around, like, this was going to happen. I had—he has had 11 years of control over me. (Tania)

He has to have complete power of people...and complete power over their thoughts and he has to be adored and honoured. (Marlene)

Manipulative behaviours toward women, children, professionals, and people outside the family also were described in many interviews.

We had called the police several times in the past to our house when he was going nuts and smashing things and hurting people, but they had never ever believed us. Even myself and five kids sitting there shaking, things smashed up, you know he'd have them eating out of the palm of their hands. (Rita)

It got to the point where he tried to stab himself in front of the kids; he went crazy one day and I rang the police, they went out and spoke to him. They came back to me and said, "Oh look he's just going through a hard time" and they pulled out their little book and he goes, "I'd like you to sign here to say that you're not going to take out a DVO on him." So I just said, you know what...he can manipulate police. (Alice)

Other women referred to men as being selfish and self-centred as a personality trait that enabled them to exert influence and control as a partner and a father.

He's selfish. It was all about himself and his own time and what he wants. It's not about working together. (Audrey)

Extremely selfish. But it's almost like he's—he—he's not connected to reality in terms of his fathering, and he wasn't in terms of his partnering either. (Rita)

He doesn't quite hear about the feelings and doesn't put [the child's] needs over [his own]. He never puts [the child] above himself, though he would say he's very loving. (Sara)

4.6.1.5 Positive fathering attributes

While most of the commentary about men and their fathering during the interviews described events and behaviours that were profoundly concerning and abusive, 17 women could name some positive attributes about their partners or ex-partners when prompted. For example, the three women who remained living with their partners each identified positive aspects despite the abuse that they suffered.

For instance, Bridget noted that her partner is on a serious criminal charge for violence, pending a court appearance, so she is concerned that this might be affecting the effort he is putting into making a good relationship with his stepchildren. She said:

They absolutely adore him... They, you know, jump all over him, play with him. Yeah they interact well together... We go camping so he'll teach them how to do things and lets them do things that I wouldn't normally do because he can actually—he knows what he is doing... He interacts well with them and pays them a lot of attention, which I think is a great thing as an adult to do... He hasn't called me a bad mother. He knows I'm a good mum. (Bridget)

Caitlyn never separated from her partner and she recalled positive aspects of his fathering over time. However, her experience and perceptions highlight the complexity of mothering through violence. She notes that her adult children believe she should have separated from the violence when they were children, and, as adults, Caitlyn now has little contact with them.

Yes, look, he did good things too. This was the very confusing part of things. When the kids were little, he took them to camp. (Caitlyn)

While some women who were separated could name positive aspects of the children's father, many statements were contradictory or described men who could clearly be charming or endearing but also highly abusive at other times.

I honestly think he's a very good father. I've got no issues with that. He just had extreme anger issues that he couldn't—he never dealt with. Like, I wouldn't say he was an extremely bad father. Like, he supported them in their sports. He supported them with the things they did growing up. But he just had anger that he could not control. (Libby)

Simone talked about a serious attack by her partner in late pregnancy. However, she also said:

The only help I ever had was my partner; he used to help me. He was pretty much good help when I was pregnant and stuff, like, right before I got with him. He pretty much had everything and my family didn't like that... 'Cause we

never really spent our money on drugs really.

Lara spoke of extremely serious incidents of domestic violence and her ex-husband using ice.

He was very kind and loving and caring towards my girls and my other daughter. And he—he was just—I think—I guess the reason why I stayed with him was because he was so good to them, but—and I didn't see the bigger picture about him hurting me and the girls seeing that. (Lara)

The very contradictory description of fathers and step-fathers with some positive attributes shows how varied (and inconsistent) many of the men were as fathers. It raises the question of whether men sought or were offered help with fathering or men's behaviour change programs. A mixed picture emerges in the next section about their engagement with these programs.

4.6.2 Engagement with parenting and men's behaviour change programs

Twenty women interviewed (40%) reported that their partner had attended some form of program either for parenting (n = 7) or for men who use violence (n = 8). Five men attended both programs. Parenting programs were usually for post-separation arrangements (e.g. court ordered or as part of the Family Dispute Resolution service). Half of the women (n = 25) reported their partners had not attended either program. There were three women who were unsure whether their partners had attended any programs (Table 4.6).

Four of the five women reporting that their partner attended both types of programs also reported that the programs were not helpful. Alexandra's ex-partner was directed to complete a perpetrator program and he was given a choice of several programs, one of which was face-to-face and contained a fathering component. Instead he chose a different online program that she felt did not have any accountability mechanisms, and which contained a very small component on fathering. Her experience highlights a system's issue for monitoring by the court. This is examined further in sections below. She felt that when she returned to court, the magistrate rewarded his participation in the program by not penalising him for the matter before the court.

And he just got, I just feel like he got away with it at the end and now he can say, I did my men's behaviour change program, I'm reformed. And it was viewed as a good thing when I took him to court after that and it was used, you know, that the magistrate said, "oh enough, you've done a men's behaviour change program". So they think, they think, "oh, well, therefore you must be remorseful and be

Table 4.6 Men attending parenting programs or programs for use of violence

Program type and attendance	n	%
Parenting program—past	7	14.6
Program for men who use violence—past	6	12.5
Program for men who use violence— currently attending	2	4.2
Both types of programs	5	10.4
Unsure of either program	3	6.3
Not attended either program	25	52.1
Total	48^a	100.0

Notes: a. n = 2 missing data, question not asked. Percentages may not total exactly 100.0 due to rounding.

changed because you did the course”. (Alexandra)

Alexandra had four criticisms of the program. First, she didn’t think it was appropriate for her ex-partner to select the program of his choice. Second, she believed her ex-partner was not very focused during the course, in part because it was an online program. She knows that he took phone calls while he was doing it. She was also concerned that he could have been alcohol-affected while doing it. Third, there was only a very small component of time spent on fathering, and she believed he needed more. Fourth, although there was an assessment at the end of the course, she has never seen proof that he actually completed it. Alexandra did not see any sign of change from either program in the way he interacted with her or their children.

Belinda believed her ex-partner undertook both a parenting course and an anger management program as a strategy for gaining care of the children. Belinda participated in the same post-separation program as her partner and reported that it focused on assisting couples to work together to separate without going to court.

Having done the course myself, they focus very heavily on trying to get couples to reconcile outside of court, and, clearly, that made no difference to him because he did the course and took me to court several months later. So there was never any—I certainly say there was never any—an intention to learn from those courses. It was just to make out to the judge that he was a different person to what he actually is...[He attended an]...anger management program but he did it just prior to making [the] family court application, part of his legal strategy. He still denies DV and anger problems. He continually stated that he didn’t have an anger problem, so why he was doing a course—you know—why you would do a course if

you are adamant that you don’t have a problem is beyond me, I can only—I can only think that that’s a—what I call a tick-a-box. (Belinda)

There were five women who believed that the men’s use of violence programs were helpful to some extent. Mai reported short-term change, while Lilian saw a more reflective change in her partner.

He went to that program. And he was, he was being respectful and helpful and after a little while, (indistinct) I let him move back in. But it didn’t last very long...As soon as he was in the house, he stopped going to that men’s, you know, men’s change program. He’s just reverted back to the—worse than before. He got more and more controlling. (Mai)

I know that the first time he went on a course; well, it’s a long time ago, when, when the big girls were little, we didn’t have [youngest child]. And we’d think a lot more about how he became different to them. And he did seem to be a lot better, like he was, yeah, open—he was more cautious, you wouldn’t, no way, just quickly and I think definitely I probably obviously made him contemplate how he’d been with me. (Lilian)

Women’s reports of more in-depth or lasting change were those where men had obtained multiple forms of support, usually a counsellor and psychologist in combination with a violence program. There seemed to be both a layered effect and a noticeable change over time.

[Husband]’s [in late 60s] now and he’s mellowed a lot and he’s listening to things I’m telling him now; he never used to try to improve so—and it’s a big journey to have got where we’ve got. We’ve had help from [non-government community service] in [location] a long time—counsellors

there and the women's group...the timing was right but I think it really did help him a lot. And I found I needed to back it up too sometimes, or I was brave and would make comments along the way or ask about things and he did communicate back some of the things. (Caitlyn)

Claudia was uncertain about the “ingredients” for change, which could have included the psychologist counsellor, their journey of change over time, or the men's domestic violence program.

So that was actually really helpful...He went to the course; he's working on his mental health every day. Like, he's committed to being a good dad and being a present father and he supports financially...He's more emotionally present. He listens, he engages in activities the children are interested in, not ones he can be bothered with. He cares about their day. Like he will ask about that, communicate. He's also sensitive to their emotions and needs and he is learning their emotional cues because that's something he's never learnt because he was always so immersed in his own intense emotions all the time. (Claudia)

In summary, women spoke of a wide range of issues that impacted on men's capacity to father and have safe, positive relationships with children. Only a minority of men recognised their limitations to the extent that they were prepared to engage with the parenting programs or men's behaviour change programs that were on offer. Some of the descriptions of control and manipulation also constituted different forms of child abuse, which are reported in the next section.

4.6.3 Child abuse by fathers and step-fathers

Women described a myriad of different forms of abuse, including many ways in which children suffered abuse. In amongst the numerous tactics of abuse, there were patterns that emerged. These included direct child physical and sexual abuse; emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse; neglect; financial abuse; litigation abuse; and continued tactics of violence and abuse. These undermined the mother-child relationship.

This section reports on child abuse and family and domestic violence themes identified in mothers' accounts of their experiences. Interview transcripts were analysed for specific references to child abuse and forms of domestic and family violence allegedly perpetuated by fathers, stepfathers, or ex-partners. It is notable that mothers were not necessarily asked directly about forms of child abuse and domestic or family violence. As a consequence, the analysis does not account for children who may have been abused, neglected, or exposed to family violence but whose mothers did not refer to those

experiences during the interview. The frequency and forms of child abuse are described first below. This is followed by a discussion of the forms of family and domestic violence and abuse which involved their mothers but which clearly affected children as a form of abuse.

Table 4.7 presents the frequencies for different forms of child abuse and neglect that were identified from the data. Coding for the types of child abuse in Table 4.7 applied the criteria used in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2016) definitions of child abuse. The resultant numbers from this coding apply per participant, not per child. Examples are provided in the following sections to illustrate how mothers described the child abuse their children experienced within the family context of DFV. A total of 45 out of 50 mothers (90%) referred to one or more types of child abuse. The aggregate total of 102 instances of child abuse meant that two or more types were identified in most cases.

4.6.3.1 Direct physical abuse of children

As identified in Table 4.7, 45 mothers mentioned some form of behaviour towards their children that was classifiable as abuse and carried out by the children's father or stepfather. Physical abuse constituted any non-accidental physical act of harm inflicted upon a child by a person having the care of a child, such as slapping, punching, or shoving a child (AIHW, 2016, p. 132). Physical abuse applied to physical violence perpetrated only against the child, so as to avoid double-counting physical assaults that occurred as part of family violence incidents against mothers and children together. Seventeen women reported direct physical abuse. The following quotes illustrate how mothers described physical abuse of children, including the escalation of physical punishment into abuse.

She had marks from the middle of her back right down to underneath her bottom, and like, you could clearly see the red handprint, like, the individual fingers. (Patricia)

He is the little girl's father. He has been very physically abusive towards her. She fears and dislikes him intensely. (Karla)

Because the violence had started during the pregnancy. So he was—he started on that boy when he was very little, and the discipline he used on that boy was abusive. He would lock him out of the house when he was three. He was abusive, he would drag him to his room; he was just abusive. (Yvette)

Not all women referred to this as child abuse but often used terms such as, “he was physical to her” or “he was overly hard”. Nicole's experience with her children provides an example of the crossover between inappropriate physical discipline,

Table 4.7 Frequency of forms of child abuse

Forms of child abuse	Total (n = 45)
Psychological/emotional abuse	31
Child witnessed violence against mother or other family member	31
Child was a direct victim of family violence with mother	13
Physical abuse	17
Sexual abuse of child	5
Neglect of child	5
Total forms of child abuse	102

physical abuse, and family violence.

So—I mean, that’s one thing I recall about that, but he was very harsh on them and very controlling and, you know, just inappropriate discipline, inappropriate use of discipline. Throwing, you know, [older stepchild] on his bed so [older stepchild]’s head hit the wall and that sort of thing and, you know, banishing them. Dinner times were terrible ’cause, you know, they’d always end up in this family violence incident and, you know, he’d banish the children outside like animals in winter, you know.

In this sample, five women experienced the “double intentioned” violence of being assaulted during pregnancy (an attack on both the mother and the unborn child).

He [ex-partner] kicked me when I was pregnant with her and I was stressed out a lot. She’s lucky to be alive. I ended up in hospital when he hurt me and it was the police. They took me to hospital. Me and my four kids. (Audrey)

He became really violent during my pregnancy with my middle boy, and so—he was born traumatised. (Yvette)

Some mothers reported that physical child abuse occurred when children were having post-separation contact with their father but their attempts to stop contact, or instate supervised contact, were not successful in the family law system.

Handing over to the father was really traumatic. You know, coming home was even more traumatic...there were bruises everywhere. Everywhere. Like all down her back. Her legs. Her front. Her neck. Her face. It’s just—it was just too much. And she wouldn’t—when I asked her what happened she said, “I don’t know”. So, you know, she was terrified. (Bianca)

Aaliyah’s children had experienced physical abuse and sexual abuse. One of Aaliyah’s daughters had disclosed to Aaliyah on more than one occasion, and separately to other professionals, about being sexually abused by her father before separation

and during contact after separation. However, the father eventually obtained parenting orders for the children to be in his primary care after a lengthy court process with only minimal contact for Aaliyah with her children. She discovered the physical abuse had continued while the children were in his care:

And another time, further down the track, in-between when he had custody of the children and, um, after, y’know, after he got custody of the children, he physically assaulted [daughter], as in belted her—quite severely. Left many bruises on her...I asked family services to help me to stop [contact], because they didn’t want to go back to their father. Both the children, because of, of him attacking her like he did...they said, um, there’s nothing they could do. And I, I, I know there was, they could have stepped in and assisted me...but they didn’t, so they had to go back. And he was actually charged with assault on—I can’t remember the exact term...and because the children had to go back to him, he convinced [daughter] to change her story, saying that she fell off her bike...which would no more give her injuries like she had and so the police saw her as an unreliable witness and withdrew the charges. (Aaliyah)

Several women identified the physical or sexual abuse of children as the point where they decided that they must separate:

When the violence started going towards [son], that’s when I knew I had to go. (Cheryl)

4.6.3.2 Sexual abuse of children

Sexual abuse was identified from the interviews as being “any act by a person having the care of a child that exposes the child to, or involves the child in, sexual processes beyond his or her understanding or contrary to accepted community standards” (AIHW, 2016, p. 133). This includes sexually abusive behaviours against a child, deliberate exposure to

pornography, and grooming for sexualised behaviours.

Even though five mothers spoke about their children having been sexually abused, criminal charges were uncommon and difficult to pursue. For example, Mackenzie's daughter pursued criminal charges when she reached adulthood. In contrast, as the example from Aaliyah above showed, allegations of sexual abuse could escalate post-separation proceedings in a way that meant fathers could make counter-allegations through alleging alienation or making false allegations against mothers.

Bianca's children had contact with their father in compliance with a shared parenting care-time court order. However, the father and his new partner physically abused the children and the father's new partner engaged in sexually abusive behaviour against Bianca's youngest child. The sexually abusive behaviour was intertwined with physical abuse:

Obviously, at this time, I didn't know. And she was—until she—the bruises started showing. There were some other things as well. Some other forms of abuse that I didn't know were abuse at the time. And she'd had vaginal irritation and was coming home with marks on her and I just was assuming she'd—you know. I had emailed the father and said are you using soap on her or something strong? And then the bruising just got worse and worse and worse from just one or two and then marks around her neck. One time she came home, and all bruises down her body. And she was continuing to deteriorate and her personality and her schooling and that's when I sought more advice from—I actually rang the police, child safety, and the solicitor and spoke to the counsellor and the advice I was given was to go to a woman's refuge. Because we just didn't know what was happening. But we knew the kids were deteriorating, and, but they weren't talking. But something was very, very wrong. (Bianca)

The account by Abigail raised highly concerning safety issues that suggested child sexual abuse was possibly occurring in the context of severe violence and the ex-husband's agenda of dominating the family.

Personally didn't agree with her sleeping in the bed with us. It got to the point where I actually bought my own single bed and I slept on the floor in our bedroom while [father of eldest child] and [eldest child] shared a bed. (Abigail separated, but the father insisted that the eldest child lived with him)

4.6.3.3 Neglect of children

Neglect was defined as “any serious act or omission by a person having the care of a child that, within the bounds of cultural tradition, constitute a failure to provide conditions that are essential for the healthy physical and emotional development of a child” (AIHW, 2016, p. 131). While many of the women felt it was important for the father to have a relationship with their children, they also spoke about how the father didn't really know how to take care of the children. In some cases, this resulted in neglect of children while they were in the father's care. Neglect was described in relation to an inability to look after children's day-to-day needs (e.g. healthy food, teeth-brushing, homework, clean changes of clothes) or a lack of active engagement with the children; instead, fathers spent time on their own pre-occupations, such as computer games.

He fails to give required medication, apply sunscreen, and allows them to get sunburnt [when on contact visits]. (Patricia)

Like, I'm sorry to say it but, he comes back in the same dirty underwear, y'know—it's become dirty. He would come back in the same dirty clothes. He, well, I'm glad that he's not—well he says he's hungry, but he does get some fast food. (Sara)

Serious forms of neglect involved a severe level of deprivation of care and this was evident in five cases. Abigail's eldest child suffers from acute dental decay as a result of the diet the child's father provides and his refusal to pay for dental care. He has majority care of their child.

But now we all know how much nutrition plays a part in our life. [Eldest child] now has deformed teeth, there's stains, they're deformed. She's going to need a lot of dental work because she was fed nothing but McDonald's. Soft drink and chicken nuggets as her primary diet.

Sadie's youngest child has high needs. Sadie became homeless upon leaving her ex-partner but this has meant her child is living with her father and his new partner while Sadie has some overnight contact. However, she has serious concerns about neglect as well as physical abuse:

I get her from Friday till Monday...And in that time I clean her. She's got nits. She's got bruises all over her, on her face everywhere. (Sadie)

4.6.3.4 Emotional, psychological, and verbal child abuse

Table 4.7 showed that psychological or emotional abuse and children witnessing family violence against their mother or other family members were the most frequent forms of child abuse, identified by 31 mothers. Psychological or emotional abuse refers to “any act by a person having the care of a child that results in the child suffering any kind of significant emotional deprivation or trauma” (AIHW, 2016, p. 128), but excluding witnessing and exposure to physical and verbal family violence.²³ The following examples illustrate forms of psychological and emotional abuse of children.

Rita’s ex-partner’s use of coercion and control included the children and was psychologically and emotionally harmful to them. This quote refers to his use of animal abuse in front of the children, inappropriate parenting, and leaving pornography for the children to see on the family computer:

And he had really unhelpful ideals about, um, oh just about all sorts of things to do with parenting, I felt which, you know, picking up on lots and lots of little things instead of positive parenting. So that was hard, and he was very cruel to the animals and that was extremely hard on the kids. And um, yeah, he really liked pornography on the internet, and every now and then he would leave it up and the [children] would go to the internet and all these pornographic pictures would come up and things like that. (Rita)

Sara’s ex-partner repeatedly tells their young child that he will take the child away from his mother. This has left their young child fearful of losing his mother to the point where he becomes distressed at signifiers of separation, such as when she leaves a room:

I’ve never told my son what I was going through [with the court proceedings], but Dad used to tell [child] that he’s gonna live with Dad and he’s not gonna live at Mum’s—will not visit Mum anymore. And my ex-husband brought it—I believe the impact it’s had on my son, who’s so now scared to lose me, even it’s not gonna happen, y’know... He’s so scared that he, he became so anxious... I’ll give you an example... If I walk out of his bedroom, he’ll start to cry and kick, he at any time, he get to be in the kitchen on his own for me to go to the toilet. Like he just says, “Mum who’s gonna look like after me”, like you, like he’s just so—here he becomes so attached, he constantly would

say, y’know, “Mum”.

One of the most common forms of emotional or psychological abuse mentioned was through verbal denigration or criticism of the children.

He used to tell her [daughter] that she was a liar and tell her that she had to tell whether she made it up. So she’s very, very sensitive about this notion of...being believed and being called a liar. (Karla)

One time [eldest child] burst into tears because his Dad called him a frigging idiot because he couldn’t eat his broccoli...and another time [reported by son to mother] “Daddy called me a greedy pig but I just look the other way when I’m really upset and don’t let him see.” So it’s having a huge impact on him. (Alice)

At times, in the case of Maryanne’s child, verbal abuse could escalate to incidents of bullying and humiliation:

So for example, with [eldest child]—well my parents have a shack and so he would put [eldest child] behind the boat and make him do like knee boarding even though he was screaming and crying and saying he didn’t want to do it. He’d always make him stay in the water until he did... There was another time where we were out to dinner with my parents and [youngest child], the younger one, started, um, eating his dessert and he picked up the piece of cake with his hands and [ex-partner] told him off. And told him he needed to sit on one hand and then he tried to—tried to eat it with the opposite hand and he couldn’t do it and so he told him he had to sit on both hands and then eat it with his mouth off the plate.

Psychological and emotional abuse was also evident in the fear children held towards their fathers, both as a result of direct psychological maltreatment and because of having witnessed family violence against their mothers over a period of time. A disclosure by Vicky’s child to a kindergarten teacher when the child’s father had stalked the child on multiple occasions is illustrative of this harm:

So a few months after [father] had left the house, right, he tried to go to the kindy and the teacher asked would you like your dad to come to kindy, you know, and his answer was “no”. And the teacher said, well, why not, and he said, well, he will hurt me and he will hurt you. He, he, hits mum with his fist and I don’t like, there’s something along those lines, you know that he, if his dad came to kindy he would hurt the teacher and the kids, you know... So his position on his father at the age of [2-5 years old],

²³ Witnessing and exposure to DFV was separated from psychological and emotional abuse in order to provide a distinct account of children’s DFV experiences as described by mothers, consistent with the focus on DFV in the aim of this research. However, it is recognised that witnessing and exposure to DFV can involve psychological and physical harm to children. This coding is discussed further in 4.5.3.

just turning [age], was, no he didn't want him to come, he was scared of him. Um, I took him to a reunification meeting with [family relationship service] and they said he showed as scared there. That he didn't sort of want to see his dad, um he had fear of him, you know. (Vicky)

As mentioned in the earlier section on fathering capacity (section 4.6.1) emotional and psychological abuse sometimes took the form of showing favouritism of one child over another and encouraging competition between the kids.

My son doesn't like his [father's new] partner and, you know, my [children] were playing dominoes and dad came in—this is what I was told—and took all the dominoes off [eldest child] and gave them to [younger child] and he said to [eldest child], “When you like [his new partner] then you can play with them.” (Alice)

[Child] used to say, his sister was the favourite and he was the unwanted child. (Vicky)

Gayle (mentioned earlier) was not the only participant for whom the father openly questioned the child's identity, placing stress on both mother and child.

My third son come to me and said, “Mum, I want a DNA”. And I said, “Well, what for?” And he said, “Because they reckon that I'm—that you slept around, that you've been with somebody else.” (Mackenzie)

4.6.3.5 Children as witnesses or direct victims of family violence

Children's experiences of living with domestic and family violence were coded separately to physical abuse and psychological or emotional abuse to enable a more accurate picture of children's family violence experiences. Children were identified as: firstly, witnessing family violence against their mother or other family member, including having seen, heard, or experienced the after-effects of physical and verbal violence (e.g. seeing their mother with bruises); and, secondly, becoming victimised directly in a family violence incident. This second form applied when family violence was perpetrated simultaneously against children and their mother—for example, verbal abuse of a mother and child together or threatening both mother and child with a weapon. Although mothers' references to children witnessing or being direct victims of DFV were coded separately to their physical abuse or psychological or emotional abuse, these experiences can nevertheless be also understood as being physically and psychologically abusive and harmful to children.

Audrey's children had witnessed their father's family violence

as well as seeing the effects of the injuries on Audrey. In this quote she is referring to a specific incident in which he physically assaulted her:

And, like, you know, last time I couldn't walk because I had been beaten up and I had to try and get up, get the clothes from outside of the washing machine into the basket and I was pushing the basket across the floor while pushing myself also across the wall—the floor. And my two little ones helped me. But my [older children] weren't there. So even though I'm still—I'm hurt, he's there, didn't help me, and I'm sort of expected to carry on doing normal domestic chores even though I couldn't even walk. (Audrey)

Although Angie felt her ex-partner could be a good father sometimes, she referred to her children having seen their father's violence, even though his anger was “mainly towards me”:

And he won't care whoever's in front of him when he's angry. He can be unreasonable, so that's the danger a bit. But, ah, when it comes to children, y'know, he loves them, but these kids also seen things, things that happen, so it's wrong. (Angie)

Children also sometimes tried to intervene to protect their mother during a family violence incident. Eloise was aware that this type of experience had affected her son and this was part of her reason for separating from the child's father:

He's always been the child. The other three would run away and hide but he was always the child that would stand there. You'd always, like, see him watching from a corner or from behind something. A couple of times he even came up and actually told his dad to shut up and leave me alone, like, “leave Mum alone”... And they shouldn't have to do that. They shouldn't have to go through that. (Eloise)

Some children continued to witness family violence post-separation through handovers associated with parenting arrangements or breaches of intervention orders by fathers. Hayley's ex-partner used his contact with their child as an opportunity to continue family violence in front of their child.

So that was the main thing; he was still entering my home and following me around abusing me for hours type stuff and in front of [child].

Other incidents involved children being caught up in the stalking and jealous rages of their father towards their mother.

Before I left, he would wake me up in the middle of the night and yelling at me, swearing, waking the kids up, and

monitoring my every move. You know—“Where are you? Where are you going?”—and going with me when I went places. And insanely jealous and threatening suicide. (Mai)

I would go to the supermarket—always fearful, of course, because it was always an accusation that I was having an affair when I went to the supermarket or went to do anything like that. And then I’d come home and I’d come home to an empty house. He wasn’t there, the kids weren’t there and then he wouldn’t answer his phone and then I’d ring his mother’s house and his mother—you know, it’s like he put his mother up to it and his mother wouldn’t answer my question either. Like, are they there or not? You know? So things like that. And, you know, if you can imagine what that’s like, you know? You step out to go to the supermarket and you come back and, you know, the whole family’s missing and you don’t know where they are. (Dana)

Threats and fear also took many forms. Vicky described how if she answered her telephone in the car her partner would swerve the car dangerously near to walls at the side of the road, intimating that he could kill Vicky and the children, who were in the back seat. Lilian remembered when her partner assaulted her at a train station in front of the children.

The verbal denigration of the child’s mother was also a significant part of the violence.

Damage to the relationship with the children—I think them seeing how he could treat me so badly. Like with the putdowns: “You’re fat and you’re stupid and you’re dumb”. That really gave them...you know, like, “She’s a slut, your mum’s a slut, she’s nothing but a slut, look at her”. Like, I was not a slut, far from it...It was always put down, put down, put down. (Sadie)

For a number of women the escalation of violence to the mother to include children directly was the trigger to leave. Lara referred to an incident of family violence that led to separation.

There was an incident with all the children. Uh, first with my son; he hit my son and then he hit my eldest daughter, and then, one time, the girls—one time he was hitting me and the girls were—had probably, had had enough and [6-11 year old child] said to him, “Daddy, stop hitting Mummy”. And he picked her up and threw her over a bed and she nearly broke her arm...and that was the moment that I realised that I could no longer keep my children safe, because it was just gonna get out of hand. (Lara)

Cheryl referred to an incident post-separation that was particularly traumatic, in which her young son felt terrorised

and caught up in the abuse.

[Child] was terrorised by my husband and, you know, and one night I ran back to the car, and [child] jumped into the car, locked the doors, and I couldn’t get in. And [ex-husband] attacked me from behind. So, you know, that’s how fearful that little boy was. We were running as fast as we could to get into the car and when I tried to open the door, he’d locked. And I couldn’t open the door, for God’s sake...So, I think that made him fearful of his father—that behaviour, and hearing the other adults. Because even years passed and I’d be walking down the street at [town] and [son] would say, “Mummy, Mummy, there’s Daddy”. The same reaction.

In summary, the incidents of child abuse were entangled with the abuse of the child’s mother. While children were sometimes the separate targets of abuse, at other times the abuse of mothers and their children was profoundly interconnected. Physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse of children occurred within a context of fear and control, which also involved their mothers. This interconnection is again captured in the following section about the tactics of abuse that directly targeted women.

4.6.4 The tactics of abuse used directly against women

A wide range of direct physical and sexual abuse was used against women by their partners and ex-partners. As mentioned in the previous section, disaggregating abuse of women from the abuse of children is an artificial distinction. However, the research team decided that this referred to a tactic primarily directed against the woman and reported this to provide clarity about the context in which women and their children were living.

4.6.4.1 Family and domestic violence and abuse pre- and post-separation

Table 4.8 presents an analysis of the forms of family violence discussed in mothers’ accounts of their experiences pre and post-separation. The categories are based on those used in the LSSF Waves 1, 2, and 3 and SRSP 2012 as well as additional categories that account for the spectrum of family violence experiences in this sample of women.

It is clear from Table 4.8 that post-separation violence and abuse was an experience for many women and children in the sample. Overall, two-thirds of women who had separated from their partner reported that the abusive tactics that undermined the mother-child relationship had continued or escalated. For some, the patterns of abuse changed following

separation. Both pre and post-separation, coercion, control, and verbal abuse were common forms of family violence, though the violence decreased for some, if not all, women following separation. The severity of these forms of violence and the long-term trauma caused by perpetrators is conveyed in the following accounts.

I was afraid whenever he would fly into his rages; y’know it’s like, um, he never hit me, but it was full psychological, emotional abuse—that was my domestic violence...so it’s that, it’s just like you’re afraid, I can—I imagine a woman is being hit when they sense this, y’know, pressure build up in the partner until finally he lashes out and hits you.

It’s the—it was the same for me; it’s this building up of the pressure until he finally, y’know, verbally unleashes on you, that flies into these rages. So you find yourself trying to keep everything calm and squashed down and... be this oblivious little fly on the wall and just constantly keep the peace...trying to think of ways to constantly keep everything perfect so he wouldn’t find a reason to fly into a rage. But of course he’d just invent something because that’s what he is used to. He enjoyed flying into rages. (Belinda)

He ended up—in order to control his environment, he’d

Table 4.8 Family and domestic violence pre and post-separation

Forms of domestic and family violence and abuse	Pre-separation (n = 50)	Post-separation (n= 47)
Control and coercive behaviour (e.g. rigid routines, unreasonable expectations about housework and children, psychological abuse to mother)	37	16
DFV involving threats to harm her, did harm her	34	5
Verbal abuse (insulted her with intent to harm, shame, belittle, or humiliate)	26	17
Physical injuries, e.g. bruises, cuts, fractured or broken bones, miscarriage (excluding strangulation and rape)	14	2
Threats or attempts to kill	10	5
Tried to or did prevent her from contacting and seeing family or friends	6	7
Tried to or did prevent her from using telephone or car	1	7
Tried to or did force unwanted sexual activity or rape	9	1
Threatened to harm the child/children (including abduction, but excluding actual child abuse)	8	6
Monitored her whereabouts (including stalking)	5	13
Circulated defamatory comments to family members, friends, or publicly with intent to harm, shame, belittle, or humiliate (e.g. social media)	5	4
Damaged or destroyed property	2	5
Threatened to or did harm pets or other animals	4	1
Strangulation	3	0
Physical injuries requiring medical treatment (GP or hospitalisation)	3	2
Threatened to or did harm themselves	3	1
Threatened or did harm other family members or friends	2	2
Post-separation systems abuse by father/ex-partner (including repeated litigation and mediation, cross-examination about rape during family proceedings)	n.a	29
Total forms of domestic and family violence and abuse	172	126

have us sitting in the lounge room watching the cricket all day with the blinds shut, because then he knew where we were, what we were doing, and he could see what was going on. (Cheryl)

But the reality is, he pretty much had it all his own way. I mean, you know, he controlled before, when the marriage—he'd continue to control after the marriage and then when we went to court and got court orders in place, he just did what he damn well pleased anyway and it didn't matter. (Dana)

Lavinia decided to leave her husband with her two children after she saw the effects of verbal abuse on her two young children.

It was, the incident that made me leave him was when he, in [date], he didn't like what I was wearing, he said that I looked like a prostitute...I was not wearing a short skirt or anything that indicated that I looked like working on [prostitution area] at all. He just didn't like what I was wearing so he made a bunch of derogatory comments that were very loud in my mother's house...My oldest child could hear and he was holding my youngest child at the time. And he [husband] was shaking with rage at me and calling me an arrogant cow and that night, [youngest child] really started to have—he never had sleep disruption from that, before that, but from that night on, he really did have sleep disruption.

Similar to Lavinia, coercion and control and verbal abuse continued post-separation for approximately one-third of women. The following quote from Monica illustrates how coercion, control, and verbal abuse continued after separation.

There's never been any physical violence, it's all psychological and emotional abuse. A lot of—yeah, criticising, name-calling, undermining, ignoring. It goes on and on. He has become worse. After 2 years, not any better. Drop-off times have become increasingly just anxiety [provoking] for me. And the behaviours displayed in terms of the children are completely inappropriate.

Table 4.8 also shows a reduction in the total frequency of types of violence and abuse post-separation. Coercion and control declined, as did domestic and family violence involving threats to harm or actual harm and physical violence. This finding was partly a product of some women no longer having any form of contact with their ex-partner, particularly when under personal protection orders that applied to both women and children. It should also be noted that some women had only recently separated from their ex-partner and were living in a domestic violence refuge, so

the opportunity for post-separation violence was limited.

The severity of violence experienced by women pre and post-separation is also captured in Table 4.8. The ex-partners of one in five women had made threats or attempts to kill them before separation and a further five women also reported this occurring post-separation. In addition, three women reported that their ex-partner had attempted to strangle them before separation.

Yeah and the police sort of let—they let me down in that they got me out of there after one occasion where he tried to kill me and—and yet they came to the house. They saw everything. They took my statement and all sorts of things, but they didn't do anything after that. (Hannah)

Actually like that—they—the things happened. He did that violence to me, and like in the last 2 days it just was getting really worse and worse and worse. And he did that in front of the kids. When I was in the car he's—I just ask him—I just ask him, "Can I go to my—can I see my friend? She's leaving [town]." And he just gets really upset. Like when we take off and when we was in the car with my boys and he's just driving so fast and he's dropped me home and he's taken the kids and he's back home and he's just grabbed the hammer to me. Like I was crying outside and he's grabbed the hammer and he's just grabbed my neck and he's just held me down. "I'm gonna hit you. I'm gonna hit you." And I'm just like, it really scared me. Like do you know what I mean? (Eliza)

I requested my maternity leave to be, begin the day after he abused me. He's choked, he's strangled me while I was pregnant and so, well, I'm currently on [leave]. (Vicky)

Twenty-eight percent of women experienced serious physical injuries pre-separation (excluding strangulation and rape) and a further 18 percent (10 women) had specifically been raped or sexually abused by their ex-partner.

So this is a man that's actually assaulted me multiple times, put bruises on my body, raped me. (Maryanne)

Like he'd say that I'm having an affair because I don't want to have sex for some money with him...He makes me feel yucky. Like a prostitute. Those are prostitutes that take money from people for sex. But that's not me. (Audrey)

Audrey and Rita were each seriously injured by their ex-partner.

[Child] was born premature. Like only 3 weeks early and normal but he—he [ex-partner] kicked me when I was pregnant with her and I was stressed out a lot. She's lucky to be alive. (Audrey)

Physical harm of women and rape and unwanted sexual activity were linked with tactics of coercion and control and verbal abuse. Maria, whose partner has shared care of the children, spoke about her distress that her ex-partner tries to make the children think badly of her against a backdrop where “my domestic violence was so much more than that. It was—it was psychological, it was sexual, it was financial, it was, um, just that whole [indistinct] of me as a person.” Libby’s experiences revealed similar features, she said:

I was petrified of him because he used to accuse me of having affairs all the time and all this stuff and, um, I mean I know we’re not talking about this now but he wanted me to have sex every night and if I didn’t he’d punish me, like, every single night. Yeah. I’d get punished and yeah. It was just—I’d hate going to bed. I hate it. It was just awful. Yeah. I can’t —And every night that he didn’t get his own way, he’d just punish you by going to sleep on the lounge after yelling and screaming at you.

Libby went on to tell the interviewer that her children would hear the yelling and screaming that followed and that often she gave in and had sexual intercourse to keep the peace.

Tania’s ex-husband was convicted for raping her but nevertheless obtained family court orders for frequent unsupervised contact with their children:

And also when he was convicted of my assault he was actually given a sentence where he was to do community service and to do a behaviour modification program or an anger management or whatever the term is. But he actually refused. So he then took a jail term suspended for 12 months, which was a higher penalty, rather than do the behaviour modification program...It was the first time the police officer who was in charge of my case had ever, ever had someone refuse to do the community service or, you know, do the program and to elect to actually take a jail term.

The frequency of monitoring women’s whereabouts and incidents of stalking increased after separation compared to pre-separation for a substantial number of women. The frequencies in Table 4.8 above indicate that more than one-quarter of women described this form of domestic violence after separation. Gabriella and her child continue to be stalked:

Because even hanging out the washing—like he used to stalk, in fact he still stalks, y’know. I was terrified that he was gonna come and take [child] or do something or whatever. (Gabriella)

For Monica, her ex-husband was able to use his position of power as a police officer to monitor her whereabouts, stalk her, access information about her, and abuse her further since separation:

The solicitor just sent me to the police station, [town] police officers, and they were terrible. They just basically pushed me out and protected him. My information was put on to a file, which he could access and it caused even more abuse from him. And they just have sent me away and said, “This is not domestic violence; this is a civil matter.” And they just dismissed it. I even went back to a different police station and reported it. And again, the information went on an internal system; he knew all about it and it fuelled the abuse even further. So, I feel very stuck ‘cause of the system and very stuck because he’s a police officer, and I feel that he has just had the power, just power over me the whole time.

4.6.4.2 Financial abuse

Financial abuse was identified for 17 out of 50 mothers pre-separation (34%) and 30 out of 47 mothers post-separation (64%). These totals indicate that the frequency of financial abuse tended to increase post-separation as well as that the form of financial abuse changed in character. Table 4.9 shows the forms of financial abuse the mothers described experiencing and said had a negative impact on them and their children. The total forms of financial abuse indicate that more than one form was experienced by a majority of this sub-group of mothers. In other words, perpetrators of financial abuse tended to use more than one tactic.

The following examples illustrate how the forms of financial abuse recorded in Table 4.9 were found to have occurred pre and post-separation as tactics of family violence. Rita and Alexandra were struggling financially to care for their children before and after separation because their ex-partners prevented their knowledge and access to family money by using separate bank accounts.

There was a lot of financial abuse in that he would—we had separate accounts and he would spend all his money and not have anything to put to the house or put to the food or put to things like that. So I was always trying to financially juggle how to look after the kids and, in fact, when they got to be teenagers, I took on a—I was working full-time; I took on a part-time job as well just to make ends meet, so that was harsh. I think everyone in the house was—when he got angry everyone was on tenterhooks to kind of see what was going on. (Rita)

Table 4.9 Financial abuse pre and post-separation

Forms of financial abuse	Pre-separation (n = 17)	Post-separation (n = 30)
Tried to or did prevent knowledge of or access to family money (including superannuation)	8	9
Not making a fair contribution to day-to-day material support of children (e.g. food, clothing, children's activities)	6	10
Wasted family money on gambling and debts (excluding normal living expenses)	6	3
General financial abuse (form not specified)	6	9
Tried to or did prevent access to money outside of family (e.g. Centrelink)	2	3
Post-separation property settlement process connected to escalation of DFV	n.a.	8
Post-separation not paying child support	n.a.	7
Post-separation mother not seeking child support because of fear of DFV or contact with children	n.a.	6
Total forms of financial abuse	28	55

Rita does not receive child support from her ex-partner, even though he has regular time with their child, because she knew that it would expose her and her child to further abuse if she did so:

And that's usually just overnight, and then she's had enough, he doesn't financially support her in any way—never has. And that's been a mutual agreement because it was worth—it was just too much—there was too much opportunity for abuse with her, yeah.

Tania's ex-partner was able to use real estate services and her bank to enable financial abuse before and after separation. He also continued to live in the family home after separation while leaving her to make the mortgage repayments to prevent foreclosure.

Um, financially, I was very lucky that I was employed because he tried to financially destroy me. We had the mortgage of our family home and we had investment properties that we had rented out. He actually diverted the rent of the rental properties so that I couldn't access that to make repayments and so I was actually making repayments for both the investment properties and the family home, even though he was living in the family home with his new partner and her children.

Tania further explained:

Financially he was doing everything he could to pressure me into, you know, financially having hardship. He closed off accounts. He actually closed off my account illegally with the [name] bank. They later apologised but to me that was—like he did everything he could to cripple me financially and emotionally and the system let him do it.

Ex-partners were able to use banks, car loan agencies, and private lenders to burden mothers with debt. Abigail's husband committed fraud and embezzlement but she was deemed liable for half of her ex-partners debt during family law proceedings. However, he did not adequately comply with his side of the court orders:

So and then I had found that he had taken my payslips and applied for credit cards online... Had all the mail addressed to his workplace; he would cut up my credit card, the secondary, and then just give me his credit card to use so when it came to court, the judge deemed—because I'd used the credit card, I was responsible for half the debt.

I wasn't allowed to go for any spousal maintenance, I was not allowed to go for any of his super or anything. So, you know, we had joint loans that he made me co-sign. I would go to some of these—like, the car loan, I was in tears. And I was saying

to the gentleman, “I don’t wanna sign these, I don’t wanna be here, I don’t wanna be doing this,” and [father of eldest child] would be there, “You need to sign this; I want a new car.” And, you know, the pressure and the embarrassment; I would just sign. The—and when it came to court, the judge deemed at earliest—[father of eldest child]’s earliest convenience, he must take my name off the car loan. It took him over 4 years. And of course, that affected my credit rating because every time he bounced a payment, it would also reflect badly on me. So, I had to contact the credit company to say, “You know, there has been court proceedings and this is what’s happened”, and they said, “Well, unfortunately, because your name’s on the loan, you [have to pay it]”.

Perpetrators attempted to use Government agencies, such as Centrelink and the child support agency, to perpetrate financial abuse. This pushed some mothers and children deeper into poverty before and after separation. A range of tactics were used. Yvette described how her ex-husband manipulated the child support system to represent himself as much poorer than he actually was. Alice’s ex-partner and his new partner accessed her Centrelink account, which was part of his ongoing abuse of her. He was also obstructing her contact with their young children:

They won’t do—like, they said, it’s up to the father now and he won’t even let me talk to them [the children] on the phone. And I’ve texted him and his girlfriend texts me back. Then on Friday I found out that she’s actually accessed my Centrelink files by impersonating me, had an hour-long conversation, changed some payment details, that’s all in the hands of Centrelink fraud now.

Gabriella’s ex-husband blocked her from accessing Centrelink while they were together and she accumulated debt during this time because he also did not make an adequate contribution to the family:

He also was financially abusive and I didn’t even know I was entitled to Centrelink money, and he told me that I was not allowed to go to Centrelink, and he gave me, y’know, like \$100 a week or something to pay the bills and all the rent and—that didn’t cover everything and so I had to use my credit card and racked up a big debt on my credit card... Um and we couldn’t sort of do anything. And of course that meant that I couldn’t leave because I was totally dependent on him.

Furthermore, Gabrielle explained that their daughter’s serious chronic health problems require expensive treatment.

She suffered years of respiratory problems. Which was really, really stressful. And he has never paid any child

support. And so I was having to be on waiting lists for attending clinics and things like that and specialists and everything—and then pumping her full of antibiotics while we’re waiting to see a specialist. Whereas if he’d been paying his child support we would have put that child support straight on to see a specialist... And I spent probably a good 12 months dealing with the child support agency, trying to get him to financially support his child. And, after that 12 months, I just realised that that’s just never going to happen. So I just gave up.

There were specific implications for women’s capacity to mother their children in these circumstances of poverty. Participants described the financially disabling stresses they experienced.

We just did not exist and he would not give any money for housekeeping, for groceries... There were days where I couldn’t even urinate from the stress, I couldn’t even do a wee... He had total 100 percent financial control. The house was solely in his name and everything was solely in his name. (Malene)

Well, he drank a lot and gambled a lot... even when I started working, it was a very few hours a week; we quite often would have no money... I would have picked his pay up before he got there. And you know I’d see the other guys coming in and they’d be, “Oh, you’re here to get his pay before him”, and I went “yep”. So that made him really mad but as I said to him, “the kids and food and all that’s got to come first”. (Mackenzie)

He was more focused on his own needs than helping to look after the children. The money that he earned was his money, so money that I earned I had to use against me and my children and pay for my bills, because he wouldn’t pay for them. Every time the word, “money” came up, he would become abusive and beat me up. (Vanessa)

For other women, hasty separation or property settlements left them with little or nothing to support themselves and their children afterwards.

And as for property settlement, now he is virtually saying that he’s making an offer of 30 percent and virtually if I don’t take it, he will tie the matter up in the courts for years and never get—you know never—so that I’ll end up with nothing and he’ll end up with nothing. So you know there’s still a lot of blackmail and stuff going on. (Hannah)

Because I moved out of that house... and basically left most of that behind because I didn’t try and fight for it. I was just like, give it to him. I don’t want it... I should have—like I was entitled to half of my stuff from the first marriage and I never did get any of that. (Mackenzie)

A recurring theme of the “Disney dad” was described by many women following the separation. These were men who often had much greater financial resources and gave gifts, expensive activities, or luxury items to children while not making a fair contribution to the children’s day-to-day living expenses. While this is not direct financial abuse, it was a tactic of control that impacted on both women and children and the mother–child relationship. Maryanne illustrates the situation.

He’s the Disney dad and does whatever he needs to do to make her happy in a sense and to show his family that he’s such a great father.

The women described situations where fathers had the resources to provide material goods and outings during children’s visits, in direct contrast to women’s inability to provide treats while managing daily food and housing expenses as single parents on low incomes.

He would lavish them with gifts and everything to make, to make them sort of want to go with him...I wasn’t in a situation to, to take them to the theme parks and all that sort of thing, so, and he would bribe them and say, y’know if you come with me, I’ll go here and that sort of thing. That was from when we separated till when he got custody. (Aaliyah)

When they do go to him, he, he showers them in everything that they want. He gives them—you know, buys gifts and he treats them. He treats more, how can I put it, yeah he, oh that Disney dad syndrome I think he definitely, definitely does that with them. (Vanessa)

So, you know, he just doesn’t buy books or uniforms or anything like that, I suppose, ‘cause he knows that I’ll do it. (Dana)

This pattern of relating to children through financial reward often continued with adult children, as Yvette described:

He’s got loads of spare cash, he can buy them expensive gifts so there’s no conflict [with the kids]. And every time there is a conflict, he’ll just buy them something. So, you know, the problem is always me because I actually can’t solve anything unless we actually talk about it, and they [kids] don’t like to talk about it ‘cause it makes them feel uncomfortable. So the problem is still me; I’ve still failed and I’m still responsible. (Yvette)

4.6.4.3 Post-separation housing and consequences of DFV tactics

Of the 47 mothers who had separated from their ex-partner, 27 women talked about experiencing housing stress with their children post-separation. As the total types of housing problems in Table 4.10 show, there is a group of mothers and children who experienced more than one type of housing-related problem.

Table 4.10 Frequency of types of post-separation housing issues

Post-separation housing issues	n = 27
Domestic violence refuge	16
Housing instability and homelessness (excluding DV refuge)	9
Ex-partner refused or refusing to leave family home	9
Total types of housing issues	34

Many of the housing issues for women were directly related to the previous section on financial abuse and crisis events in family violence against mothers and children. Women with no financial resources found it difficult to leave abusive partners. They also then needed to manage housing instability and homelessness after leaving. For example, Tanesha has separated from her partner and has a protection order against him, but is still sharing the family home with him. He refuses to leave and yet she is having difficulty accessing public housing.

It’s like a prisoner, it’s like you—like, you are following someone else rules in the house...But as long as he doesn’t touch me, as long as he doesn’t abuse me, as long as he doesn’t hurt me. I’m keeping everything quiet...It’s just something you need to be with someone else’s rules. I’m paying everything, I’m doing everything but at the end of the day I can’t say anything. (Tanesha)

Using a domestic violence refuge was the most frequent type of housing issue described by women, but refuges are short-term and mainly offer a crisis response. These services were critical in enabling these women to access safe accommodation when attempting to leave their ex-partner or responding to violent events. The role of domestic violence refuges for housing and therapeutic support is discussed in more detail in Section 4.9, which is about services.

Difficulties accessing safe and affordable housing presented as an ongoing problem for nine women. Some women had to move between housing or domestic violence refuge services

as they reached time limits for staying, they could not stay there with children, or the safety of the location became compromised. Abigail's experience contained these themes. She was also pregnant while homeless:

Abigail: And he [a case worker] actually found somewhere—he found [name of homeless refuge] for me...So, I did stay at [name of homeless refuge]. But obviously I knew that I couldn't stay there for long...And then because I actually broke the lease of where [ex-partner] and I were living, it went to [civil administrative tribunal], which is a residential tribunal...Even though I said it was for domestic violence issues, for some reason it wasn't marked confidential, so they sent [ex-partner] the address of [name of homeless refuge]...So, then it was deemed necessary to move me...Well, I was gone that afternoon...So, then I lived in a motel until they could find me another crisis shelter. So then I went to [DV refuge]...And I stayed in [DV refuge] until [month].

Interviewer: So you had [baby] when you were at [DV refuge]?

Abigail: Yes.

Sadie also became homeless after separating from her violent ex-partner. Her situation of homelessness, couch surfing, and living in a housing service was a barrier to Sadie regaining care of her youngest child (whose experiences of severe neglect and physical abuse by her father and father's new partner were described earlier). Sadie's ex-partner also refused to leave the family home, even though she had been the family's sole breadwinner and continued to pay the mortgage post-separation until recently:

I was paying the mortgage and you know, I can't—you know I was making myself sick. I was going without to pay the mortgage for them...And really, I couldn't do that and—look, I was paying it right up until [date]... And buying food and everything and working two jobs... But it got—it became so hard for me because I had no—I was homeless...I was—do you know what I mean? I was couch surfing.

Sadie tried multiple avenues to find housing for herself and her youngest child but homeless services were not a suitable environment given her special needs. She currently has some housing via a domestic violence service:

I have [indistinct] through women's housing for domestic violence. Yeah, not so nice. It's for—I moved in. It was filthy, full of needles. Everything was disgusting. Like, you couldn't—it was putrid. It had a dead smell in it. It was bad...It was really—but I've cleaned it up. I have—of

course, you're going to clean it up. I live normally...And yeah, I've made it a home. (Sadie)

Like Sadie, housing problems for nine women were partly or solely attributed to their ex-partner's refusal to leave the family home. Mai's experience is therefore one of many. Her ex-partner refused to leave the family home. He also refused to permit her to live with the children in their investment rental property. Mai had to take legal action to resolve this:

Oh, when I left him, I went—my friend was going overseas for 2 months so I went and lived at her house while she was away. And then I ended up, I asked the real estate agent for our two properties, two houses, and [indistinct] tenants in mine and I emailed them and said, "Could the tenants move out of the property so I could move back in?" and they said they needed [name]'s—that's my ex-partner's—approval as well. And he declined to terminate the tenancy. So when I came back, I ended up homeless for a little bit there and I went to court to get him ousted, to get him ousted from the family home. We went to court and then on the last day in court, I got [indistinct] and she—the two lawyers agreed that he would let me have [the second rental property], which is what the tenants were in...and so I moved into it and they—he paid for a rental—furniture rental for 6 weeks. So, I'd just moved into the rental property, he wouldn't—he was being very difficult about furniture so I'd just started from scratch and been given things from friends so I'm living in a house, [indistinct] home and started from scratch.

4.6.4.4 Systems abuse and mothers losing contact with their children

A high level of systems abuse was evident across women's experiences post-separation, seen in Table 4.8. Systems abuse refers to instances where a mother's account indicated the father or ex-partner was using agencies, legal systems, family law services, or other services to further perpetrate abuse. This included repeated litigation and mediation, cross-examination of mothers about rape and sex while men self-represented during family law processes, disrupting family law proceedings, repeated breaches of personal protection orders, not complying with family law orders, and using protracted family law proceedings to seek 100 percent of care-time with children when fathers had not previously been active parents. This type of abuse, along with case examples, is discussed further in section 4.9. However, it was such a clear tactic of abuse directed at women that it is important to acknowledge it in this section of the report. The discussion here focuses on the use of litigation and threats in relation to the children.

From the women's perspective, some of the fathers' threats resulted in a retaliation situation of cross-allegations of abuse in legal proceedings and services, whereby the father accused the mother of abuse towards the children.

And because of that [an unfavourable court case] he then took revenge against me. Conjured up about accusations against me regarding what I had done to the children and it went to—went to another court...he lost again, because the court found that I hadn't done what he had said I'd done to [daughter]. And so then he told [daughter] one time just after that, that, well, the next time the children came to me, [daughter] said to me as she walked through the door, "Dad said that we have to get you to hurt us, so he had something else to use in court"...and so he had me back in court for assaulting her...And, and the court just threw it out because—and that was when I decided to walk away and I left that town and moved interstate, because I couldn't take any more of what was happening to, to me and my children. I thought if I left, he would stop, but it didn't. He still had me back in court again over allegations that he conjured up...looking back now, it's all just sort of just really dawned on me, 'cause he got [eldest son] away from me and then he got [daughter] and [younger son] away from me. It was just like I was, I was punished for being a mother. (Aaliyah)

Because that psychologist said that my view of reality is skewed, that line in that report has been picked up and used time and time again to challenge my intervention order. I've been in court 14 times over contesting—because they only give you intervention orders for a year, right? (Dana)

Other forms of litigation abuse involved fathers' claims for care of the children, or substantial care-time with them. Often this group of fathers had very little involvement with their children prior to the separation.

He was the applicant in the family law proceedings and went for full custody of the children and 90 percent of all assets. So I was in a situation where I could not not go to court. I couldn't not respond because I'm not just going to hand over my children to someone who is violent, who has never parented. He was not an active parent when we were together. It was like, for me, we always used to joke that I had a fifth child...you know, he was the other child. So, you know, I had no choice but to respond and say, well, no, you can't have full custody including of my eldest who was from my first marriage. (Tania)

I mean, the worst thing—I think the worst thing was that he went for custody at all...I think that's the worst thing, 'cause he didn't want them and he never had them, he never

actually cared for them or parented them. He didn't know what safety was, he didn't know what protection was, he never gave a shit about their rights or what they wanted to do with their lives; he just saw them as projections of himself. And I think it was so cruel, 'cause I would have just cared for them and he could've just had them every other weekend and been, you know, a Disney dad and they would probably think more highly of him...And I—and they would not be as traumatised. (Yvette)

In Alice's case, the child protection department had intervened and supported the father to have primary care of the children after he failed to return the children from a contact visit.

He did not return the children earlier in the year, and I have had no contact with them since that time.

Other women found little help from post-separation family relationship services or the court system to respond to men's systems abuse:

I tried mediation three times. He never turned up. I went with the police and he'd pissed all over my clothes. I gave my child a hug and I could just tell by her face that she [the child] wasn't happy...because she hasn't seen her mother for 3 months. It's not for lack of trying. I've tried to do it the court way. (Sadie)

The theme of systems abuse and the aspect of litigation will be further developed in section 4.9; however, it is important to note here the profound anxiety, impact, and consequences of this type of litigation on the women (and children) involved.

4.6.4.5 Actively undermining the mother-child relationship.

Not all post-separation arrangements for children were litigated. There were a wide range of highly stressful and abusive circumstances under which women came to be separated from their children. Women invariably experienced this as a tactic of abuse and a continuing aspect of domestic violence and the active undermining of the mother-child relationship. This section is used to discuss the range of living situations and contact arrangements for children post-separation.

Six women had no contact or very little contact with at least one of their children as a result of the refusal of the perpetrator of domestic violence to allow the women to see their children, and, in one further case, an older son became abusive and contact between this mother and son has currently ceased. In three other cases, women were losing contact with older children who were returning to live with their fathers after protracted family law proceedings about care and property arrangements or direct pressure from fathers on children to live with them. There were many permutations in the contact arrangements, which shifted across time.

But [youngest child], the reason why he doesn't see me [mother] is because of his dad's emotional abuse by saying that I'm gonna put him [father] in jail. (Vanessa)

As discussed above in relation to systems abuse, the most common emergent pattern was that of men who were either abusive or uninvolved in their children's lives prior to separation, but who then went on to have either shared care, primary care, or high levels of care-time with their children (27 men). As reported in 4.4.3, over half of the sample had post-separation care arrangements where fathers had shared care, primary care, or regular overnight care-time with one or more children.

He shouldn't have any contact, he doesn't care about the kids. He did not even tell the kids he loved them before we separated. And now he gets them every second weekend and holidays though. (Patricia)

Even prior to the separation, they couldn't be left with Dad—because Dad would be violent and then...how his cycle is, he can be okay and things could be quiet at home. (Sara)

Six of the men who initially had high levels of involvement post-separation were eventually restricted to no contact, or highly supervised or indirect contact due to direct physical or sexual child abuse perpetrated during time spent with the children.

Like I found out that his behaviour in the contact visits in the first three or four times that he went was poor and he was aggressive and he was yelling at the staff...can you imagine the fear that they were in? (Vicky)

The total alienation of mothers from their children, which resulted in no contact or very limited contact was the more extreme end of a wide range of tactics of abuse targeted at undermining the mother-child relationship.

There was a lot of maternal alienation. "Dad says I don't have to do anything you say so I'm not going to"...I mean I did have concerns about exactly what they were doing together...it just makes it hard because at the time that [eldest child] wasn't living with me...okay, yes, I made mistakes. But [eldest child] had him [father] and his family telling her bad things about me. (Abigail)

Children repeated to their mothers the things that their fathers had told them, such as: "Mummy never wanted you" (Cheryl) or "Mummy's not a good person" (Monica).

In situations where the relationship between women and their children had broken down, it was often perceived by the participants to have been a result of the perpetrators

continued efforts to align the children against them. As Hayley said: "He drove a wedge that I couldn't do anything about." Lara also described this type of tactic occurring before separation:

It was when I was with him, because the girls—like my (6-11 year old), she used to say to me, "I'm going to tell daddy and he'll hurt you", because she was just following the pattern of "if you don't listen to me you'll get hurt". (Lara)

This became another tactic of power and control by perpetrators that, in turn, resulted in women feeling powerless and ineffective in relation to their children's behaviour, which indirectly undermined the mother-child relationship. As Alice said: "The impact is that you know they've learned from him how to lie and manipulate."

Two different patterns emerged for some of the older or adult children. One group of children who had contact with their fathers eventually refused contact. Furthermore, they did not seek contact with him as they moved into adulthood.

Both children have lost contact with their father. Though father recently tried to make contact again with [eldest child]. The [second child] said the only phone call she wanted is the one that tells me he's dead...The effects of violence don't go away. (Gemma)

For another group of older children, they wanted to get to know their father and spend more time with him as they grew into adulthood.

I have [two children] who are [18 years and older]. My youngest daughter, she's [12-17 years old]. She is 100 percent with me...The older two did actually go to live with their dad last year. (Marlene)

Another mother was losing contact with her older adult child due to fears of being found by her ex-partner.

I don't really have much contact with anybody because of fear of him finding where I am. My daughter comes every once in a while but, um, I just try not to tell too many people where I live or just bring them over here because, in case he may follow, which he hasn't done so far, but, um, you know, you can't take a chance. So I don't really get to see my older children as much as I used to. (Lara)

It should be mentioned that not all post-separation contact was alienating, conflicted, or abusive. There were four fathers who had been involved in significant domestic violence prior to separation who had regular and consistent time with their children. However, the contact was neither as extensive nor quite as negative as that mentioned for those men who demanded or gained high levels of contact with their children

in spite of limited or abusive previous involvement. There were nevertheless significant reservations still expressed by the mothers involved about the impact on children.

[Ex-partner] works shift work. So that was the main— main reasoning... For me, um, it runs over an 8-week cycle of his shift work. So the children basically stay with me during the week and then, depending on when his shifts are, he will have them during the week, but only until 8 o'clock at night... They want to spend time with him for sure... they say that they want to spend time with him but they don't like the situation. (Maria)

Most of the time they invite me, so I go on the invite and then I see there's, like, tension, when I say, "no I can't go, or something like that". But most of the time it's bearable... He's actually a good father. It's only when he has been, um, sick, so, like, when he becomes angry. (Angie)

In summary, for half the women in this study the parenting arrangements for children to spend time with their fathers who had been domestically violent were extremely stressful. Some, but not all, of these arrangements were litigated or repeatedly litigated through the family law system, including family relationship services. Many children experienced ongoing abuse in the process. Many of the difficult arrangements for children were part of a longer pre and post-separation pattern of targeting the children's relationship with their mother.

This section has described the wide range of ways in which tactics of abuse were used against women both pre and post-separation. The following section explores the impact that this abuse had on women's mental and physical health and, in turn, their mothering and relationships with children.

4.6.5 Impact of domestic and family violence tactics on women's health

In the study, five participants described ongoing physical health issues as a result of living with DFV. Women spoke about how attacks by their partners led to physical injuries.

It was quite bizarre really, because he actually nearly killed me. And, um, he threw me down a flight of stairs and I had, like this horrible triple-prolapse, like my uterus and my bowel and my vagina, everything came out. And, um, so I ended up in hospital on a lot of morphine that first night, and it was actually a nurse that came up and said to me, "Is this a violent relationship?". (Rita)

And it was fairly warmish weather and I'd gone to work with a poloneck and the matron said, "Ms [name], what have you got that poloneck on, on this hot day?" And I said, "Yeah, I really need to take it off". She said, "Well,

get it off". I thought, "Oh, God, I have to take it off. She's gonna see the bruises around my neck. Oh my God, what am I gonna do?" So I went into her office and I told her and she said, "Sit there, ring this number now". And the person on the other side said, "Well, one day, it'll be you he throws against the fridge and then you'll be dead and who's gonna look after the little boy?" Well, that was a bit of a shake-up. Went to shelter. (Cheryl)

Women recalled how violent attacks resulted in contact with the health and hospital system.

I ended up in hospital when he hurt me, and it was the police. They took me to hospital. Me and my four kids. And from there I got checked over. Scanned and then I spoke to a social worker and then from there we went to—she gave us a bag of things. Like essentials. Just like toothbrush, toothpaste, facecloth. Things that we needed. (Audrey)

With regard to mental health specifically, 11 participants mentioned that they suffered from mental illnesses as a result of living with DFV. Three of these participants were undergoing treatment for post-traumatic stress, and two participants were diagnosed with depression. Panic attacks, dissociation, and extreme anxiety arising from DFV were mentioned by other participants:

I was very much a broken person and it was just sheer determination, even through depression and stress like I've never known in my life, but I just kept plodding ahead. (Bianca)

I unfortunately gave up the fight a little bit. I spent 20-something years in really, really difficult circumstances and my level of burnout is still blowing my mind. (Vicky)

Jana spoke about chronic illness, which she perceived to be a direct result of the abuse she had suffered: "My whole system just shut down; it was too much. I was just on overload." Abigail realised that her partner was triggering post-traumatic stress and she felt that her partner used her mental illness to bolster his sense of importance. Yvette described the effect on her baby's mental health as a result of DFV affecting her own state:

So [baby] was super insecure, and really, really needed closeness. But then, of course, my presence wasn't always calm either, 'cause I was having panic attacks that had started during the pregnancy.

Effects of mother's mental health issues following domestic violence did not always dissipate when they left their ex-partners. As Maryanne said:

It's changed my life, completely changed me as a person. I used to be really confident and now I ask someone if I

should go to the shops now or in 5 minutes. Like I—it feels like my independence has been completely stripped. I have a lot of anxiety, a lot of anxiety, and that's hard to manage on a daily basis.

I think the biggest challenge I've had since separating from [ex-partner] is trying to mask or hide my anxiety from them. That's been a particularly challenging parenting experience. Because I've—we've gone through the family court and there's times where he has to see them and I have to drop them to him; hiding my fears and anxiety from them is quite difficult as a mum to sort of be there and try and be supportive of them and this process, when internally I'm absolutely frightened for their lives and have so much anxiety I really panic. So as a mother that part of my relationship with them is quite difficult. (Maryanne)

Many of the participants spoke about loss of energy as a result of experiencing DFV. They referred to how a lack of energy left them struggling with their mothering roles both during and after living with DFV. For example, speaking about her health during domestic violence, Hayley recounted:

I was functioning as a zombie because I just didn't have enough sleep, and so on top of the stress of domestic violence I wasn't sleeping because of the stress of that.

The impact of domestic violence on this aspect of wellbeing did not always dissipate after participants left the relationship. For some participants, this was because mothering in the aftermath of DFV continued to involve a loss of energy in day-to-day life, and this was often linked to sleep deprivation. Speaking about her nightmares from DFV, Rita said, "I still wake up some nights screaming". For others, the ongoing stress of post-separation DFV contributed to their exhaustion. For example, Hayley spoke about losing sleep after she left her ex-partner because of the financial stress that was a direct result of financial abuse by her ex-partner.

4.6.6 The impact on children of the pre and post-separation tactics of abuse and control

Children were also affected in many different ways by their experiences of domestic violence. Issues of psychological and emotional distress pervade the accounts of the effects on children. Examples have already been described in section 4.6.3, as it is difficult to disaggregate the experience of abuse from its impact. A ubiquitous theme was also the distressing experience of children emulating their father's abusive behaviours.

4.6.6.1 Psychological, emotional, and behavioural effects on children of father's DFV tactics

A group of children continued to be traumatised by ongoing contact with a father they were afraid of. Court orders were often in place to ensure that this continued to occur.

She doesn't want to have to hear his voice; it was hard, I had to put a special ringtone on my phone for him, because it does that every time my phone rings, then she's shaken to a sort of traumatised or triggered mode from the PTSD... Sometimes she feels angry with me because I'm pushing her to talk to him [on the phone] at least enough that she's said something. If she doesn't say something out loud [to him], then I get accused of not actually letting her talk to him. So he calls her Saturday afternoon, and usually on a Wednesday night she starts to think about it. She'll mention that she's feeling upset or worried about it. And then, um, when it comes to the phone call time, she um—there's just little tears when the phone rings. And she will, um—she would take the phone from me most times now without a fight, which is something, but she will usually say something like, "I don't want to talk to you, go away". And she'll disconnect the phone. And then afterwards, she's just distraught. (Karla)

And you know why her behaviour was that bad: because she had three long weekends. They're allowed this contact with her father, and she just couldn't cope with it. (Patricia, talking of her 6-11 year old child)

For infants, the physical and emotional impacts were closely interrelated. Maryanne spoke about the effects on her son (under 2 years old) and daughter (2-5 years old):

When he's with his father he doesn't sleep at his dad, always—literally he's completely exhausted. So he'd sleep for an hour and then return him to me. Whereas this is a baby that normally has two sleeps a day, 4 hours a day some days and really this poor little baby is only getting by on being able to sleep when he's completely exhausted... I think [ex-partner's] behaviour has had a massive impact on [2-5 year old child] because she's a little bit older but [she] is very clingy also. Like at night-time she won't go to sleep without me and she also wakes up a lot in the night, has nightmares and says things like "no daddy", and that breaks my heart. (Maryanne)

Sleep disturbances for all children, not just infants, were commonly reported as associated with abuse and DFV.

But I do remember that there was sleep disturbances. I know that they wake up at night and everything, but I do—I believe that it had an emotional impact on her without a doubt. (Gabriella)

Other children struggled with anger and disruptive behaviour.

I have a lot of problems to see my kids getting anger, angry, anger problems. My youngest ones. And—but he's doing good now because he's seeing—seeing counselling here at this school. Yeah, he had a hard time when we, like, came here first month. And my oldest one is as well. As well. Like you know it's hard for them. It's not easy still. What's going to happen? He's very emotional. My youngest one is very angry. He's angry bird. Like sad. Yeah. They're affected. Of course they're affected. (Eliza)

Each child in some families had a different reaction to both living with domestic violence and the issues of separation and spending time with their fathers.

I think, well, the—seeing the distress—like, initially when he first left, the [regressive] behaviours. You know, from seeing a child [her son] that's really capable to dress and feed themselves to then be just wetting the bed, unable to dress themselves, and the behaviours that's escalated from—with my son at school, night terrors. And that's been a horrible one...she's [her daughter] displaying these physical signs to me, that the younger ones can be emotionally loaded and it highlighted for me that she's trying to please everyone. She's like—she wants to be the peacekeeper and wants to keep everybody happy. But then, you know, her symptoms of tummy aches and—you know, she's unwell a lot as well. Like, it's just that it's not so evident, yeah, in her behaviour. And she cops so much flack from my son, you know? She—because she's the youngest, she tends to bear the brunt of a lot of his outbursts. And to the point where—you know, she'll be very upset and, “Mummy, I am so tired of him mistreating me like this”. And—but she's just so forgiving of him. (Monica)

There was a lot of defiant, angry behaviour. There was some aggression, and physical violence came out in the younger ones. Especially the youngest who was the most hurt, the most physically hurt. So she became quite violent herself. She would hit myself. Hit her brother. Hit her sister and just be screaming profanities. Just things you wouldn't expect from a child. Just such intense anger and aggression. The boy probably withdrew a little bit more. They became afraid of a lot. Pretty much afraid of everything that was not well known to them. So any kind of change. And of course that was really hurtful and heartbreaking to me. So it was really hard to get through that time with such anger. They also had in that time—you know they were afraid to sleep alone. They had learning difficulties. (Bianca)

4.6.6.2 Children replicating the violence and abuse of their fathers

The issues in relation to the intergenerational transmission of abuse, violence, and disrespect for women are contentious. There were clearly children in this sample who were actively working against replicating the behaviours of their fathers and were being supported by their mothers to be different.

[Son is] very gentle; in fact, I think he came into a really hard time of it, because he wouldn't be the kind of macho man that my partner expected him to be. So he's—I think his gentleness almost was validated, because he doesn't want to be that kind of person. So he's all into animals and plants. (Rita)

However, there was also another strong theme present within the interviews of women experiencing their children repeating the abusive behaviour of their fathers. Twenty mothers in this sample made direct reference to, and provided examples of, this disturbing pattern.

He tells them things that he knows will upset me...My [6-11 year old child] is starting to abuse me like her father. Same tone of voice, same voice, same actions... My youngest child I used to call my little sunshine. I used to sing that song, “You Are My Sunshine”, all the time. Now she cries all the time. You know, they won't do as they're told, they trash the house, they break things, attention-seeking behaviour. (Patricia)

It was particularly the case for some following contact visits: children (often, though not only, boys) were seen to emulate their fathers' attitudes and behaviours:

They're lovely but also very difficult. They're coming back from his house very angry. My [6-11] year old... last night, he had, like, a 2-hour tantrum where he was throwing things and hitting his sister. And smashing windows, smashing doors. (Malene)

And my son absorbs this behaviour and wants to imitate his father. So I've a lot of problems at the moment with my son, with violent outbursts...So there's a lot of power and control issues happening there with my son. (Monica)

Some of the behaviour involved other children, either their siblings or their peers.

So he has some anger issues that I worry about and I worry about how that will pan out over the years. But, um, you know, he's also, he's doing really well at school; um, I think a little bit of a worry because, he did have an altercation with a boy in class that was teasing him. And he'd been like a star student, um, for the first sort of 8 weeks of school, but he has gone down a line because

he pulled back a little kid's, um, fingers and I wonder why he did that and where that's coming from. (Vicky)

And this morning, he's trying to cut his sister with a knife and not understanding that that's not okay. Punching his friends, very—reacting violently. (Monica)

These challenging behaviours provided the backdrop for the relationship between a significant group of women and their children.

4.7 Mothering in the context of domestic and family violence

The previous sections drew on interview data from 50 women exploring the context in which women were parenting their children, outlining the challenges of mothering in the context of domestic violence. The themes outlined a wide range of tactics of abuse that perpetrators of domestic violence used to control, intimidate, and undermine, and the impact that this had on their children, or directly on themselves as women, in relation to their mental and physical health. The parenting capacity of men who use violence from the perspective of the women they had abused indicated that most men were very limited in their capacity to provide appropriate fathering or to safely cooperate with post-separation parenting.

A strong picture emerges of women parenting under pressure and children living in an environment often dominated by fear, conflict, and abuse. For many women and children, separation did not provide relief from abuse, though the DFV may have taken different forms. The following section explores the ways in which women spoke of their mothering and the mother–child relationship under these difficult circumstances. The experiences and the backgrounds of women in the sample were very varied; their responses to mothering in the context of DFV was therefore also varied, even though common patterns emerged.

A number of issues were pertinent to women's perceptions of their mothering. These included: the context in which they were mothering, reflections on the “regime of control” through which they were mothering, the external surveillance of their mothering, the compensatory behaviours in their parenting, and the steps involved in repairing relationships with children.

4.7.1 The mothering context

A particularly important issue lay in the differences in post-separation arrangements. Sixteen women reported that the father had no contact or limited time with one or more children. There were a wide variety of reasons for this situation, including the six fathers who previously had high

levels of care-time but for whom contact stopped when the extensive abuse and distress of their children came to light. For another group of five women, the children's father had eventually disappeared from their lives, or had very infrequent contact, and in one case had died. Others were managing limited contact arrangements.

Yeah, I had full custody of her because he mistreated her. He actually kidnapped her...She only saw him probably twice at the front door and then he threatened to get violent even though there was no need to be that way. (Lea)

Three of these women were in the early stages of separation from highly abusive relationships and were living in a refuge. At this stage, there was no contact or only indirect contact for the children—a situation that may be fluid.

We're still going through the court process so we're in a bit of a limbo to—you know, to be entering sort of life with not knowing where he is and what he's, you know, capable of at any given minute. So safety is paramount. (Annabelle)

Nobody knows where we are. Keep us safe. (Audrey)

As mentioned previously, a high proportion of the women in the sample were managing children who spent significant periods of time with their fathers who had a history of violence or ongoing DFV. Some other women had lost contact or were losing contact with at least one of their children, as fathers (or their new partners) took over the parenting of children, sometimes to the exclusion of their mothers.

4.7.1.1 Mothering in a “regime of control” and abuse

A number of women reflected on the way in which their mothering was profoundly constrained by a “regime of control” imposed by the domestic violence perpetrator. Mothers' need to protect themselves and their children created unrealistic pressures on their children and on themselves as a parent. They referred to the need to be perfect and for their children to be perfect.

I swear I spent most of my days trying to make sure everything was done before he was there. If everyone could just be fed and bathed and put in their pyjamas, and all that to happen was their bedtime story by the time he got back, that was really a good day. It all went to shit if I could not make that happen. (Yvette)

While some women lived with a “regime of control” that constrained their mothering, others felt undermined in their parenting by excessive criticism or inconsistencies.

I was a stay-at-home mum for 8 years, and in that 8 years I found that he—my ex just constantly told me really that

I didn't know what I was talking about. So in making decisions I found it was very difficult to do that...and yeah, always second guessing myself. (Maria)

It would be like whenever I'd set rules then [ex-partner] would deliberately do something to counteract them. So we never ever got a routine or anything going every week because he'd just change it whenever he felt like. (Mackenzie)

Other women talked about the way in which living with fear and abuse affected their demeanour with their children. Vicky described being “an emotionally unavailable mother at times”. She attributed the numbing of her reactions as a mother to dissociation that she described as a result of living with DFV. This was similar to the response described by Tania and Alice.

I'd stopped hugging my eldest son...I'd become really numb emotionally. I didn't realise that I'd become less affectionate with my children. (Tania)

There was a lot of pressure and I wasn't happy. Cranky a lot—you know, snappy. And I hate that I've ever been like that with them. (Alice)

Like Alice a number of other women reflected on their feelings of guilt and remorse about their mothering. Looking back, Yasmin felt that she had little time for the children because her ex-partner demanded so much time and attention. In other instances, participants reported that the children had been targeted by the perpetrator and subjected to emotional or physical abuse. In these circumstances women felt guilty and responsible for their inability to sufficiently protect their children. Elisa reports that if she showed loving care for her children, her ex-partner would abuse her for this. Similarly, Mai's ex-partner would jealously intervene in her attempts to care for the children: “It was very hard 'cause I wasn't allowed to care for the children as I wanted to. When they were upset, I wasn't allowed to go to them.”

These reflections on mothering when living with DFV accurately reflect the many aspects of the tactics of abuse described earlier.

4.7.2 Post-separation mothering under surveillance

Following separation, a number of participants described added pressures on their mothering and the apparent quality of their mothering due to involvement with child protection or the family law system. In this respect, eight participants perceived their mothering to be under increased scrutiny. As Patricia noted, “I was afraid that every act or decision would be used against me or the children, and, as a result, I was second-guessing my parenting all the time”.

Patricia's experience was echoed by other participants who felt that their ability to mother in difficult circumstances was little understood and their efforts were devalued by child protection and post-separation services, leading them to further doubt themselves and their abilities as mothers.

I was told that [child protection department] may come and visit and investigate. So for a long time I was just like “Are they going to come to the house?” And then you start thinking stupidly, 'cause you're like, “Oh, there's too many dishes in the sink. What if [child protection department] decide to come today? Because my house is messy, will they decide to come today?” But the reality is that my house isn't that messy compared to the people that [child protection department] do need to go and visit and work with. But in my mind, I was still paranoid. “I haven't dusted in a week. Look at the dust! What will they think if they turn up today? At the time, like, I just felt crazy, and everything was big. You know, there was just so many little things, that [child protection department] turning up and seeing dishes in the sink or a knife on the bench...it was just too stressful too much of the time. (Gayle)

For some participants, the wider cultural prejudices about victims and survivors of DFV exacerbated the pressures on their mothering role. For example, Rita perceived that the societal view of women living with domestic violence led to further condemnation rather than support:

I think of the million little things that women do as acts of resistance and as protection for their kids, like even after a night when you've been scared to death, and you get up and you make the breakfast and make the lunches and make sure the kids are off to school clean with their homework and everything they need, and still get them to do sports. I think that needs to be celebrated, like, women who do that stuff. I know how hard that was—it's like hero stuff—and, yet, as a society, people will still look at a woman like that and go, “Well, why does she stay, why doesn't she leave” rather than “Wow, how amazing is she that she can still get up and do that for her kids?”

The pressures of cultural and religious views were also named by several women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. They described feeling the pressure for women to remain in marriages and continue to mother their children in situations of DFV.

It's culturally accepted that, you know, women get beaten up and stuff like that...first of all, you know, Christians don't have busted up marriages. (Jana)

In summary, women were highly aware of the wider context in which they were mothering and the particular pressures associated with both pre-separation and post-separation violence.

4.7.3 Mother efforts to compensate and repair

An important pattern in the data was reflected by women who spoke of the need to compensate for the abuse children were experiencing or had experienced, or alternatively their need to repair relationships that had been negatively impacted by the violence and abuse.

One parent's got to be responsible and if one parent's hurting the kids, emotionally, I just think it's up to the other one to step in and not let it happen and that just happens to have been me. (Annabelle)

I felt that I had to make sure [child's] not missing out on, y'know, love and affection. And I had to do double. (Sara)

Other women reported the need to protect their children.

I remember there was a few times I actually took the blame for stuff that happened, because I didn't want him to go off at them. (Lillian)

While some women were aware of these compensatory mothering actions while living with their partner, this reflection often occurred once women had separated and could have a greater perspective on their mothering.

Um, I guess in a way I've kind of felt that I didn't protect my children enough. So I've always felt that. I've always felt like you know I could have done more for them than I did. So I guess now I'm really over-compensating. (Mackenzie)

Several women referred to the necessity of compensation and "perfection" as surpassing the usual expectations of mothering. As exemplified by Tania and Yvette:

I was pressured to be a supermum. You have to be not just a mum when kids have gone through trauma, you have to be a supermum. (Tania)

I have to be perfect because he's such a letdown. (Yvette)

After separation from their ex-partners, many women were striving to achieve a more secure and settled parenting style with their children.

Just the fact that I am there with my kids, my kids are with me, and I try every day to—you know, to do better than the day before and, you know, we're not perfect and nobody is perfect, just as long as, you know, we've done the best we can do in that day. And the kids, you know, they do just adore me and love me and I appreciate that.

For example, I sort of said, you know, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry this has happened", and my eldest boy said, "Mum, it's not your fault". (Annabelle)

My relationship's kind of changed from a very protective role to just, you know, now finally being their mum I guess. (Belinda)

Kimberley, explained that she is "pretty firm with the kids... but very understanding", while Annabelle reflected:

I just know how much it affected me and I really want to protect them and, you know, let them learn at their own—you know, just have somebody—I didn't have anyone to talk to and I think it's really important.

The transition to their own mothering style reflected in the latter comments brought a great sense of relief for some women, who lost their sense of needing to be "the perfect mother" out of fear of their partner, fear of the external child protection and family law systems, or the need to compensate for the abuse of their children.

4.8 Relationships between mothers and their children

The previous section, which explored the issues of mothering under pressure in the context of DFV, relates closely to the nature of the relationships between mothers and their children. As previously noted, women and children experienced very different contexts post-separation. The mother-child relationships were configured around these varied circumstances. A number of themes emerged: the relationship problems for women whose children were mirroring their father's abusive behaviours, and other problems emerging, such as loss of contact with their children, the strengthening of the mother-child relationships following separation, and, for some women, the growing pride and appreciation of themselves and their children.

4.8.1 Children mirroring their father's behaviours

Section 4.6.6 revealed a significant group of mothers whose children (mostly sons) were repeating their father's abusive behaviour as a result of experiencing child abuse, witnessing family violence, or their father's parenting. Women reacted differently to these situations and the effect on their relationship with their child.

Eloise, for example, responded to her young son's behaviour as a trigger for separation.

If I had known the effects on the kids I would have left him years ago and never gone back. I picked up my [2-5 year old child] from kinder. He was doing kinder at the time and I picked him up and he's done the same thing (as the father). Yelled at me, swore at me, and then knocked everything off the bench. This was the same day, 8 hours from the father doing the same thing. That was the incident that opened my eyes and I went no more. It's no good.

Other women, particularly those with older children, felt progressively alienated from their children. Patricia sees her children as being manipulated by their father during the time they spend with him, in turn causing them to defy and disobey her. Tania and Dana reflected similar disturbances in children's behaviour:

But he's so much like his dad, and, of course, when he came back from his visit it was like having his father in the room, the things he would say. He was just shooting his father's bullets for him and, of course, then I would have a PTSD reaction and didn't quite understand what that was. (Tania)

It's pretty awful for me because with the oldest child, I have no communication at all...I guess the stars aligned for him in terms of the boys' ages as well, because they're at that age where, you know, they wanna hang out with their father, they wanna do manly things, they want their father's love and approval...the father's always there and the whole family has always said that, you know, I'm not good and I'm a bad person and I'm a rotten person and I'm a—you know, all these sorts of things. And I guess, you know, the kids absorb that...Over the last 12 months before going to his father, you know, my oldest boy was behaving towards me in the same way that his father was. You know, very abusive, very angry. You know, would come out of his room and just start criticising me for no reason whatsoever. (Dana)

Sometimes women reported beginning to fear their children when adolescents and young adults became abusive.

I asked [12-17 year old son] to stop and he actually—pardon me, threw the bong water all over me and went to hit me and I said to him, “you get out of here”. And then I tried to rebuild with him...but it's him standing over me. It's him abusing the shit out of me. (Sadie)

The destructive effects of domestic violence and the ways in which women were managing the abuse from their children were evident for these mothers in the relationship with their children.

4.8.2 Undermining of the mother–child relationship

While undermining the mother–child relationship was discussed in section 4.6 as a tactic of abuse, it was also evident that this had profound consequences for some relationships between women and their children.

...My daughter's so bitter with me. I don't know what her father said when he took her away from me on that last visit, but she's really upset with me, saying I should've let him see her more as a child. She's not understanding how violent he was and how dangerous. (Lea)

Some women felt that both their life and the child's life were worse since separation because of continual undermining of their relationships and ongoing abuse.

If you ask anyone else like my parents they would say I was in an abusive—like abusive relationship from the word go, but I would say more so since we separated. (Maria)

As far as human beings are concerned, he has to have complete power of people...You know, he's openly and degradingly lied to them about me and things, and I just spoke the truth in court. And I don't yield a lot of power, been able to fight back, but he gets inside their heads and he gives them a disgusting amount of money and gives them everything they want materialistically. It's hard now. It's harder now than what it ever was. (Malene)

I feel like I'm constantly having to repair my relationship with my children because of the situation of co-parenting with their father in such a way that, you know, it's still incredibly hostile. I mean this man is incredibly violent, very difficult man, and he will—he is very angry still, even 6 years later. He's still incredibly angry that I left him and that I took action against him, that he—you know, I'm—what I did was for him unforgivable and therefore the children are—he uses them as pawns. (Tania)

Lavinia was the main carer in her young children's lives prior to separation from her violent and abusive husband. As described in her case study in section 4.5.3, she has progressively been deliberately excluded from her children's lives.

The relationship with my children...I'm probably—I call myself a 2 percent mother, or a marginalised mother, that's how I feel. The relationship with my children; I'm no longer important in their lives. I'm not there—I'm not there for them when they need me. I'm not—I have no idea what's going on in their lives. The father won't let me speak to them to wish—even my youngest child goodnight. So I mean really, I've just been completely marginalised and cut out of their lives effectively. (Lavinia)

4.8.3 Strengthening relationships between mothers and their children

Some mothers felt that their relationship had always been close, like Eliza: “Always good, like we have fun together”. For women who did not need to manage stressful and abusive post-separation care arrangements with the child’s father, life changed after separation in positive ways. The “return to normality” signalled a strong theme of better relationships with their children.

I think my son sees me as a strong woman, that I’m probably a bit of a rescuer in his case, and that’s not a good thing because he can get himself into all sorts of bother and “Mum’ll sort it out”. Yeah, I think that our relationship is close and the fact that I separated made it even closer. (Cheryl)

When asked about how she feels her relationship is with her children, Kimberley said:

A lot better than it was. You know, a lot closer now again...now I do talk to them a lot and I do explain. I do try to explain things.

Women also became more aware of reciprocity in their relationships with their children. Rita described how she attempted to protect her children from the emotional effects of domestic violence. She explains how the children, in their turn, stayed to protect her:

Um, well I think we were always quite close, like we really stuck together through the worst times...top of my mind was to make sure that they always knew that nothing was their fault, even though he’d—even though the arguments would start from something that he’d see they’d done...most of the time when he attacked me it was because I put myself between him and them...But when he left, um, within 3 months three of them had moved out and I remember sitting down and asking them, “Why didn’t you go beforehand?”... And, um, they all just said they couldn’t leave me in that situation with him.

These reflections on acknowledging positive changes to relationships between women and children led into discussions for a group of women about the pride and achievement in strengthening their relationships and the growing self-esteem they experienced in relation to their mothering.

4.8.4 Pride and achievement

Despite diverse and multiple pressures on mothering, many participants described themselves as “good mothers” and cited protectiveness and the ability to fulfil mothering tasks and care for their children during difficult times as evidence

of this. Good mothering was described variously as loving the children, setting boundaries, listening to children, being honest with them, and being responsible for them.

I’m not the best but I’m not the worst either. I get on real good with my kids...oh I am proud. I love my kids. Yeah they’re my support, my kids. (Yasmin)

I’m overall a very devoted mother...Like try to make up for the lack of him and the lack of any other family. (Gabriella)

Aaliyah, who was estranged from her adult children because they sided with their father and rejected her, said, “I love my children unconditionally”. Aaliyah had taken the brave step of going to her children’s homes to tell them this, but reported that, “they just nodded their heads”. That was the last time Aaliyah saw either of her adult children.

Yvette felt that she represented effective mothering through providing the predictability of routine in an unpredictable lifestyle dictated by her ex-partner’s moods. Following separation, she described how she continued to ensure there was structure at home so that the children had a sense of security through knowing what to expect.

In summary, women spoke from very different contexts for their mothering. There were none that did not speak of this role as an important part of their identity. However, the extent to which this role was a positive source of fulfilment seen through strengthened relationships with their children varied for women and was highly dependent on the role that the domestic violence perpetrator continued to play in children’s lives.

The role of informal and formal support as a further variable in supporting or undermining the mother–child relationship will be discussed in section 4.9 of the report.

4.8.5 Summary of the perpetrator tactics of abuse and the impact on mothering in the context of DFV

The in-depth data from 50 women who participated in an interview have demonstrated their perspectives about: the fathering of men who are domestically violent, the impact that this had on the mother–child relationship, and mothering—in particular, in the context of difficult post-separation arrangements. A short summary is provided here before a discussion of the formal and informal support systems that were accessed by women and their children.

The accounts from women are striking in their heterogeneity about post-separation parenting in the context of DVF. For example, there was a group of men who had no ongoing contact

with their children after separation and a higher number of men who had extensive time with their children, and even a minority who had gained full parental care and actively worked to exclude the mother from their children's lives.

On the other hand, there were also some strong patterns in the data in which consistencies emerged in women's stories about men and their parenting. Interestingly, the research questions that structured the findings in this section of the report could not be responded to with entirely discrete answers. Fathering capacity was not separate from the tactics of abuse and the impact these tactics have on children and their mothers. Nevertheless, for the purposes of reporting and clarity, accounts were disaggregated to address the research questions concerned. Initially, the tactics of abuse by perpetrators of domestic violence towards women and children were described, alongside the individual characteristics of men and their fathering. This context provided the backdrop against which to understand women mothering under pressure and the impacts on the mother-child relationship.

A range of issues influenced the fathering capacity of men who use violence in this sample. In the first instance, the amount of time they spent with children was clearly significant. Most women reported that prior to separation, most of the men were little involved in their children's lives. For the women who were able to name positive attributes about the men, these generally related to their care of the children. Unfortunately, while able to name some positive interactions and care in the relationship between these men and their children, the women then frequently made contradictory statements about other times of abuse, inconsistency, or the denigration of them as mothers in front of the children.

The capacity to father was significantly impacted by men's individual characteristics and behaviours and their attitudes to children and to women. The attitudes to women were also ones that were of primary concern, because 40 percent (20 women) of the sample reported directly on their concerns about children replicating their father's abusive behaviours and attitudes.

Equally concerning were men's attitudes to their children. Women reported that some of the men had very little understanding of child development. They had often had little experience of caring for children prior to demanding equal shared time or high levels of time with their children on separation. The emergence of the "Disney dad", who provided children with treats while women struggled with poverty and reduced circumstances at separation, or with inadequate household finances prior to separation, featured strongly in the lives of many children and their mothers.

The tactics used by fathers who were violent and abusive were wide ranging. Child physical abuse; child sexual abuse; emotional, psychological, and verbal abuse; financial abuse; systems abuse; and continued violence and abuse of the child's mother were all identified. Not all men were involved in all of these behaviours. Furthermore, violence and abuse did not cease with separation for the majority of women and their children. Sometimes it took a different form from prior to separation (e.g. systems abuse, financial abuse, and stalking rather than direct physical violence).

Women reported that ongoing violence and abuse impacted negatively on themselves and their children. For others, the trauma of previous violence cast a long shadow and children needed, but were not necessarily given, time to recover before having extensive care-time alone with their fathers. Considerable psychological, emotional, and physical problems were reported for many children.

There was a group of children and their mothers whose quality of life appeared to be significantly worse following separation. The escalation of DFV, including stalking, financial abuse, and systems abuse, combined with considerable care-time spent with fathers who were abusive and controlling, provided an environment of fear and ongoing misery for children and their mothers. Managing the ongoing impact of trauma on their children, and adolescent or young adult violence in the home, created significant challenges for mothers who themselves were trying to recover from the domestic violence they had experienced.

In contrast, other women and their children who managed greater distance from their abusive ex-partners talked of recovery, repair, and some pride in their mothering and their relationships with their children. Children had also been described by mothers as distinguishing themselves from fathers, through their own sensitive personalities and personal interests.

4.9 Services and agencies

This section examines the nature, extent, and impact of engagement with services and agencies described by the women in the qualitative sample. All of the participants' experiences reflect recent engagement with services and agencies as a result of the recruitment strategy applied for the research. For the majority, this was occurring or had recently occurred in the aftermath of separation from a violent relationship. These women were at different stages in their post-separation trajectory, with some (n = 9) in the very early phases of post-separation and with very limited engagement with services apart from refuges, family services, and, in some

cases, police and hospitals. For the majority, the experiences discussed reflect a period of up to 5 years post-separation. For this group, engagement with multiple services, including refuges and domestic violence services, child protection, police, and family law system agencies, was not uncommon. The experiences of a smaller proportion of the sample cover a longer period, ranging from 10 years to up to 20 years post-separation. The four women who were still living with their partner had also discussed a variety of services.

The main services and agencies that the women and children in the sample engaged with were:

- family violence support services, including crisis intervention, safety planning, refuges (and in some cases, longer-term refuge support), or support after family violence over the longer term;
- criminal justice agencies, including police and magistrate courts for crisis intervention, personal protection orders, and, less commonly, criminal proceedings;
- the child protection system;
- the family law system; and
- therapeutic services for parents and children.

Less common services identified were those provided by non-government agencies for emergency food and emergency financial assistance. However, Financial Wellbeing and Capability services and financial counselling were not identified as services made available to women, which may therefore be a gap in their support. Therapeutic services included those that provided individual counselling for parents and children on their own, as well as those that provide groups for victims/survivors of family violence and for men who use violence in relationships. Overall, engagement with several of these services and agencies was not uncommon in the sample and the majority of women in the sample had engaged with at least two of them.

For the women who were separated, the most common trajectory saw separation commence with police involvement in a DFV crisis (sometimes following prior incidents when police had been called but not acted). The police intervention and DV crisis resulted in personal protection orders being obtained and, less frequently, criminal charges also being laid. Engagement with the family law system occurred thereafter. Most commonly, the family law system was the main system women had engaged with in relation to post-separation parenting, and, for some of this group, engagement with child protection agencies also occurred to a more limited extent. For a smaller group of women, the child protection system was the main system they were involved with and they had no or limited engagement with the family law system. Just

over half the women were caught up in multiple processes, including family law system processes about parenting and property matters in proceedings they experienced as continuing, perpetuating, and compounding the abuse they experienced during separation. For this group, involvement with police and criminal justice agencies was also common.

The discussion in this section begins with an examination of experiences with refuges and domestic violence services, followed by therapeutic services. It then moves to a consideration of the role that engagement with child protection and family law services played in shaping parenting after separation from violent relationships, including systems abuse. The experiences of three women who were recruited through programs dealing with the consequences of family violence at a later life stage, and five women with long-term experiences of DFV in later life, also provide insight into some of the implications of parenting in this context over the life course through their reflections on outcomes and relationships with adult children.

4.9.1 Refuges and domestic violence services

In the main, the women whose pathway out of a violent relationship involved engagement with domestic violence services, including a period in a refuge, reported positive experiences. Of all the services and agencies discussed by the women, experiences with refuges and domestic violence services were most likely to be spoken of in positive terms. Being in a refuge provided a period of safety for women and their children and access to specialised support in a range of ways. This support covered practical issues, including assistance with government agencies such as Centrelink, legal and justice agencies, and child protection.

Refuges also supported the beginning of restoration in mother-child relationships in a formal and informal sense. In a formal sense, many of the women engaged in counselling, group work, and workshops that assisted them to understand their experiences, consider the impact on their parenting and children, and to begin the complex work needed to develop or restore effective parenting. In a less formal sense, several women spoke of the time in a refuge as a period when, away from violence and trauma, they were able to re-establish normal routines and enjoyable activities with their children, support their children to recover from stress and trauma, and begin to return to healthier patterns of activity and behaviour. A number of women spoke of the benefits to their children of the counselling that was made available for the children during their stay in a refuge. But for some women, it was also a challenging period as they began to appreciate the impact that the exposure to violence had on their children.

Yeah, because they were in the refuge, they're actually, they do other things for us, with your Centrelink, the doctor's, the kids [counselling], ah they, they're, there is a counselling but we did pretty much our own thing... And, ah, I also attended, ah, um, workshops and, um, and other stuff. And we all go every—with the, with the schedule it's actually, um, organised; it's very well organised. Because, yeah, um, things to do every day. (Angie)

For some women, their experiences of refuge were less positive. Sara had several attempts to leave a violent relationship prior to a final incident of violence that could have been fatal. On the earlier occasions, her experiences in refuges had been mixed and contributed to returning to her ex-partner. On the final occasion, the structured environment and therapeutic support in the particular refuge, together with its location in a place she considered guaranteed safety, provided her and her child with an environment in which to recover. She described her experience in one refuge the first time she tried to leave:

I think, oh, in my, in my first refuge, like it's not good to have changing people. In the refuge there should be someone, y'know, who kind of just does the counselling, like there should be some really regular people and, um y'know, there should be more support.

By comparison, the refuge she was referred to the time she left for good had a much better structure in place for supporting her to maintain the separation and remove herself and her children from violence permanently:

But I honestly would say that refuge has had the structure. What it, what it gave, what is different then too, to the other refuges, that [name] refuge has got, ah, kind of, programs for, um, for women to learn about, y'know, domestic violence, so I could understand it, to go in-depth of that, in order for not only for you to kind of come to full realisation and, y'know, and also to be able to—y'know, the last key was an understanding for a future life in order to avoid it happening again.

For another participant, who had a longer term history of violent relationships, the refuge she was in felt isolated and lonely due to its distance from the town centre and lack of access to public transport. This participant also reported that she found some aspects of the refuge “triggering” because of her earlier history of trauma.

The whole thing has been really hard for me. So I can't—I probably won't say, because I haven't done a lot of the workshops because I—I don't know. It's been really hard for me out here, so—there's been a lot of triggers and everything for me out here anyway. (Yasmin)

4.9.2 Parenting support and therapeutic services

As the discussion in section 4.5 establishes, the consequences of family violence for most of the women and children in the sample were severe. For the women, depression, anxiety, extreme levels of stress, and post-traumatic stress were evident. Similar effects were also evident for children, and the mothers' descriptions indicated significant levels of externalising behaviour, poor self-regulation, sleep problems, and emotional trauma. Some of the women in the sample had children with special needs, and, in some cases, the father's attitude to addressing these needs was dismissive or obstructionist. The majority of the women in the sample had accessed therapeutic support for themselves and their children. The nature of this support varied, but it was most commonly based on individual counselling, with smaller numbers of women explicitly identifying working with psychologists or psychiatrists. Therapeutic support was seen as critical to recovery from the effect of family violence for themselves and their children. However, some women reported being unable to access appropriate or sufficiently sustained therapeutic support due to a lack of access to professionals with sufficient levels of expertise in family violence, or due to financial constraints and a lack of access to ongoing subsidised support. Three women in the sample reported being able to pay for therapy through Victims of Crime Assistance processes and compensation grants. In some cases, engagement with court processes inhibited engagement in therapeutic support for mothers and children.

The next three sections examine women's experiences with therapeutic services. First, the participant's own experiences are examined, followed by a discussion of the nature of their children's engagement with therapeutic services. The third section examines the accounts of women whose engagement with the family law system inhibited engagement with therapeutic services for themselves and their children.

4.9.2.1 Women and therapeutic services

For the women, the use of therapeutic services had three main aspects. First, was addressing their own trauma from the experiences of family violence. Second, was to support them in addressing their children's trauma from exposure to family violence. The third aspect involved supporting recovery in their parenting capacity, including support to deal with the ongoing stress of attaining parenting arrangements with their ex-partner and maintaining ongoing co-parenting arrangements with their ex-partner in some cases. Some of the women who engaged with personal protection order systems or the family law system also spoke of the need for therapeutic services to assist them to manage their anxiety and, sometimes, the trauma elicited in these processes. For most of the women who accessed therapeutic supports, support for their capacity

to meet their children's needs in challenging circumstances was a critical part of engaging with therapeutic support both for themselves and their children. In some instances, this support led them to realise the connections between their experiences of family violence, the consequences for their own wellbeing, and their children's difficulties.

Vicky spoke of the need for continued support as she negotiated her way through the court system and what she experienced as the use of this system to maintain control over her and the children:

I have a good psychiatrist. I'm living in domestic violence still. I'm out of the house and what others and people don't realise is, it's still domestic violence that he's controlling and intimidating and putting that same threat of taking.

Like two other women, Maryanne was able to access financial support for psychological help through a Victim's of Crime Assistance scheme. She found working with the psychologist in relation to her own trauma very helpful, as well as relying on the psychologist's professional advice about how to manage her children's anxiety. Describing the aftermath of an unplanned encounter during which her ex-partner had behaved inappropriately to her in a public place in front of their children, Maryanne explained how her psychologist's advice about responding to her child's anxiety was helpful:

On the way home [2-5-year-old child] was very fearful and she was just very quiet and for her that's very odd. So I have got some advice on how to deal with those situations now and it's actually to address their emotion straight way, rather than trying to change the subject and talk about happy things. It's to address the emotions that she's feeling and say, it's okay. You feel a bit scared but you're with Mummy now and you're safe [now]. Those sorts of things have really helped because, um, addressing the issue and addressing her emotions. Whereas before I didn't know how to deal with that. So I would just talk about happy things, and [now] it's okay to be sad today or it's okay to be a little bit scared but Mum's here, like addressing [2-5-year-old child]'s feelings around the situation and that's really helped on a parenting level because I—I just didn't know what to do. Like do you just talk about funny things, like do you distract or do you address, and is it okay to address it? And in that way [psychologist] helped me a lot.

Similarly, Alexandra's counsellor helped her understand the behaviour of her children after spending time with their father:

And then I can parent better and also just explaining when I—when the kids have, um, when they come back

from their dad's and they're transitioning back and there, you know, doing things—they're very different. My eldest can be very withdrawn; she's much—she takes on his personality and she can be quite rude to people and easily withdrawn and my counsellor has helped me to see, um, to understand that that's normal in the case of traumatised children.

Like Maryanne, Annabelle, who was in a refuge with her children, found that the therapeutic support provided for both her and the children assisted her to understand how to communicate with her children about the violence and its effects:

I think it's very important especially when—you know, you don't want to leave them to their own devices, because God knows what they'll think. They're only young and, you know, their whole brains and all that aren't quite developed and this and that and this and that, so I think it's really important that we walk hand in hand with them through it. And, you know, let them know they can be sad and angry and they're all okay emotions, but you've just got to have them in check. You know, you can't—you know, I suppose I've had a bit of a disruptive life due to circumstances and things beyond my control and I just know how much it affected me and I really want to protect them and, you know, let them learn at their own—you know, just have somebody. I didn't have anyone to talk to and I think it's really important to have someone to talk to that understands, and that you do actually trust and believe in and, you know, respect and admire and all that kind of stuff.

One in five of the women had been in a refuge that provided access to therapeutic support, mainly specialised group work for themselves and their children. For Lara, it was the psychologist at the refuge who made her realise that her children were also experiencing the family violence:

And she said to me, "Did you know that you're hurting the girls by allowing this to happen?" And I just clicked. And I didn't really ever, ever saw it like that, because I thought, no, because I was the one that was getting hurt, I never thought that the girls were getting hurt, but I didn't see their point of view because they explained to me that everything that they were watching, I was abusing them by allowing that to be seen. And it broke my heart because—all the time that I stayed was just to save them and to [protect] but I didn't realise that I was hurting them myself and I was sad and I was crying.

In addition to providing guidance on how to manage the effects of the violence on their children, the women spoke of

a number of other benefits of having this kind of therapeutic support. These benefits included reducing feelings of anxiety in themselves and children, reducing isolation, and supporting them to recover self-esteem.

Now I'm doing—getting—trying to get them help to make them happy again. Doing counselling. A lot of counselling. Like, we're still doing lots of playing together. Just you know just being—trying to be a positive. They're happy. I'm saying, "Everything is gonna be okay. You guys are gonna see your Dad. This is not your fault. Not your guys' fault. This just happened". (Eliza)

[And we] shared that stuff and that's the beauty of going to a DV course. You find other women and the question was asked today, what's one thing you got from the course today and I said, I'm sad. I don't want us to lose this place because it's precious, because I'll have no place to verbalise what I feel, how I feel, because it's DV. You can't just go and blab it to every Tom, Dick, and Harry. Nobody wants to hear it; [they don't] understand it. (Jana)

Some of the women who were at a later life stage were also engaged in therapeutic group work to assist them to deal with the longer term implications of family violence, including fractured or non-existent relationships with adult children.

Initially, it's just knowing that other people—even though you know in your head—but knowing other people in the room with you have gone through similar experiences... Um, and um, and learning different strategies and one of the biggest things is learning to forgive myself. Um, because that's been really—well, still is difficult. (Aaliyah)

4.9.2.2 Children and therapeutic services

For children, the mothers' accounts indicated there were three main issues that brought them into contact with therapeutic and counselling supports, where access to this was not impeded by ex-partners or court orders:

- recovery from trauma caused by exposure to family violence or child abuse;
- assistance to deal with maintaining a relationship with the perpetrator over the longer term; and
- intervention to address the development of problematic behaviours in children associated with exposure to the attitudes and behaviour of perpetrators.

Consistent with the discussion in the preceding section, support for parenting capacity to meet children's needs was a significant theme in the women's discussion about counselling services.

Hayley's experience of working with her child's counsellor was critical to Hayley coming to an understanding prior to

separation that she was in an abusive relationship that was having adverse consequences for her child's wellbeing. As well as seeking counselling for herself in the face of her ex-partner's refusal to cooperate with seeking therapeutic support, Hayley found a behavioural psychologist to help her deal with her son's challenging behaviour. One of the critical aspects of this engagement was the psychologist's support in enabling her to implement strategies to ensure that the child was not directly exposed to her ex-partner's abusive behaviour:

It's very hard. When you're so disempowered in that way, you can't stand up to a bully like that. You can't—you don't have any power. You're so stressed every time you see them...you know I had quite a few sessions with her where she didn't deal with [son] at all. She just dealt with what I needed to do with the domestic violence. (Hayley)

In Karla's situation, help from both a psychologist and a psychiatrist for her child was critical in enabling her child to function in everyday situations and to manage high levels of anxiety associated with her experiences with her father. Karla describes the importance of the support in this way:

They had good sorts of very practical ideas and things that can help to deal with the trauma and the sort of PTSD triggers and so on. And just that they explained to me—I think what she was—a bit about what she was going through and how these things have affected her, and what that means in a practical sense. So they both, I think, in their different ways, had some really good sort of useful things to share.

Um, even down to, you know, "What we can do", and, "We think that her anxiety is building up before it gets to a dangerous stage", um, things that she could do where she feels scared to go into the classroom, that kind of stuff. And because it—it's like—that the thing that happened, it was not just that he did something bad to her, that's why she's scared of him. It's everything that she connects him to.

For Nicole, re-establishing contact with a psychiatrist her son had seen earlier in the separation helped them to deal with issues that arose for him in adolescence, which included depression and anti-social behaviour at school, in the context of increased contact with his father and criticism from Nicole's ex-partner of her and her new partner to her son:

The school principal who I've had—we've had a very good working relationship with, rang me and said, you know, "Look, we're worried about [son]; he's written a poem about committing suicide". And so, you know, this was really distressing. And anyway, so we ended up taking [son] to see a psychiatrist...who we'd actually seen earlier in the

piece when [son] was having trouble with the contacts [with father] as a young child. So, we had a relationship with [psychiatrist] although we hadn't seen him for, like, maybe 5 years. And we went back to see [psychiatrist] and, you know, dealt as much as we could with what was happening for [son].

Malene's daughters needed sustained therapy after separation as a result of their exposure to family violence. Speaking about one of her daughters, Malene explained:

[Daughter] was treated for 2 years under [youth mental health service] here in [town] for post-traumatic stress disorder from the domestic violence at home... She was on medication, she had attempted suicide twice, and self-harming. I was reaching out to the school and to counsellors and [youth mental health service] for help to get [daughter] through this difficult time.

Claudia described a severe history of violence, which had directly affected her children. She linked it to mental illness in her former partner and indicated that each of them were dedicated to maintaining his engagement in the children's lives and supporting their recovery. She described a very intensive process involving therapy for each family member, which was assisting them in working towards this goal. Elements of the process included steps that would allow her and the children to overcome their intense fear of her former partner, and she indicated that he was also "part of the conversation" about the children feeling safe:

Claudia: So, at the moment, he does have periods unsupervised with the children, yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Claudia: And everyone has cleared that as okay, so that hasn't been a decision we've just made off our bat, our own bat without consent with professionals, if that makes sense.

Interviewer: Yeah that makes sense. And do the kids know what to do if they feel unsafe?

Claudia: Yeah they do.

Interviewer: So has that been a conversation that you've had to have with them?

Claudia: It is. They remember and, but yeah—sorry there is no but, just their dad is also aware that that conversation takes place. And he's also sometimes a part of that, so at times [older child]'s PTSD will be triggered by things that have nothing to do with family violence and but somehow click into an old memory, if that makes sense; it's like a trip switch that can be triggered by anything.

So there's open communication on those things. They are aware that he was—not so much [younger child] but [older child] understood it better, that he was doing the behaviour change course and it was this term we dropped the precautions at school. So [ex-partner] comes and helps with school drop-off because I did placement last term at a kindergarten. So that was actually really helpful.

Several of the women whose children were adults spoke of their need for therapeutic assistance as older teenagers or young adults with mental health problems linked to exposure to violent and abusive behaviour. For example, one participant, Mackenzie, used no services after separation from a violent relationship apart from making property arrangements through consent orders. Her children maintained contact with their father until their late teens. Both experienced mental health problems and received counselling. It had also recently emerged that Mackenzie's daughter had been sexually abused on contact visits. Her father was facing criminal charges over the abuse. Mackenzie and her children were accessing counselling and other support at the time of interview.

4.9.2.3 Lack of access to adequate therapeutic support

Some women reported disappointment and frustration at not being able to access counselling of a sufficiently expert or sustained nature for either themselves or their children. Despite the availability of Commonwealth-funded services that have sliding scales and exemptions for fees, some also indicated that financial constraints, including those resulting from post-separation financial abuse, meant that paying for therapeutic support was difficult (if not impossible).

It's like climbing through a haystack, trying to—and it's exhausting, trying to find these services that are accessible, you know, on a pension. I mean, there are some psychologists that I could possibly access—if I want to pay an extra [fee] for \$80 for a session, you know. But under Medicare, finding a child psychologist, a male—they're like hen's teeth. (Monica)

The experience of Alice underlines the importance of access to therapeutic support grounded in expertise in family violence. In the context of a severe history of family violence and direct abuse of the children as well as financial abuse, and with significant physical health problems, Alice turned to a psychiatrist for assistance after the stress of protracted property proceedings that were also associated with a resurgence of her ex-partner's violence and applications for personal protection orders:

I ended up in such a mess; I went to the psychiatrist, I was shaking, he wrote me out a script of Valium and that was the end of it for me.

Alice links her addiction to Valium to a chain of events that resulted in being assessed as an inadequate parent by child protection after her children were over-held and not returned from contact by her ex-partner. Even after significant violence and sustained problems after separation, she had only brief phone contact with a domestic violence service. Her main sources of support were friends and family, and various community services, including Lifeline. She had dealt with publicly funded legal representatives about her parenting, property, and personal protection order proceedings.

Other examples illustrating a lack of access to appropriate therapeutic support included participants who could not access support for their children. Finding appropriately qualified professionals for young children and finding male professionals who were needed for male children proved difficult. Some women reported having to cease therapy when funding envelopes had been exhausted, even though they still had a strong need for ongoing support. A couple of women indicated that even in such funding circumstances, some professionals had continued to support them via reducing their fees. Monica articulated the implications of moving between counsellors and services very clearly:

I attended the domestic violence group with [name of therapeutic service], and there's a lovely—you know, special domestic violence counsellor there. And I can tell that their funding stream is different; it must be from state, and they're not capped on access for service. But my problem is that, you know, having developed a rapport with someone and having all this—like, the other—it's a continual wave of tsunamis with them, just ongoing with domestic violence. And that man's not in my life, but it's not stopped the abuse. So, it's trying to—you know, from just going through so much emotionally with a service that helped you and you've done all this wonderful groundwork, to start again fresh with a new counsellor is—I mean, that is exhausting. Yeah...and I think particularly for people that have gone through domestic violence, you know, trust is something that you—is shattered. My trust in services and the system and—you know, in services I've got some terrible psychologists and counsellors that I've encountered as well. And I think that is very detrimental. So, having found somebody that I've had a—you know, support system with, that is just gold. Really is. So, I mean, there are other services that I can use, but when you feel so fragile and vulnerable, trying to start a session with—yeah, very hard.

4.9.2.4 Engagement with the family law system inhibiting access to therapeutic services for women and children

Close to a fifth of the women in the sample experienced challenges in accessing counselling for their children in the context of engagement with the family law system. This arose in three ways:

- directly through conditions prohibiting taking children to counselling in court orders;
- indirectly through fathers vetoing counselling; and
- indirectly again by mothers being advised not to engage in counselling to avoid creating records that might be subpoenaed or create the wrong impression in court.

The question of whether therapeutic records are admissible in legal proceedings is complex. Under s. 10E of the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth), protection is offered in relation to services provided by family counsellors or professionals to whom clients are referred by family counsellors. Situations where disclosures indicating a person under 18 has been or is at risk of being abused are exceptions to inadmissibility (s. 10E(2)) unless there is sufficient other evidence for the Court to determine the factual issues on. The protection does not apply to services offered by professionals who are not or have not been referred family counsellors (see e.g. Crawford and Sisinas and Anor FamCA 914).

Two women reported court orders were issued that prevented them from taking their children to counselling. This occurred because the court's view about the need for counselling was inconsistent with their own and the views of those professionals with whom women had been consulting. The experiences of each of these women involved concerns about their children being abused when spending time with their fathers and their experiences encompassed engagement with multiple services.

In Bianca's case, court orders ultimately stopped the children from spending any time with their father. However, very detailed and restrictive conditions in relation to parental responsibility also meant she was not able to continue counselling for her children:

It [counselling] was very limited because the father had the court order that we couldn't—they couldn't attend anything. And it's to this day, that's in the orders. God knows how a judge allowed that. But they went—for a period of time the kids went to a [support service] and he did everything he could to get that disallowed. To get that stopped. And the court to be honest even looked at me as if that was damaging. For me to take them there. And we never—we never—they never discussed abuse or what had been going on, and, you know, one of the things that had happened to [daughter] is technically classed as sexual abuse. But the children weren't per se sexually abused. They were emotionally and physically harmed. And [support service]

really helped them more to work through their emotions and how to channel their anger and feel confident about who they were. So I felt that was a positive thing. But the courts apparently agreed with the father and said no. So that got stopped and he had it written into the final orders that they can't attend any counselling whatsoever and the court allowed it.

In Patricia's case, such orders were made in the context of a dispute that involved engagement with state justice systems (including cross-applications for personal protection orders) and the family law system. Although she wanted to access therapeutic support for herself and her children, this was directly prevented for Patricia's children and indirectly prevented for her due to fears their records would be subpoenaed by their father.

I shouldn't have to go down to the street and use a public payphone to ring up Parent Line so they can't have my number or anything else. You know, because I'm extremely concerned about the children's behaviour. You know, that shouldn't happen—have to happen. We should feel that we're free to get help and we're not, we're not, you know, and the whole fallacy of we're protective parents, [child protection department] won't get involved, we can't be.

For three other women, denial of parental consent by the fathers meant they could not access counselling for their children, even though they believed this was necessary. For these women, the denial of consent for therapeutic support for children was associated with their ex-partner's denial that violence had occurred.

With [counselling service] here in [town] and I—they did one session and then I told [ex-partner]...and then he stopped the children going, doesn't—he thinks the children go because he doesn't believe there's been domestic violence. So I don't know where to go. (Mai)

Even when—even with these programs in place, when you've got a partner who is, um, you know, 50—has 50 percent care of them, you know, it's almost impossible to—you know, I wanted to start [the children] just to go to a—you know, just a psychologist that they could have someone neutral to speak to. And again, I was advised that was not a good idea to do by the lawyers. And the [child support program] thing, but then [ex-partner] stopped it so they had to stop [child] from going as—so you know, I—the services that are in place I think are great but they're just—they're not—they're not working. (Maria)

For four other women, the fear that their counselling records or their children's counselling records would be subpoenaed

underpinned their reluctance to either engage at all with or maintain therapeutic support, as was indicated earlier for Patricia. One of the women said that her records had actually been subpoenaed. Others were acting on a lawyer's advice not to create any records that could be subpoenaed. For these women, this situation represented a continuation of abuse and control in two ways. First, through actual or threatened loss of privacy and the exposure of deeply personal material in court proceedings. Second, through preventing them from accessing assistance for recovery.

I went to a counsellor who was quite helpful in lots of ways. But at least—well the thing for when you go to court is that they subpoena your counselling records and so you can't say anything to a counsellor or whatever without it being scrutinised. Um, he (subpoenaed) last time, so he got to see everything; I mean, he knows when I have pap smears, you know. (Karla)

The experiences discussed in this report reflect engagement with the family law system over an extended time span. Some experiences are contemporary. Others occurred more than a decade ago. In 2012, the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) was amended to strengthen emphasis on protecting children from harm. An evaluation of these changes (Kaspiew et al., 2015b) found that the changes were a step in the right direction, but room for improvement remained. One of the studies that contributed to the evaluation was based on interviews with pre and post-reform samples of separated parents (7000 each study). Parents' views on the family law system were mixed, particularly the views of those who were affected by family violence and safety concerns. Among parents who were affected by family violence or safety concerns and had used family dispute resolution, lawyers, or courts to resolve parenting arrangements, majorities offered positive evaluations of their experiences before and after the reforms. Some of the experiences reflected in the data set out in this section may illustrate the kinds of circumstances that led substantial minorities of parents in these studies not to offer positive evaluations.

4.9.2.5 Other sources of support

Women raised a range of other sources of support. Most commonly, family and friends were seen as instrumental in supporting them to leave the violent relationship, recover from the violence, and continue to care for their children in the face of protracted legal disputes. However, this support was not available for a sub-group of women, several of whom were from overseas with no local family or social support. Others in this sub-group had been estranged from family and friends due to tactics of social isolation from their ex-partners.

For three of the women, family support underpinned their ability to maintain court proceedings. Three women, also involved in court proceedings, acknowledged that the support of new partners was essential to their ability to withstand the impact of exposure to ongoing abusive behaviour as a result of parenting arrangements that maintained contact between the children and violent ex-partner.

A variety of other supports were also spoken of, including:

- Centrelink to provide access to financial assistance, though some women reported negative experiences;
- support from community centres to navigate social welfare and housing systems and for short-term financial and food assistance;
- groups operated by relationship services that supported social connection and recovery of self-esteem but weren't necessarily family violence focused;
- support from non-government community service organisations;
- telephone and online support services, such as lifeline;
- support groups for single parents;
- for people with mental illness; and
- volunteer programs that provided parenting support.

4.9.3 Child protection

Experiences with state and territory child protection agencies were also mixed. Some women became unwillingly engaged with child protection as a result of the violence. For women, the child protection agencies' imperative that they be a "protective parent", motivated them to end the violent relationship. However, there was little indication in the data that child protection agencies supported restoration of parenting capacity and other practical supports that women needed after separating from violent ex-partners, such as housing.

For some women, potential engagement with child protection raised two sets of fears. One was of triggering further violence from the perpetrator. The other was of having the children removed from their care and placed in out-of-home care or placed with their ex-partner, despite their ex-partner having been a perpetrator of violence.

No, a couple other times, um, I think the police must have notified child protection because there were kids in the house when they called out. But they never came to see us, they always just send a letter saying they've received notification from the police, and they've decided not to do anything about it—of course— they sent me a letter and they sent him a letter. So he would go—it was just increase his rage, that—you know, in his eyes we had called child protection and they were coming to our house. (Rita)

And, you know—but it feels like if I ask for help or if I say, "I'm not coping" even though realistically I know no one's going to take the baby from me, it's the fear that [ex-partner] installed right at the very beginning. "If you ask for help, you go anywhere, the baby will be taken." (Abigail)

Some other participants reported trying to initiate engagement with child protection in relation to their children's safety while in the care of the other parent. This had mixed results. For one woman, notification to child protection resulted in her ex-partner being sent a letter requiring him to desist from physically abusing the children. This resulted in less physical abuse but the continuation of emotional and psychological abuse. More commonly, the women who attempted to engage child protection to protect their children from the other parent reported that child protection was unwilling to take action, in some cases due to the involvement of the family law system. One woman reported that child protection told her that they would only get involved if the family law court outcome was inconsistent with their view of a safe outcome and another woman indicated that she was told to take the matter to the family court but was not given any ongoing support to do so.

I rang [child protection department], and they basically said...if you, um, if you feel that your children could die at contact, then you need to take it back to Family Court. They've provided one protective parent. I said, "What don't you understand; my hands are tied". (Patricia)

That person [from child protection department] then got on the phone and said, this household is not safe for your children to be in and we will write a letter to say as much. An incident has occurred but we couldn't get in contact with you. And so I then rang the police officer also who attended that evening, who admitted that she felt that she'd probably made the mistake of keeping my children there [with ex-partner], that possibly they should have taken them that night as well, but they didn't. And so anyway, I got the letter from child protection, saying it wasn't safe for my children to be in [ex-partner's] care, blah. I take this to Family Court. Child protection would not back us up in court. (Tania)

Others reported experiences with ineptly conducted child protection investigations that undermined their ability to establish that their protective concerns had an evidential basis. Karla and Bianca each described their experiences with child protection services in this way:

And then the last ones, they referred it to the police child protection unit. And the lady there, she was quite lovely but found out after she'd interviewed [daughter] that the recording didn't work...So she said that she had disclosed some things, it wasn't—and that's detailed to

the prosecution. Um, and [child protection department] people have said to me if it looks like court is going badly, to get in touch with them, but they won't step in; they'll actually speak with me, so they won't investigate and that's in quite a lot of reports made, so various doctors and psychologists and things. (Karla)

There have yeah and they'd been—after the fact I found out that there had been a couple of notifications to [child protection department] prior to all of this happening. So from—I'm not sure from where but there had been other notifications. The children eventually disclosed everything to [child protection] after we'd been in refuge for a while and [child protection] said they were too young to know what was right or wrong. They interviewed the father and his partner and they laughed it off. (Bianca)

Two of the Aboriginal women who participated in interviews reported having frustrating experiences with child protection. For one woman, this resulted from child protection not arranging visits between the child and their father despite being required to do so in Children's Court orders. She was concerned that the child would not have a relationship with the father and the absence of a relationship with the child might contribute to the father deciding to commit suicide. For another Aboriginal participant, Sadie (see case study further below), the child protection agency's lack of concern for the exposure of her children to abuse and damaging behaviour in the father's household underpinned her negative views. This behaviour involved exposure to abuse by the father's new partner, as well as exposure to sexual activity and drug use. Involvement with an Aboriginal child protection team was more positive for her than her experience with the mainstream team in the child protection department.

4.9.4 Family law agencies and courts

Participants had varying levels of engagement with the family law system, encompassing limited contact with relationship support providers and mediation, to resolving matters through lawyer-assisted negotiation, through to litigation over parenting or property matters. About a quarter of the women were involved in processes relating to both parenting and property matters. For some, attempts to resolve property issues had led to renewed or intensified family violence and disputation over children's matters, often against a background of family violence that included emotional and psychological abuse as well as financial abuse before and after separation. For many women in the sample, their experience involved sustained and protracted court processes. Some faced proceedings in multiple jurisdictions, including criminal, civil, and family law.

From the participants' perspectives, the majority of experiences with the family law system were negative. Where outcomes that were satisfactory from the participant's perspectives were achieved, in that they maintained the safety of children, this occurred only because they had the persistence, personal fortitude, and financial resources to pursue an outcome that was acceptable to them. Despite strengthened emphasis on family violence in the *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth), participants consistently reported that the implications of parenting in the context of family violence received little attention, either while going through family dispute resolution, while proceedings were afoot, or in the determination of parenting arrangements.

With very few exceptions, the participants in this research expressed negative views of their engagement with the family law system post-separation. Their experiences underlying these views were varied. The following discussion examines five themes that emerged from the transcripts:

- a lack of focus on family violence in the family law system;
- the emphasis on shared parenting in family law practice;
- the tensions that arise in attempting to maintain safety in an adversarial legal process;
- fragmented and disjointed services and agencies involving inexperienced professionals; and
- approaches to family violence within the family law system and between the family law system and other systems resulting in disjointed service delivery.

These themes are interrelated and varied combinations contributed to the negative character of the experiences reported by the women.

4.9.4.1 Family violence not a focus

Not all participants raised their experiences of family violence with family law system professionals. Where they did, most participants considered that their experiences of family violence and trauma were not accorded due weight by family law professionals. The women described experiences with professionals across the system who displayed insufficient expertise in DFV, including family dispute resolution mediators, lawyers, judges, and family report writers (who are social workers or psychologists who prepare reports for the courts) and other experts (including psychologists and psychiatrists who prepare reports for the courts). Some women reported that a lack of expertise about family violence among some professionals providing information to the courts, including contact centre staff and family report writers, combined with brief and superficial engagement with the children, meant that the children's needs and complex circumstances were not fully understood by professionals. For these participants, the consequences of family violence were not recognised,

including trauma and ongoing risk of harm for themselves and their children. Subsequently, their concerns were given insufficient weight in the context of the system's emphasis on the child's right to a meaningful relationship with each parent after separation. The impact of trauma was of peripheral or no importance to the professionals in the family law system with whom they engaged, and in some cases their accounts of violence were not accepted, although DFV and their own and their children's safety were central concerns for the women.

The experiences described by Maryanne illustrate these issues. Maryanne described a history of very significant family violence, and her ex-partner was facing criminal charges as a result. She had obtained a Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal (VOCAT) settlement that enabled her to access counselling for her own significant trauma. She was concerned about the impact of trauma on her two young children but was having difficulty finding the right help for them. Under court orders, the children had frequent daytime contact with their father, and only the changeover was supervised. Maryanne was concerned about the nature of the behaviour the children were exposed to during contact and was concerned for their safety in their father's care. She had made this known to professionals, including the court through filing a Notice of Risk, but the parenting arrangements did not take into account her concerns. She was experiencing stress and trauma and considered the children's behaviour indicated they were too. From Maryanne's perspective, despite her attempts to make her experience and concerns known to the family law court, the issue that determined parenting arrangements was her ex-partner's "rights as a dad". She was satisfied with the lawyer who had main carriage of her matter, after an earlier experience with a different lawyer who considered that the violence she described was not severe enough to warrant raising, even though criminal proceedings were afoot and a VOCAT claim had been successful.

These quotes convey Maryanne's perspective on her experience:

Maryanne: I'm concerned he'll hurt them to get to me. Yep and I've expressed that to my lawyers and to the court and apparently that's not a reasonable excuse to limit his time because he has rights as a dad... So once you submit a Notice of Risk to the court that goes through to the child protection services. That's the only contact I've had with them.

Interviewer: What was their response like to you, to your request for help then?

Maryanne: Ah, pretty much, oh, there's nothing we can really do. You've submitted the Notice of Risk. So that's where—you know, job's done in their eyes.

Maryanne's situation clearly illustrates the disjunction between the level of significance placed on family violence and its implications for her children by her and by the family law system. In her case, the factors that influence this include the shared parenting philosophy in the system, the lack of weight accorded to her safety concerns, and the fact that even filing a Notice of Risk had failed to draw a response to her safety concerns.

For other participants in the sample, similar overall experiences were described but professionals in different parts of the family law system were involved. Two kinds of professionals who provide information and evidence to family law courts are contact centre staff (who may provide observational reports) and family report writers (who provide either brief or extended reports to the court assessing the dynamics in the family). Several participants had experiences with these kinds of professionals and considered that the professionals had neither the depth of expertise in family violence nor the extended level of engagement with the children to properly assess the children's wellbeing and behaviour in the context of the family violence they had experienced. The following quotes from Sara (about contact centre staff) and Tania (about a family report writer) illustrate these points.

The other thing that you [the family court professionals] kind of looked at but they have absolutely misinterpreted it, was that [the contact centre report said] my son was very comfortable to go to Dad. No, no one has realised that well during the—um, my son is very young and he's, he, while living in the refuge he would have already even forgotten what was going on. (Sara)

The first family report I was—I mean I didn't know at the time that I had PTSD but the whole way that was run was just ridiculous because I was sitting in a room with [ex-partner's] mother for like 3 hours waiting to go in. I was the last person to go in with the children. They were tired. They were hungry. It was a really long day and so by the end of that whole thing I was absolutely a mess when I went in there. I was just—came across I think her words were emotionally labile; um, and that first family report he came across as glowing and this great dad that loves his kid. (Tania)

This lack of appreciation of the impact of family violence on women and children was not confined to processes associated with courts. It was also reported by women who had used other post-separation services and legal mechanisms, including family dispute resolution and mediation. Experiences in this context were more mixed. Some women indicated they considered their experiences were understood, albeit to a

limited extent. Others considered the family violence was not taken into account to a sufficient extent, if at all.

Monica described her experience of mediation through a legal aid commission:

It was organised through Legal Aid. But I found it to be pathetic. Nothing was addressed; the behaviour wasn't addressed. It—just often going to times, dates, places, and you signed a non-denigration statement. But that—yeah, just doesn't have any weight at all. And the parenting plan is as good as a piece of tissue paper. He—he's let—he let the children down. Three times in the last few months, he's just not taken them. Yeah, a lot of—yeah, a lot of game playing. Lots of games. And yeah, starts—really starting to let the children down. I called for mediation through [another family dispute resolution provider], which he refused to attend. So I've been issued with a certificate and really not sure where to take that.

Speaking of the incident that made her lose confidence in a family dispute resolution provider, Alice said:

I actually felt quite good for a while and then just towards the end—and I think this what was the straw that broke the camel's back in the meeting. [Ex-partner] went in and he said something to the lady and she just—to me—she gave this little giggly little flirty thing and I went, nah, don't trust you.

Nicole also observed a not dissimilar dynamic:

Just to say that, like, [ex-partner] monopolised the whole process and there were two woman mediators and he called us all ladies. It was so bad that I just—I can't speak about it, it's—it was so, so bad. And I just ended up agreeing, and he kept wanting to have more and more sessions, I think he liked the attention and he liked talking to—you know, there was something just so perverse about it.

4.9.4.2 Shared parenting philosophy

A parallel theme to the lack of focus on and expertise in family violence in the family law system was the emphasis placed on relationships with both parents after separation. This was reflected in the participants' experiences of the system in a range of ways, including their understanding of what the law required and advice provided by professionals, as well as a more general emphasis on the need for children to maintain relationships with fathers after separation. This was the case even for participants engaging with the system since 2012, when greater emphasis was placed on family violence in the *Family Law Act*.

This was spoken of in various ways by the women, including in terms of a shared parenting philosophy, an emphasis on meaningful relationships between fathers and children after separation, and fathers' rights under the law. These features of what the women experienced as the defining culture of the family law system compounded the implications of the lack of focus on family violence and child abuse in the system. Some experienced engagement with professionals who indicated that maintaining father-child relationships was the main priority in making parenting arrangements, and a number were very concerned about the potential implications of being seen to be an "alienating" parent. Some reported being advised by professionals not to report concerns about family violence and safety, or to be conservative if they raised concerns about the extent to which arguments for limits on the other parent's contact with the children should be founded on these concerns. Several women reported that their behaviour was perceived by professionals as problematic because they raised concerns about the implications of family violence for ongoing relationships between fathers and children.

Vicky was one of few women in the sample who had court orders that provided for no contact between her ex-partner and her children. Her description of how she achieved this outcome demonstrates the level of personal fortitude, persistence, and financial resources required to pursue a "no contact" outcome, even when circumstances warranted such an outcome. The following extended discussion of her case illustrates how she negotiated the delicate balance between pursuing a non contact argument and being seen as an "alienating" mother.

For Vicky, separation from her ex-partner occurred when she was pregnant and was triggered by an episode of attempted strangulation. Separation was followed by a sustained pattern of behaviour, which, in combination with her knowledge of her ex-partner's violence in previous relationships, made her extremely fearful. She had a personal protection order and the children were named on it. In Vicky's case the violence was extreme. Until it became unsustainable, she had remained in the relationship because of legal advice that, if she left, shared "custody" would be a likely outcome. To Vicky, staying in the relationship logically meant being able to keep the children safer under her watch than if the father had care of the children on his own. After separation, she was referred by a domestic violence service to a lawyer who supported her to negotiate the delicate balance involved in establishing that her need for safety was not a malicious attempt to remove the children from the father.

Vicky followed her lawyer's advice to agree to supervised contact at a contact centre so that could establish she was not a "withholding" mother, even though it caused substantial

fear because of an escalating pattern of violent behaviour by her ex-partner.

So it was horrible, a horrible experience and I kept saying to my lawyer I don't want to do it. But she kept trying to say well, I, you know, if I didn't do it, if I didn't take them—that it would lead me to be known as a withholding mother, it wouldn't be good for the Family Court eyes, you know.

Following this period of supervised contact, Vicky was concerned about indications of trauma in her children's behaviour contained in a report from the children's contact centre, which she only became aware of months later, when the report was tendered in evidence in the court proceedings. Furthermore, in order to support her case for no contact, Vicky was able to establish a pattern in the father's violent behaviour by obtaining evidence from his previous partners. This assisted her to rebut the court-appointed psychiatrist's view that "I was being overreactive and a mental case".

In considering the features of Vicky's circumstances that distinguish her situation from the situations of other participants with less favourable outcomes, and that contributed to attaining a family law court outcome that maintained safety and did not involve shared care, there are some significant elements that are consistent with a small number of other participants in a similar position.

First, she had access to quality legal representation. She was able to find this legal representation because of a referral from a domestic violence service. This meant that in strategic terms, the presentation of her case did not cast her in an unfavourable light. She had sound advice on how to behave so as not to appear to be a no-contact mum, including by agreeing to supervised contact at a contact centre despite the level of fear it inspired in her and her concerns about its impact on her children's wellbeing.

Second, she had the personal and financial resources to persist in her efforts to rebut the court expert's view that she was "being overreactive", by calling evidence from her ex-partner's former partners. This allowed her to establish a severe pattern of violence suggestive of a high level of risk, and to establish that this was a feature of her partner's previous relationships. To maintain the safety of the children during the proceedings, they were also named on a personal protection order. Third, intensive support of family and friends was integral to her being able to persist with her pursuit of safety. These elements were common to Belinda, the other participant in the sample who had a court outcome involving no contact.

In contrast to Vicky, Alexandra accepted an outcome reached in lawyer-led negotiation that maintained contact between her

ex-partner and the children but did not, in Alexandra's view, take adequate account of the family violence. She conceded to have the agreement enshrined in consent orders because she was advised that it was better than taking a chance on a court outcome. Financial pressures also contributed to her decision to accept the agreement:

I was told by everyone, including my lawyer, that it would be better than letting the court decide what was gonna happen. Because, um, the family violence was so minimised through the whole process and I wasn't happy with my lawyer, they couldn't understand domestic violence either...I couldn't keep fighting. I was too stressed and too exhausted and too financially, completely, financially burnt out to keep fighting...So I had to agree to things that I would never have agreed to. And I would've gone to court probably, so I would've lost my—the \$100,000, and I would've been homeless.

For other women in the sample, outcomes involving ongoing contact between fathers and children were not uncommon, as described in section 4.4.3. Participants described a range of points at which the emphasis on meaningful relationships was reinforced in their engagement with professionals despite severe histories of violence, as the following quotations demonstrate:

I just think it's really important to stress that the court didn't listen to the children. I think that was a really big issue. And something that needs to be—they have no voice. They—you know the things they disclosed were appalling, and the violence was really disregarded in favour of the children still having a relationship with the father, and that to me screams something very wrong about it. (Bianca)²⁴

But I could never get away and I could never get away because the court always ordered or indicated very strongly that [ex-partner]'s rights to [child] held more influence than my experience of family violence or—and the impact that had on me and on my relationship with [child]. So always, time and time again, the [ex-partner] has increased his access, his contact with [child] and that has been supported on every occasion by the court. (Nicole)

4.9.4.3 Tensions in maintaining safety in a private law process

A further characteristic of the family law system that contributed to the negative experiences reported by most women arises from its adversarial nature in a private law context. There are two main issues that arise from this.

²⁴ While independent children's lawyers are available through the courts to represent the best interests of children in proceedings, as in our previous research they are appointed in the minority of cases and not always available to families such as this one (see Kaspiew et al., 2014)

First, in a private law process based on adversarial principles involving evidence being adduced and tested, safety may not be maintained as the process unfolds. This is because, until the process is concluded and a judicial decision is made, concerns about safety and family violence issues are treated as untested claims. In some cases, procedural steps compromised the safety of the women and their children, including through addresses being made available to ex-partners on court documents, even though the women were essentially in hiding.

The second issue about the adversarial nature of private law was that many women experienced the process itself as traumatising. This flowed from the stress of facing an uncertain court outcome in the context of their own and their children's trauma, the necessity of repeating their stories, to have their evidence tested in court, to come face-to-face with the perpetrator during court processes, and, in some cases, to be cross-examined by the perpetrator where they were self-represented. In some cases, this occurred in the context of processes, including litigation, that were deliberately being used abusively (see section 4.9.5).

These two aspects of the legal process exacerbated the trauma experienced by the women, thereby compounding the women's experiences of a lack of expertise about, and focus on, the implications of family violence and the emphasis on maintaining relationships between fathers and children in the family law system. The following quotations illustrate the participants' experiences in relation to these two issues.

He'd been stalking you see, so I was terrified that, um, initiating that action would stir up trouble and that he would respond... And so I was worried that ah, y'know, I was told to email him the information and then we had this next date. Which was in about 6 weeks. And so I did all of that and then I sat on the edge of my seat being absolutely terrified for 6 weeks—that he was either gonna come and kill us or that he was going to, y'know, create a case against me. (Gabriella, who had self-represented to get orders ancillary to an exercise of parental responsibility)

The thing I really struggle with the family law process, is I'm here saying he's done this and he's done that and he's done this and he did this to me. He did this to our children. He's done this, and then he sits on the other side saying, well, no I didn't, no I didn't. (Maryanne)

The family court did not do anything to ask about domestic violence, to try and educate me about domestic violence or to try and—or to understand why I hated him so much. That was perceivable, anybody could see I was terrified of him, hated being at the court and hated being there. I asked for an escort up the lifts all the time, no one asked

me why. Nobody said, "Why do you need an escort?" Except the guy—the security guy. He cared. But he wasn't gonna tell a lawyer or a judge, was he? (Yvette)

4.9.4.4 Fragmented, disjointed services and agencies, and inexpert professionals

In the context of a lack of focus on, and expertise in, family violence, and the strong focus on shared parenting in the family law system, the experiences of Vicky and a limited number of other participants in the sample demonstrate that reasonable family law system outcomes could be achieved with good legal advice and financial and other resources. However, this was not the case for a majority of participants in the sample. Rather, the experiences of most women entailed fragmented engagement with multiple services, agencies, and professionals, as well as a lack of access to any one service or agency that was equipped to meet the needs of the participant and children arising from family violence in the context of separation.

Many of the women had limited financial resources, and reliance on publicly funded services, including legal and family dispute resolution services, was significantly unsatisfactory. These ranged from Family Relationship Centres to legal organisations and different court processes. For some, this also encompassed processes and agencies outside of the family law system, including child protection and criminal justice agencies. The experiences of many were marked by engagement with disjointed services and inexpert professionals, none of whom were able to offer coherent solutions to the problems the women were experiencing. The women whose experiences were characterised in this way commonly reported being passed from professional to professional and agency to agency. This type of experience was reported by some of the most vulnerable women in the sample, including those in the sub-group who had no or minimal contact with their children. A further consequence of engagement with multiple services and agencies were experiences in which women faced contradictory approaches between different agencies and services. The following case studies with Sadie and Lavinia illustrate these problems across multiple services and inexpert professionals.

Case studies: Sadie and Lavinia

Sadie's experience provides a means of exploring the implications of disjointed service delivery and engagement with inexpert professionals. Sadie is an Aboriginal woman. After separation she experienced periods of homelessness and consequently left two children with her ex-partner. Her ex-partner has re-partnered with a woman who is abusive to her own children and is also abusive to Sadie's. As a result of

the impact of violence, including trauma and homelessness after separation, and a lack of appreciation for her situation by her then employer, Sadie no longer has secure employment or financial stability. She has engaged with police, child protection, and the family law courts to attempt to secure her own safety and that of her children. Court orders mean her younger daughter lives with her father, even though she has expressed a wish to live with her because of violence (directed at her and others) and drug use in her father's household. Child protection is also involved, not only because of the violence and abuse of the children in the father's household, but because of the lack of care accorded to Sadie's younger daughter. This daughter has a need for high levels of care that are not being met in her father's household.

Although Sadie found the Aboriginal support team with the child protection agency helpful, her overall view of her engagement with child protection is negative and she believes they are unable to assist her to secure her daughter's safety.

You know, you can complain to [state child protection] all you want, do you know what I mean? They're jack shit. Sorry, I've lost faith in everything.

In the context of family law proceedings, neither her lawyer nor the engagement with court was of assistance in securing safety for her or her child. It also appears that one of the reasons that child protection was of limited assistance was because the family court proceedings were already underway. Compounding Sadie's negative experience was the involvement of inexpert publicly funded legal professionals. This meant that when the family law court hearing occurred, the evidence to support her case was not available to the court.

Because it's court-ordered. This court system, bunch of bumbling fools, I tell you. They do not care. 'Cause I didn't—what happened is my lawyer didn't do an affidavit. I didn't do it. So, that's, they didn't have the background information. So we got to court and it was a nightmare... It's—like, I was devastated. [Youngest child] was crying. She thought he was living with me. And then I said, "No, you gotta go back", and she said, "Mummy, I'll be all right".

Sadie's was not an isolated experience. Other women in the sample reported similar experiences, including Lavinia, whose children, one of whom is an infant, were not in her care after her ex-partner retained them after contact. Lavinia describes failures by legal professionals at critical points:

Yeah, there were lots of people involved who somehow, in one way or another kind of just damaged it all more. Um, yeah, unfortunately I had legal aid, so the first lawyer I went to see, he wasn't a legal aid lawyer, so he

recommended another lawyer but he wasn't very familiar with him unfortunately, he was a very poor lawyer. And didn't do much for my cause, and pretty much let the whole situation when I wanted an emergency recovery... when my youngest was not returned to me. He pretty much didn't act because he'd had another barrister in his stead do the mediation appointment with Legal Aid... The mediation officer just simply walked in and said, "He's not returning the baby". And I just sat there... what? I'm sorry what? And the barrister was, oh well, we need to do an emergency recovery order, yadda yadda yadda, and then nothing happened. And I was trying to contact this guy called [barrister] for his information and my lawyer saying, oh no I can't do anything 'cause [barrister] has it. And then eventually 6 weeks later, somehow we realised that [barrister] hadn't done anything and my lawyer hadn't done anything either, and so we submitted an affidavit to court and we got an appointment 6 weeks after that.

Lavinia's experience with inexpert professionals contributed to her not seeing her children for months and set a sequence of events in train that means her relationship with her children is deeply fractured. Other women described similar experiences:

Well, the legal aid process I found to be terrible. Terrible. Initially, I went first with a case of emotional neglect and these behaviours to a Legal Aid solicitor... I provided them with all this information, but then that solicitor never helped me any further. I was appointed a different firm. No choice in who I was dealing with. And I'm—the particular man who was assigned to me, I felt embarrassed. He had gone through his own divorce; he divulged information to me that was completely inappropriate. (Monica)

4.9.4.5 Contradictory approaches across agencies

It was not uncommon for the women in the sample to experience contradictory approaches between family law system agencies and other agencies they were involved with, such as those in the criminal justice system. Some also experienced contradictory approaches between different agencies within the family law system; for example, Family Relationship Centres and family law courts. Patricia's situation provides an example of these dynamics.

Patricia has two children under 11 years old. Under family court orders, they both live mainly with her and have unsupervised alternate weekend contact with their father. She describes a history of abusive behaviour, including threats to kill and harm her and the children, as well as high levels of coercive and controlling behaviour and financial abuse, before and after separation. Her engagement with services and agencies encompassed:

- the use of a domestic violence service for safety planning, with the separation being triggered by advice from a psychologist;
- brief contact with a family relationship centre, which challenged her ex-partner over his treatment of her and the children;
- use of police and state magistrates court for a personal protection order after separation with a cross-application by her ex-partner being unsuccessful; and
- a family court application being lodged by her ex-partner after being served with the personal protection order.

Patricia indicated that her ex-partner claimed she was abusive in the family court proceedings but then recanted. She described being told by the judge that unless she agreed to consent orders for alternate weekend contact, she faced the risk of losing “custody” of the children altogether. Her ex-partner has breached the personal protection order but police have not prosecuted him, and he has also breached conditions of the family court orders. Patricia indicated that while the state magistrate and the Family Relationship Centre professional each recognised her ex-partner’s behaviour as abusive and unacceptable, the Family Court professionals, including the judge, involved in her matter took a different view. For example, statements that Patricia clearly understood to be threats to her life were not accepted as such by the judge and the family report writer ignored her statements about the history of abuse, focusing instead on whether she was an “alienating parent”. Patricia has ongoing concerns for the safety of the children when they are with their father:

Every weekend that they are with their father...am I going to get a knock on the door from the police officer [because]...he’s finally killed the kids?

Patricia described a number of continuing negative effects on her parenting, her children’s behaviour, her relationship with her children, and their relationship with each other arising from past and ongoing exposure to abuse. She describes how controlling behaviour prior to separation means she continues to be hyper-vigilant about the quality of her own parenting and is fearful of criticism: “I second-guess myself all the time: what am I doing, could this look like I’m a bad parent”. One of her children has special needs, and the change in households and routine leads to challenging behaviour. More generally, the children continue to exhibit challenging behaviour, particularly after contact, including hitting each other, damaging property, and reacting against her. While Patricia found therapeutic assistance for herself very helpful, court orders prohibit the children from receiving such assistance.

Belinda’s experience not only illustrates the point made in the preceding section about family law processes causing trauma,

it also highlights the contradiction arising when a personal protection order is in place, but Family Court approaches require assessment of parent–child relationships:

Um, well, the single expert witness interviewed me and my parents and the girls separately, but then she insisted that, um, she interview him with the girls as well. I had a court order at that point that he couldn’t come anywhere near them, couldn’t contact them and couldn’t come anywhere near them, so I couldn’t believe that she was allowed to, um, disobey a court order and order them in the same room. (Belinda)

Karla and Maria’s experiences illustrate an even greater contradiction:

And the last time we went to Family Court, on the very same day they had somebody from [child protection department] saying that if I hand over [child to ex-partner] when I think she’s at risk, then she could be removed from me. And on the same day, the, um, the magistrate, it was a circuit court. And he said that if I withhold [child], then he could send me to jail. So it’s like, somehow it becomes this thing that I’m in the middle of—I have to make choices and take risks and it’s frightening because it’s not just me taking risks for myself, it’s with [child]. And—what do you do with that? I don’t know; think carefully, I think. (Karla)

So he can—he can do whatever he wants, um, and the manipulation and the controlling and so on that he has over me and [the children]. For me to stop that, um, and they, for example, get an intervention order, it’s irrelevant because we have a court order in place for care arrangements, so if he wants to contact me he can contact me any time whether I have an intervention order [indistinct]. And it just—you know, even though [the children] said what they wanted it was irrelevant and then a report was done and that was irrelevant. You know, it—I don’t understand why a family assessment report is done unless something is done. So if they—if they make a decision on what they feel is in the best interests of the children, then that should be put in place immediately. (Maria)

4.9.5 Use of systems to perpetuate abuse

More than half of the participants described protracted disputes involving engagement with multiple agencies and legal frameworks. For this group, their ex-partner misused various aspects of these intersecting systems to perpetuate the dynamics of control and abuse, to the extent that any potential avenue was leveraged. Extended engagement with family law system processes was particularly common among this group.

For this group, financial abuse was a particularly strong aspect of the family violence history, and property and financial issues were not uncommonly involved in the disputes. Eight women reported that attempts to instigate property settlements led to intensification of violence and disputes over children. The discussion in this section first identifies the tactics associated with the abuse of systems evident from the participants' accounts, followed by extended discussion of three cases to examine the personal and systemic dynamics evident in systems abuse experiences.

Systematic analysis of the interview data revealed a range of tactics that perpetrators operated in services and agencies to maintain the dynamics of fear, coercion, and control in the context of ongoing disputes about parenting arrangements. The effect was that children were used as levers in an ongoing campaign of abuse by perpetrators. Characteristics of the legal system, including its adversarial nature and the principles of procedural fairness and natural justice, supported the perpetuation of abusive dynamics in an environment where many professionals have insufficient expertise in family violence to recognise the misuse of their services, systems, and processes. The following tactics used by men in varying combinations and circumstances were evident in the interviews:

- exploitation of the intersection between the family law, domestic and family violence, and child protection systems to either use one system to “trump” the other or to use action or inaction in one system to undermine the mother’s case in the other system, usually the family law system;
- raising counter-allegations and applications in response to mothers’ efforts to obtain personal protection orders or protective parenting orders in the family courts for safety of themselves and children;
- manipulative engagement or non-engagement with family dispute resolution services, mediation, and contact centres to prolong family law processes and exhaust personal and financial resources of mothers;
- exhausting personal and financial resources (including legal aid) of mothers through prolonged litigation in multiple forums to either wear the mother into capitulation or force them into self-representation;
- upping the ante by applying for orders for equal, majority or all parenting time with the children, particularly in the context of property disputes;
- use of civil law processes (Family Court) to obtain advantage in their criminal law processes;
- of civil law processes (usually Family Court) to maintain persecution, including through cross-examination of mothers when fathers acted as self-represented litigants;

- non-compliance with court orders (Family Court and personal protection orders) and child support obligations; and
- use of personal and professional positions and networks to inhibit women being able to access frameworks and systems to attain safety, including police.

Case study: Aaliyah

Aaliyah was the mother of two grown children with whom she had no contact for years at the time of interview. She had separated from her ex-partner as a result of family violence. After separation, she became concerned about indications that her daughter was experiencing sexual abuse on contact visits with her father and both children were being physically abused. Her engagement with police and child protection in relation to these concerns did not result in any action. There was an investigation by child protection that she viewed as flawed, and criminal charges in relation to a physical assault of her daughter were dropped after the father convinced the daughter to change her story. On legal advice, she instigated family law proceedings to attempt to protect her children.

In response to the safety concerns Aaliyah raised, her ex-husband raised counter-allegations about sexual and physical abuse. After proceedings extending over 4 years, she was forced to represent herself in a 7-day trial after her legal aid cap was exhausted. Aaliyah considers she was not able to do a very good job with representing herself in these complex proceedings due to health problems at the time. The lawyer representing the children’s interests had taken a position consistent with Aaliyah’s and suggested she appeal the trial judge’s decision to order that the two children reside primarily with their father, but she did not have the personal or financial resources to do so. At the time of interview, she was undertaking a family violence recovery program to support her with ongoing mental health problems caused by the violence she experienced during her marriage and trauma about what happened to her children.

It is yeah. I can’t remember how many times we were in court, um, over that time. And the final court hearing was, um, regarding, um, the custody of the children, was in [dates omitted] and um he got custody of them. And it was basically because I had to represent myself in court for 7 days. And I was going through so much stress at the time, I didn’t know what was happening to me...bottom line, I didn’t cope very well in court...And because I didn’t represent myself very well, um, they gave him custody.

Case study: Karla

Karla’s daughter is under 10 years old. She has had no face-to-face contact with her father for just less than 3 years after

Karla realised she was being physically abused on contact visits. Karla separated from her violent ex-partner by going into a refuge when her daughter was an infant. The violence was severe and included rape of the mother. She continues to experience psychological effects and her daughter has been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. Her daughter remains fearful of her father and has been traumatised by court processes that forced her into contact with him and orders that now provide for regular telephone contact.

Litigation commenced shortly after separation, when Karla's ex-partner refused to return their infant daughter to her after a contact visit. The litigation has extended over 8 years in ways that are characteristic of her ex-partner's use of systems abuse. Karla has experienced the Family Court processes as an extension of the ex-partner's abuse, including being cross-examined by her ex-partner as a litigant in-person over days about sexual matters of no relevance to the proceedings. Despite her fear for her own safety and that of her child, court orders mean that she needs to provide her ex-partner with her address at all times.

Karla has had engagement with the child protection agencies on several occasions and, at times, her ex-partner's behaviour has stymied their capacity to investigate protective concerns. As examined earlier in this part of the report, the complications caused by simultaneous engagement with family and child protection agencies came to a head on the first day of one family court hearing, when child protection officials informed Karla that if she provided her child for contact with the father, then her child would be removed from Karla's care, and the family court judge also warned that Karla would be jailed if she refused to make the child available for contact.

Karla: I think they've put me in danger; they've allowed me to be abused in front of them, they've supported that. Um, you know, at one point when my ex was representing himself, that he questioned me directly for days on the stand.

Interviewer: He cross-examined you?

Karla: Yep in that particular time. And at one point, he started questioning me completely off topic and not related to anything, about [sexual practices] and nobody stopped him. I'm sort of looking at the judge and looking at my solicitor, looking at the barrister, and they all just looked the other way, [indistinct], I don't know, was asleep or something. Nobody stopped him.

Case study: Tania

Tania has three children, aged from 16 years and younger, with her ex-partner. She separated after severe violence, which

included rape, financial abuse, and physical violence. After separation, her ex-partner applied for 90 percent of their assets and "full custody" of the children. He was successful in obtaining Family Court orders for weekly contact with the children but then moved away from the area shortly after the orders were made and has since not been spending time with the children pursuant to the orders. The children of Tania's ex-partner's new partner have been removed from her care by child protection authorities because of his violence. However, despite advising her that they considered her ex-partner a risk to her children, the child protection agency did not support Tania in pursuing a Family Court outcome involving no contact.

Tania's ex-partner also faced criminal charges arising from the violence against her, for which he was convicted. The Family Court and criminal court processes were unfolding in parallel but the Family Court hearing came ahead of the criminal court hearing. Tania's statement for the criminal court hearing was obtained in the Family Court proceedings, allowing her ex-partner access to a key piece of evidence in the criminal proceedings against him well ahead of the trial. As a self-represented litigant, he also personally cross-examined Tania about her sexual assault allegations. Tania explained during the interview that her attempts to establish and maintain safety for her and the children were viewed negatively in the family law court, while her ex-partner was not proportionately scrutinised for his violence:

They [the Family Court] were so angry with me because I'd gotten an interim intervention order against him in that first 6 weeks that I separated from him, but he was in an—I had the police actually saying get an intervention order. Go down Monday. This guy is not stable. He's screaming at us over the phone. He's swearing. He's carrying on. Get an intervention order. Keep you and your kids safe and so I did that, and then I was highly ridiculed by the Family Court for doing that... They said that I was just trying to stop him from seeing his kids. This wasn't about that. I've never stopped him from seeing his children.

4.9.6 Service and system improvements

Participants were asked to offer any further thoughts about what would help women and children to recover from family violence. A range of issues were raised, with many women making suggestions for changes that would see the range of needs arising from family violence, especially after separation, dealt with in a system developed and configured to meet these needs. Issues that were raised included the need for expertise in family violence to inform laws and processes, an emphasis on protection and safety, and an acknowledgement

that recovery from violence may necessitate stopping contact between children and violent ex-partners. Several of the women also spoke of the importance of access to expert therapeutic support without being concerned about records being subpoenaed.

The thing that would've been helpful would've been an early assessment of, you know, the situation and some better intervention and there's been none. So, we've just been—you know, it's like we've been sitting ducks. (Dana)

Really, what would help would be to be allowed to get away. (To be) allowed to get away from him. You know, I'm—I work from home so, um, [child's] really not safe at home, and I'm conscious that he knows where I am. And that I'm required to tell him where we live; we can't just move so he can't find us. And so always, every day, even just as we're sitting here in the middle of the day working, I have my doors and security doors locked and it's really hot. (Karla)

The one that I think is just, you know glaringly obvious, is that a perpetrator should not be allowed to directly cross-examine his victim. That to me was incredibly traumatising and should not happen. So to me that's the easy one. But in terms of bigger stuff, I think that when somebody is an applicant and you've got an applicant and respondent there, and they're saying that violence has been present to a very high level that's criminal, then there needs to be some sort of communication and better alignment between the agencies and between the governments, and there needs to be pretty much, that there needs to be almost like a special team that intervenes at that point. Like I had all these different agencies coming, you know, like child protection, and I had all these—you know, all these specialist family counsellors and all this sort of stuff that we were court-ordered to do. I mean, surely this needs to be some of, um, you know, just a one-stop shop, and when there's violence present that they deal with it and then parenting plans are made from there in a protective way. (Tania)

I just feel that it'd be really nice that, um, maybe the government would understand too, that when you're in domestic violence and—it just takes a lot to stay away from the person, that every day's a struggle, and, like, you're always sort of expected to be a mum and find a job and function like a normal human being, but you've got all these things behind you. (Lara)

Children having a right to therapeutic support without the risk of their privacy being lost from subpoena of their records was also raised:

[The children] probably need, ah, they probably need still need someone to speak to, but I just, I can't take the risk that this won't be analysed to death...And people can take things, the wrong things; um, y'know, it'll have to be disclosed to the court, and they'll take, they could take what [the children] say the wrong way and, I want, I'd prefer whatever they say in those rooms to be confidential, between the two of them. My children should have a free forum in which to say, y'know, whatever they like about me or their father, um, without it ending up in a, in a court document somewhere. (Belinda)

A number of the women also spoke of the need for greater awareness of family violence and its consequences in society generally, as well as in more specific settings involved with parents and children, such as schools.

A coherent systemic response with services and agencies, rather than a response spread across inconsistent frameworks and approaches, was suggested as essential in the women's responses. For example, the need for a coordinated case management service to support post-separation parenting arrangements where there has been a history of DFV was raised as an idea for outside of Family Court processes. Dana identified this as a strategy to facilitate care of children, encourage accountability of perpetrators, create an independent record of parenting issues, and potentially reduce time pressure on courts:

Dana: I think that there will be—if there was case management. So, domestic violence case management where we had a case manager overseeing the whole situation that I could go to every single time that he refused to communicate, or even would—you know, my SMSs around the children or wouldn't tell me where they were or wouldn't tell me where he was—you know, what they were doing. If I could go to my case manager and say—I mean, for example, you know, as we speak, I don't know if my oldest boy has his work experience things returned, if his computer is being fixed up and returned to school, if he's had his vaccinations, if he's had his dental check-up. I don't know anything. If I could go to the case manager and say, "Look, I sent him seven SMSs to find out, you know"—because I'm concerned about the welfare of my boy. But, you know, it would mean that there would be someone who could go back to you and say, "Look, here are the seven SMSs. You know, they've been—she'd been sending them to you over the course of 3 months, you haven't responded to one single one. What's going on?"

Interviewer: And would that be in a particular service or court-based or something else?

Dana: I would think outside of the courts. Outside of the courts, but it would be a situation where if there were continual breaches—so, we have court orders. He doesn't comply to them, he's never complied to anything. Where will I go to now? You know? If I go to my lawyer, my lawyer will say, "Okay, we'll [indistinct] and we'll raise it when we go to court". Well, the court's 8 months away, you know? You can't pass things for 8 months; a lot happens now, you know? Eight months out of the child's life—4 years out of the child's life; it's unacceptable. Those sort of—if we had somewhere where I could say, "This is what's happening in the moment and let's address it and let's make a record of it" and, you know, when we go to court, if there are a lot of breaches, someone else apart from me that can raise them, a person who is outside and who is above it, you know? Who they—who's independent of me and him.

4.9.7 Summary and conclusions about service experiences and DFV

This section has examined participants' experiences in engaging with services and agencies in the context of a history of family violence and, for most women in the sample, separation from the father of their child or children. In keeping with the research questions, the impact of engagement with these agencies and services on parenting was a particular focus of discussion in the interviews.

The findings demonstrate that most women found engagement with family violence services and refuges in the immediate period of separation to be mostly helpful, particularly where specialised therapeutic support for restoration of parenting capacity was offered as part of the refuge service. Assistance with the practical aspects of separation, such as support to access financial assistance and negotiating legal processes, was also valuable. These women spoke positively of the counselling opportunities provided to them and their children and considered the time in refuge to be an opportunity to begin recovery from family violence.

Many women also spoke of the need to continue engagement with therapeutic services over the longer term, both for themselves and children. Counselling and other support were seen as necessary to address the continuing consequences of family violence, including anxiety, depression, fear, and post-traumatic stress. For many women in the sample, this support continued to be necessary longer into the post-separation period in the context of the negotiation and management of post-separation parenting arrangements. However, some women reported being unable to access services of a sufficiently expert or sustained nature for themselves and their children, despite concerted efforts to do so. Others

were inhibited from obtaining or maintaining engagement with therapeutic services through fathers vetoing this, court orders prohibiting it, fear of records being subpoenaed, financial constraints exacerbated by financial abuse, and economic limits on services.

Many of the women in the sample had engaged with child protection agencies. This engagement varied from brief contacts as a result of notifications being made and their own appeals for help, through to more substantive processes involving investigation and action being taken to remove children. From the women's accounts, restoration of parenting capacity and supporting their efforts to secure safety in the wake of family violence and child abuse allegations did not appear to be a focus of engagement from child protection agencies.

From the participants' perspectives, the majority of experiences with the family law system were negative. Where outcomes were satisfactory from the women's perspectives, maintaining the safety of children occurred only because they had the persistence, personal fortitude, and financial resources to pursue an outcome that was acceptable to them. More commonly, women reported being unable to secure satisfactory outcomes in the family law system. Several issues were identified as relevant in producing this situation, including a lack of focus on, and expertise in, family violence among family law professionals, an emphasis on shared parenting in the family law system, and a lack of access to services funded and configured in a way that meant women had sustained support in securing the safety of their children. Women reported significant stress and impeded recovery from violence, for themselves and their children, as resulting from their engagement with the family law system. For some, ex-partners used the family law system and other services to perpetuate abuse.

The data indicate there are several interrelated dimensions to the way that parenting capacity against a background of family violence may be affected by engagement with the family law system. The first concerns the potential for the system to fail to recognise and to re-awaken, compound, and exacerbate trauma as court and out-of-court proceedings necessitate engagement between the victim/survivor and the perpetrator. The second concerns the potential for those professionals in the system to fail to recognise family violence and fail to appreciate its effects on children and the parenting capacity of victims/survivors, meaning that in some cases parenting arrangements that did not accord safety resulted, and ongoing exposure to trauma and prevention of recovery was maintained. The third concerns the potential for the family law system and other services to be used as an instrument of abuse by ex-partners.

4.10 Conclusion: mothering, fathering, domestic and family violence, and services approaches

The qualitative study was based on 50 interviews with women from Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia, and Queensland. Their family circumstances and point in time within their life-course varied substantially and their children's ages ranged from infancy to adulthood. The DFV experiences described by women were severe in nature and the majority of the children in the sample were not only exposed to family violence, but had also experienced abuse directly. DFV experiences encompassing financial abuse and systems abuse were reported by more than half the women in the sample.

In relation to fathers, the women's descriptions indicated that a number of negative fathering behaviours were evident in addition to behaviour towards children that was directly abusive. These included inattentive and inconsistent fathering, manipulative behaviours that had the effect of undermining relationships between mothers and children (sometimes involving the use of material resources), the exertion of controlling tactics in relation to mothers and children, and the manifestation of behaviours and negative attitudes towards women in general and the mothers in particular. The child abuse was co-occurring with DFV and sometimes, but not always, part of the abuse of the child's mother. Forty-five of the 50 women identified one or more forms of child abuse by partners or former partners. Nineteen women discussed direct physical or sexual abuse of children, separate to incidents of domestic and family violence. Other women spoke of neglect, the emotional abuse of children, and the harm children experienced when seeing their mothers verbally abused or physically assaulted. Women who were interviewed also reported that issues with mental health, gambling, and drug and alcohol problems impaired the fathering of a significant minority of the men.

Mothers also reported that some of the men had very little understanding of child development in undertaking their role as fathers and in their relationships with children. Expectations of their children's behaviour were unrealistic for the child's age, and children would be punished for not adhering to the expected "rules" for the father's household. This reflected qualities of coercion and control in DFV. Some women reported that fathers had little experience of caring for children prior to demanding equal shared time or high levels of time with their children upon separation.

The analysis based on qualitative data establishes that the impacts on mothering and mother-child relationships during DFV are multiple and, in many cases, continue long after women leave relationships with perpetrators. Relationships between mothers and children, and meeting the demands

of caring for children, are affected by the negative impact of DFV on maternal health, with both mental and physical effects reported by many women in the sample. High levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress were commonly reported, and children were also reported to be experiencing these issues in many cases.

There was a group of children and their mothers whose quality of life appeared to be significantly worse following separation. The escalation of abuse and stalking, financial, and systems abuse, combined with considerable time spent with fathers who were abusive and controlling, provided an environment of fear and ongoing misery for children and their mothers. Managing the ongoing impact of trauma on their children created significant challenges for mothers who themselves were trying to recover from the domestic violence they had experienced.

Despite this, women spoke about close relationships that had developed in adversity, and they outlined their ongoing attempts to repair their relationships with children. For some women, practical and emotional support from family and friends helped with their relationships with their children, but others had no supports in the aftermath of DFV.

From a systemic perspective, the qualitative data suggest four main issues that impede access to effective responses for women and children recovering from family violence. The first concerns limitations in the availability or accessibility of services able to meet needs in this context. Several women indicated that it was difficult to find services of the kind that they needed. Examples included psychologists skilled in working with children who had experienced family violence, including male psychologists who could work with boys. Other women indicated that their ability to access such support was limited for funding reasons, either because they lacked the money needed to access help privately or because the funding available was too limited for the amount of help that was needed.

The second impediment to women seeking effective responses arises from limitations in the extent to which professionals with expertise in family violence and parenting are available in the system with which they are engaging. This point is particularly pertinent in relation to the justice and family law systems, with participants commonly reporting engaging with different kinds of professionals who had insufficient expertise to identify and assess family violence and its implications for parenting and children's behaviour and wellbeing. These professionals included police, lawyers, contact service staff, judges, and social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists who work in the child protection or family law systems.

The third impediment concerns the fragmentation of the services and agencies that parents engage with against a background of family violence and parenting, and the tendency for these services and agencies to operate in silos. This means that in a context of substantial and potentially ongoing trauma, mothers and children must engage with multiple services and agencies sequentially or simultaneously, thereby impairing their ability to recover from the trauma. Finally, the last two issues—the lack of consistent family violence expertise in some systems, notably justice and the family law systems, and the fragmentation in these systems—means that the systems themselves are open to exploitation by perpetrators of family violence.

Conclusions and implications for future research, services, and professional practice

Introduction

This domestic and family violence and parenting research program has examined three main issues about the impact of domestic and family violence (DFV) and inter-parental conflict (IPC) on parent–child relationships in Australia:

- parental conflict in families and impacts on the emotional health and parenting behaviours of mothers and fathers and child functioning;
- how DFV experienced before separation, after separation, or both affects parents' emotional health and parent–child relationships; and
- mothers' experiences of engagement with services in the domestic and family violence, child protection, and family law systems in the context of DFV.

This multi-method study of parenting in the context of conflict, violence, and abuse breaks new ground in building the knowledge in this area, as well as confirming and validating previous literature. The analysis of major Australian longitudinal datasets revealed population-level findings. These datasets were the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC), based on three to five waves of data collected from more than 3000 families, and the AIFS Family Pathways suite of studies, based on over 16,000 separated families (Longitudinal Survey of Separated Families [LSSF] and the Survey of Recently Separated Parents [SRSP] 2012). Together, these provide comprehensive data about the extent and the impact of persistent IPC and DFV on children and their relationships with their mothers and fathers. The interviews with 50 women who had experienced DFV extended the findings from the LSAC and AIFS Family Pathways studies. The interviews explored in-depth the ways in which women found DFV to have impacted on their mothering, the ongoing impact on children of DFV, and the tactics of abuse and violence used by fathers or partners both pre and post-separation.

To date, the implications that family violence has for parenting capacity of mothers and fathers have received little attention, and this gap was identified in the state of knowledge literature review (Hooker et al., 2016). The empirical aspects of this research program establish four of the significant issues about parenting where there is DFV or IPC: the impact that experiencing DFV or IPC has on a parent's capacity to provide effective parenting, the extent to which a perpetrator of DFV has the capacity to provide healthy parenting, the extent to which DFV or IPC affects mother–child and father–child relationships, and how policy and practice respond to the challenges in this area.

Frequency of inter-parental conflict and family violence in Australian families

This research program has established that inter-parental conflict (IPC) is common in intact and separated families in Australia. Domestic and family violence (DFV) in the form of physical hurt or emotional abuse was also found to be prevalent to a considerable extent before and after parents have separated. Where separation occurs, these problems continue to be relevant for a significant proportion of separated parents.

Analyses of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) indicated that one in three families were affected by IPC at some time across the early and middle childhood years. Overall, 8-9 percent of families experienced conflict that was persistent across five waves of data collection (i.e. present in the past and currently). Children had a much greater likelihood of experiencing IPC when their parents were separated than was the case for children whose parents were living together. Mothers of pre-adolescent children were four times more likely to have reported current IPC with the child's father if she was not living with him (40% compared to 10%).

Findings from the AIFS Family Pathways studies (Longitudinal Study of Separated Families [LSSF] and Survey of Recently Separated Parents [SRSP] 2012) highlighted the high rate of DFV for a substantial group of separated parents. Approximately one-quarter of mothers had been physically hurt before separation (LSSF [Wave 1] 24%; SRSP 26%), compared with one in six fathers (LSSF [Wave 1] 17%; SRSP 16%). High proportions of both mothers and fathers reported experiences of at least one form of emotional abuse, though this was evident for more mothers: LSSF [Wave 1] 64%, SRSP 68%; fathers: LSSF [Wave 1] 52%, SRSP 58%. Reports of physical hurt reduced after separation, although a gendered pattern was still visible in the data. However, with the diminution of physical hurt over time, the continuation of violence and abuse reported post-separation was largely in the category of emotional abuse alone. Mothers were more likely than fathers to report experiences of violence or abuse in each LSSF wave and each SRSP time frame (i.e. before or during, and since, separation). Conversely higher proportions of fathers than mothers indicated having no experiences of violence or abuse across the LSSF waves and in SRSP. Therefore, both before and after separation, significant proportions of Australian children and young people are cared for in families where IPC or DFV occurs, according to the LSAC, LSSF, and SRSP data.

The qualitative data based on interviews with women who had experienced DFV provide detailed insight into the dynamics and impact of DFV on parenting. All women in the sample had children who had lived with DFV. Much of the violence and abuse reported was severe physically, psychologically, and financially. Of the 50 women in the sample, more than half ($n = 27$) had one or more children with care arrangements that required the child to live with the perpetrator father on a shared care or full-time basis, or for the father to have substantial overnight care. For these women and their children, the effects of post-separation abuse were ongoing and children experienced little relief from the negativity of DFV in their living arrangements. This occurred even though most women had persisted in their efforts to protect children, repair mother-child relationships, and reach safer post-separation arrangements.

Consequences of inter-parental conflict and family violence for parents and children

For parents in this research, there is clear evidence that IPC and DFV are associated with significantly impaired parental wellbeing and relationship quality between parents and between parents and children, especially where there are sustained experiences of IPC or DFV. This was evident across all datasets (the LSAC and the AIFS Family Pathways studies) and all stages of the family life cycle experienced by women in the qualitative study.

In the LSAC analyses of IPC, families were examined at three time-points that represented developmentally distinct life stages for the focus child: the transition to primary school (age 4-5 years), middle primary school (age 8-9 years) and the adolescent transition (age 12-13 years). Across all three age groups, similar high proportions of mothers experiencing IPC reported dissatisfaction with the couple relationship, psychological distress, or parenting difficulties (low efficacy, high irritability, low consistency, or low warmth). Impaired wellbeing and relationship quality was more common when there was any past or current experience of IPC, and highest when IPC was persistent.

The AIFS Family Pathways data (LSSF and SRSP) indicated that experiences of DFV were significantly linked with poorer mother-child and father-child relationships in separated families. Reported experiences of violence or abuse were associated with lower levels of satisfaction in parental reports about their relationship with their child, and this pattern applied to both fathers and mothers. The data suggest that the negative association between parent-child relationships and experience of DFV may be partly mediated through the negative

effect of DFV on the quality of the inter-parental relationship, parents' safety concerns for themselves, or child and parental emotional health, which in turn had negative effects on the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, financial hardship was more common overall among parents who reported violence or abuse than parents who did not. A long-term association was evident between financial hardship and experiences of physical hurt reported occurring before separation.

Again, the qualitative data analysis from 50 women supports these population-level findings and provides detailed insight into the parenting capacities and behaviours of perpetrators and victims/survivors of DFV and the impact on children. A minority of women and children were freed from the ongoing impact of the extensive time children may spend with fathers who were abusive to women, children, or both ($n = 16$). The recovery of the mother-child relationship and the ability for children to respond to an abuse-free environment was a strong theme amongst these women. However, the majority of women were managing ongoing behavioural and emotional distress in their children, especially those who had ongoing contact with the perpetrator. A significant group of these mothers ($n = 20$) spoke of the ways in which their children were replicating the abusive attitudes and behaviours of their fathers. The problematic context for both mothering and fathering was often maintained by post-separation arrangements.

Children: adverse outcomes and a "dose" effect over time

For children and young people, IPC and DFV have adverse impacts on physical and emotional health as well as on their social and educational functioning. This is not surprising, as the combination of parent psychological distress and poor quality inter-parent and parent-child relationships is a well-established risk factor for a range of adverse child outcomes. Any experience of IPC or DFV was linked with poorer outcomes in these areas for children, and persistent IPC and DFV was associated with poorer outcomes still, compared to families with no experience of conflict or violence. These findings may be considered to be robust, as they were evident across the majority of outcomes assessed, measured at different ages, by mother-report, teacher-report, and direct child assessment. From the pre-school years onwards, there was no evidence that children were less susceptible to the adverse effects of IPC according to their age (infants were not included in the samples). Pre-school, primary school, and pre-adolescent children showed similar levels of impaired functioning. Likewise, the adverse effects were not restricted to the socio-emotional and cognitive outcomes that are recognised to be highly sensitive to the home environment. Children's physical

health was also poorer at all ages for children from families with IPC compared to no IPC reported.

There was a dose-response pattern in the LSAC data in families where IPC was reported. The proportions of children with poor outcomes increased in a step-wise fashion. The lowest rates of problems were found in children who had no experience of IPC. The rates increased for those with some experience (past or emerging pattern) of IPC and was highest for those with persistent experience. Moreover, these patterns remained after the analyses were adjusted for a range of other maternal and family characteristics that are known to have adverse effects on children's health and development.

Although separated parents in the AIFS Family Pathways data (LSSF/SRSP 2012) provided a generally positive picture of their child's wellbeing, the parental assessments of their child's wellbeing varied across sub-groups with DFV experiences. Parents who had reported experiences of violence or abuse had rated their child's wellbeing less positively than those parents without experiences of violence or abuse, regardless of the duration of separation. The analyses also showed that the reports of parents who experienced ongoing violence or abuse after separation were particularly negative about their child's wellbeing. The negative association between parental reports of child wellbeing and parental experience of DFV was conveyed through the negative effect of violence and abuse on the quality of inter-parental relationship, safety concerns, and emotional health, and, for mothers, significant financial hardships after separation.

A majority of interviewed mothers in the qualitative study reported that their children had experienced child abuse of some sort by their father or stepfather, either before or post-separation. This included: physical abuse (n = 17), sexual abuse (n = 5), neglect (n = 5), psychological or emotional abuse (n = 31), child as a direct victim of DFV with the mother (n = 13), and children witnessing violence against their mother or another family member (n = 31). It was unsurprising that their mothers continued to report extensive behavioural, emotional, and physical problems when children had ongoing care-time post-separation with fathers who had a history of child abuse or abuse of the child's mother. Women particularly mentioned how difficult the behaviour of many children was after a period of time with their fathers. These behaviours could include replicating the abusive behaviour of their fathers. These themes were consistent with the LSAC findings about the greater frequency of children's difficulties adjusting to care transitions after time with their father, where mothers reported inter-parental conflict. It was notable that there were also children whose mothers reported in the interviews of having been able to cease the child's contact with their father

due to the child's distress and ongoing abuse (n = 6), where children continued to struggle with trauma symptoms, and other emotional and behavioural problems.

IPC and DFV in families with separated parents

The LSAC analyses indicated poorer outcomes for mothers and children in separated families where IPC was occurring compared with separated families where there was no IPC. To maximise the sample available for analysis, the combined effects of parental separation and IPC were examined at one age only—the pre-adolescent years. For mothers, and for children to a lesser extent, either parental separation or IPC was associated with poorer outcomes than when neither of these were present, while the combination of being in a separated family where there is current IPC was associated with the poorest outcomes.

In separated families, structural care arrangements (the extent of shared care, how often the father sees the child) were not related to IPC. However, IPC was associated with mothers reporting children having greater difficulty settling after time with fathers (40% compared with 16%) and being more critical of the mother and other family members after spending time with fathers (32% compared with 12%). Unsurprisingly, this pattern also emerged in the qualitative data.

For fathers, LSAC data were examined when the study child was aged 12-13 years and compared according to family type and IPC. Due to missing data and non-participation in the study by men, there is an under-representation in these analyses of fathers from families experiencing conflict, which has likely resulted in an under-estimation of effects. Nonetheless, there is evidence that separation and IPC are each related to poorer outcomes for fathers. In intact and separated families, current IPC was associated with greater proportions of fathers reporting psychological distress and irritable parenting, and IPC was also associated with more fathers in intact families reporting inconsistent parenting.

Findings from the AIFS Family Pathways LSSF and SRSP datasets further establish associations between DFV and negative outcomes. These included increased financial hardship, higher levels of parenting stress, negative inter-parental relationships and poorer outcomes for children and young people in separated families where DFV was reported. Although most separated parents in general held positive views about care-time arrangements, the experience of DFV was linked with lower levels of perceived flexibility-workability about care-time arrangements. Part of this negative association was conveyed through the negative effect of DFV on the quality of inter-parental relationship and presence of safety

concerns, and parental emotional health, which in turn negatively affected parents' perceived flexibility-workability, parenting stress, and quality of the parent-child relationship. Experiences of DFV appeared to continue to be negatively associated with a lower level of perceived flexibility-workability of post-separation care-time arrangements, with this longer term link being mediated through the continuation of violence or abuse for some parents. Higher levels of parenting stress at 2 years after separation were associated with experiences of violence or abuse reported before or during separation.

Irrespective of care-time arrangements (shared care between parents or majority time with one parent), the salient influences are the presence of DFV and the extent to which it is sustained over time. However, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of measures for DFV, including the self-reported nature of the survey design, under-representation of families where severe DFV has occurred, and the absence of measures for intensity, power dynamics, and context of perpetration.

Qualitative findings about parenting in the context of family violence

Insights based on interviews with 50 women demonstrate that parenting in the context of DFV poses multiple challenges. The women interviewed had experienced multiple forms of DFV and, for most, DFV had continued after separation, including through the use of the financial, legal, administrative, and service systems to maintain this abuse. Almost all of the women in the sample indicated that their children had also experienced some form of child abuse.

A number of common themes emerged from the women's accounts of the impact of DFV on their parenting capacity and their descriptions of their ex-partner's (and in some cases current partner's) capacities as fathers. In relation to their own parenting capacity, the women's accounts highlighted direct and indirect consequences, including experiencing diminished physical, emotional, and psychological capacity to meet their children's complex needs as a consequence of the violence, and diminished confidence in their own abilities as mothers. Consistent with the findings from the AIFS Family Pathways analysis, financial abuse and the consequent financial hardship was a significant source of difficulty and distress for women, on an ongoing basis for many.

Parenting capacity and fathers

The women identified behaviour that was directly abusive to children, as well as behaviour reflecting a range of negative fathering qualities. Among the behaviours that undermined relationships between mothers and children was the use of material resources to win children over in contexts where mothers had few financial and material resources. In addition, the manifestation of negative attitudes to women in general and the mothers in particular was identified, including through explicit denigration, which some children adopted and repeated. The mothers also described inconsistent and inattentive fathering and the use of control and coercion in relationships across the family. In some situations, alcohol, drugs, gambling, and mental health also impaired fathering capacity.

Mothering capacity and impacts on children from DFV

The mothers' accounts highlighted a number of adverse consequences for children and their mother-child relationship, including children's high levels of stress and anxiety, behavioural problems, and difficulties with social and educational activities. Some women indicated these difficulties were sustained into adulthood and several reported fractured relationships with their children and adult children, which they attributed to the abuse.

In this context, the qualitative findings highlight challenges for mothering in the context of DFV that were identified from the quantitative data in multiple ways:

- the physical and emotional consequences of DFV for mothers' ability to function, including high levels of stress, anxiety, and financial hardship;
- the physical and emotional consequences for children of being abused or exposed to DFV, including traumatic stress and impaired social, emotional, and educational functioning;
- the challenges for mothers of simultaneously dealing with the consequences of DFV for themselves and their children—mothers may be experiencing stress, anxiety, and other difficulties, but children's needs are also heightened and their behaviour may be particularly complex;
- mothering challenges being particularly difficult when children begin to replicate the behaviour and attitudes of their abusive fathers;
- implications for mothers and children from the children having been exposed to negative parenting behaviours and, in many cases, ongoing abuse from fathers; and
- the implications for mothers and children of continuing to be exposed to DFV and abusive behaviour after separation, both in processes for making parenting arrangements and when living with those parenting arrangements.

Women who were interviewed also spoke of the ways in which protection of their children and the need to compensate for continuing to live with DFV (even post-separation) interfered with “normal” parenting. Rebuilding and repairing of relationships occurred when both women and children were not managing ongoing post-separation abuse and had access to appropriate support to the extent that they needed it.

In summary, against the background of DFV, the qualitative data establish that women caring for children in the context of past and continuing DFV are doing so in extremely challenging circumstances.

Policy and practice directions and areas for further research

The findings of this research have significant implications for policy and practice at a range of levels. From a population perspective, the high prevalence of IPC and DFV, the persistence of these issues in the population, and their negative effects on parent and child wellbeing all highlight the need for community-level approaches that prevent the occurrence of IPC and DFV and reduce children’s exposure to IPC and DFV. The data presented here suggest that there is no “safe” level of exposure for children, irrespective of whether parents have separated or not. Adverse effects were clear for children and parents even when the exposure examined was inter-parental conflict as opposed to violence, and when it occurred intermittently compared with persistently.

At a more specific family level, the findings suggest that parent psychological distress and impaired relationships play a role in shaping how children are affected by IPC and DFV. Parents who are emotionally available, sensitive, and responsive to their child’s needs, and are consistent and warm in their daily interactions, provide children with a secure, predictable environment and act as an important buffer against adversity. The data presented here identify these as areas of parental functioning that are impaired in the context of IPC and DFV, placing the health and wellbeing of the next generation at risk. Impaired developmental opportunities in early life can have profound and long-lasting effects. Therapeutic treatment for mothers and children is consequently critical for their recovery in this context.

It has therefore been concerning to note that there is a group of women and their children for whom separation from a violent and abusive partner may bring no relief from the abuse, and potentially opens up new ways for being abused. For at least two-thirds of the women in the qualitative sample, abuse continued in some form or escalated post-separation towards both women and children at significant levels, including

through systems abuse. Children were reported to have also suffered abuse prior to more protective post-arrangements being put in place in some cases.

The practice implication is that the abuse for women and children prior to separation needs to be taken into account when children’s post-separation living arrangements are made in child protection and family law services. The recognition that men who use violence against their partners also are likely to have limited capacity to care for children in a consistent and non-abusive way has been slow to be acknowledged. The continued effects of persistent inter-parental conflict and DFV are shown in the longitudinal studies reported here and indicate that much greater attention is required to ensure the emotional and physical safety of children when separation occurs in these circumstances.

In combination, the findings of all parts of this research project indicate that environments involving IPC or DFV create risks for children and young people at multiple levels. First, an elevated risk of direct child abuse occurs in such environments. Second, children and young people are exposed to several further factors that individually or in combination may compromise social, emotional, and educational outcomes in these environments. These factors can include exposure to psychological distress and compromised parenting from a parent who has experienced DFV, and exposure to compromised, manipulative, or abusive parenting from a parent who has perpetrated DFV.

From a children’s rights perspective, all children should be provided with an environment that allows them to achieve their optimal potential in terms of physical health and socio-emotional and cognitive development. Organisations that provide services to families who are experiencing conflict and violence need to recognise and respond to the imperative of protecting children. In addition to stopping the violence, these services have an important role to play in supporting the mental health of parents and their recovery in parenting capacity, as well as supporting restoration in parent–child relationships.

Some aspects of this research (the state of knowledge report and some of the programs described in the qualitative interviews) point to the emergence of promising therapeutic practices and programs in the context of DFV and parenting. However, at this stage, the extent to which evidence-based programs are available to parents and children affected by DFV is unclear, as is the suitability of generalist programs for addressing DFV. The findings of this report would suggest that such programs merit further specialised development and expansion, especially in continuity of service provision for mothers and children.

Continuity of service provision would also enable long-term evaluation. Moreover, the importance of policies and programs that are aimed at reducing the occurrence of IPC and DFV generally in the Australian community are reinforced by these findings. Such programs were not a focus of this study but it is clear that the characteristics of effective approaches in this area and the extent that programs applying them are available warrant further empirical examination.

The experiences of the women interviewed for the qualitative component of the study indicate significant limitations in the extent to which approaches in the DFV sector, in child protection agencies, and in the family law sector are configured in a coordinated way to address parenting capacity and the needs of parents and children against a background of family violence. Across these areas, the extent to which strengthening parenting and repairing mother–child relationships are a focus is inconsistent. Restoration of parenting capacity is a focus in some refuges where specialised, professional, therapeutic treatment for mothers and children is provided, but a broader understanding of the extent to which such programs are available to women and children in intact families and in the aftermath of separation would be desirable.

Furthermore, it is clear that therapeutic approaches that address women and children's needs in this context are valuable, but there are limitations in the extent to which they are accessible due to financial constraints of services, women's financial hardship, and legal barriers set by fathers and court orders. A more comprehensive assessment of the nature, availability, and accessibility of counselling and psychological support would be justified. This includes attention to the needs of men as fathers who have used violence and abuse (Stewart & Scott 2014; Scott et al., 2007). Recognition of the need for recovery from trauma should be a substantial focus for services that work with women and children affected by DFV. Additional recognition is required to understand that children may continue to be exposed to abusive and unhealthy fathering behaviours through post-separation parenting arrangements, and this should inform the practice of services, agencies, and professionals working with parents and children after separation.

In the child protection and family law systems, there was little indication from the qualitative study that supporting parenting capacity was a focus. In this regard, and in the more fundamental area of securing safe outcomes in parenting arrangements for children, the findings indicate that women still experience disjointed, inexperienced, and ineffective service delivery in child protection and family law systems. In the context of very recent (Australia. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016; Australia. Department of Social

Services, 2016; FLC 2015, 2016) and less recent (ALRC, 2010; FLC, 2010; Chisholm, 2010) reviews of the implications from fragmented service delivery for women and children affected by family violence, this report points to continuing urgency in the development of integrated approaches to meeting these needs. In the child protection arena, this would mean a wider focus on the implications of family violence rather than whether the violent relationship had ended or not, which would necessitate the application of therapeutic approaches oriented toward supporting recovery in mother–child relationships. In the family law system, the focus on shared parenting would need to give way to a more individualised and nuanced assessment, informed by substantial professional expertise in DFV, of the child's needs and the capacity of each parent to safely meet those needs where there is a past or ongoing history of DFV.

Systems abuse is a further issue that raises significant policy and practice concerns. These findings add to the established body of evidence (see the discussion by Kaspiew et al., 2015b, at 7.3.3) that indicates perpetrators of violence can use various legal and administrative systems to perpetuate the dynamics of abuse and control even when separation has occurred. It is clear that the fragmented system of service delivery to women and children affected by violence is open to exploitation and that other aspects of the system are similarly open to abuse by perpetrators of family violence, including private law, mediation, family dispute resolution, and adversarial processes for making parenting arrangements. In this context, a significant finding in this research program is the association between financial hardship, poor wellbeing outcomes, and family violence in the population of separated parents. The qualitative findings give further evidence of an association between particularly severe patterns of family violence, financial abuse, and systems abuse. These findings suggest a need for a more comprehensive assessment and analysis of systems abuse as a form of family violence and what can be done to prevent it. Until such a piece of work is concluded, professionals and agencies working with separated parents against a background of DFV need to be alert to the possibility that the services, systems, and processes in their area of concern may be being misused by perpetrators of DFV.

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Appendices: List of tables

Table A1 Comparative summary of LSAC, LSSF and SRSP study designs, participants and measures available.....	198
Table B1 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers reporting low relationship satisfaction by IPC categories	199
Table B2 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers reporting psychological distress by IPC categories	199
Table B3 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers reporting poor parenting by IPC categories.....	200
Table B4 Percentage (95% CI) of children with poor outcomes by IPC categories.....	201
Table B5 Adjusted results: percentage (95% CI) of children with poor outcomes by IPC categories.....	202
Table B6 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers and children experiencing poor functioning by family structure and current reported IPC.....	203
Table B7 Percentage (95% CI) of fathers experiencing poor functioning by family structure and current reported IPC.....	204
Table C1 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with the study child, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W2-W3.....	205
Table C2 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with the study child that fathers reported in LSSF W3.....	206
Table C3 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with the study child that mothers reported in LSSF W3.....	207
Table C4 Coefficients of OLS regression of parenting stress, fathers and mothers, LSSF W1-W2.....	208
Table C5 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1-W3.....	209
Table C6 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements that fathers reported in LSSF W3	209
Table C7 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements that mothers reported in LSSF W3	211
Table C8 Coefficients of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1-W3	212
Table C9 Coefficients of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1-W3.....	213
Table C10 Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome), fathers and mothers, LSSF W2-W3.....	214
Table C11 Coefficients of OLS regression of BITSEA scale (higher score = worse outcome), fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1.....	215
Table C12 Coefficients of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, reported by fathers in LSSF W3.....	216
Table C13 Coefficients of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, reported by mothers in LSSF W3.....	217
Table C14 Coefficients of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas that fathers reported in LSSF W3	218
Table C15 Coefficients of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas that mothers reported in LSSF W3	219
Table C16 Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome) that fathers reported in LSSF W3.....	220
Table C17 Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome) that mothers reported in LSSF W3.....	221

Appendix A: Comparison of LSAC, LSSF, and SRSPs

The three LSAC, LSSF, and SRSP datasets provide very large sample sizes and each allows for complex analyses, particularly analyses of important population subgroups that are not afforded by smaller studies. In combination, these datasets provide a picture of DFV across the general population and the impact of IPC and DFV on parent–child relationships and child wellbeing. Together the datasets also offer the ability to explore the nature of DFV and its impacts after parental

separation. The replication and extension of the findings from one study to the other studies strengthens confidence in the validity of findings.

Table A1 provides a comparison of LSAC, LSSF, and SRSP to illustrate the commonalities and differences between the data sets. This helps to understand the basis of the contribution made by each data set in this project.

Table A1 Comparative summary of LSAC, LSSF, and SRSP study designs, participants and measures available

Study design	LSAC B cohort	LSAC K cohort	LSSF	SRSP
Primary focus	child	child	Separated mothers and fathers	Separated mothers and fathers
Approximate sample size (at commencement)	5,000	5,000	10,000 (+ 3,000 recruited at Wave 3)	6,000
Nature of the sample	Population representative	Population representative	Separated parents registered for child support	Separated parents registered for child support
Geographic distribution	National	National	National	National
Year commenced	2004	2004	2006	2012
Repeated measures	Every 2 years; 5 waves available	Every 2 years; 5 waves available	1-3 years; 3 waves available	One wave only
Most recent data	2012	2012	2009	2012
Respondents	Mothers, fathers, child	Mothers, fathers, child	Mothers, fathers	Mothers, fathers
Child age	0-1 to 8-9 years	4-5 to 12-13 years	Varies	Varies
Time since separation	Sub-sample varies	Sub-sample varies	Wave 1: 15 months; Wave 3: 5 years	12 months
Depth/quality of measures				
Family violence	Brief	Brief	Detailed	Detailed
Inter-parental relationship	Detailed	Detailed	Detailed	Detailed
Parent wellbeing	Moderate	Moderate	Brief	Brief
Parenting	Detailed	Detailed	Moderate	Moderate
Post-separation parenting	Detailed (for relevant sub-sample)	Detailed (for relevant sub-sample)	Detailed	Detailed
Child wellbeing	Detailed	Detailed	Brief	Brief
Use of family/relationship services	Brief	Brief	Detailed	Detailed
Socio-demographic and economic circumstances	Detailed	Detailed	Detailed	Detailed

Appendix B: Tables from Part 2 (Effects of inter-parental conflict on parenting, mother–child relationships, father–child relationships, and children’s outcomes)

Table B1 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers reporting low relationship satisfaction by IPC categories

Age of LSAC Study Child	Low satisfaction with the couple relationship		
	IPC never	Past or emerging IPC	Persistent IPC
4-5 years B cohort ^a	7.9 (6.7, 9.0)	25.4 (21.3, 29.5)	58.6 (50.9, 66.3)
8-9 years B cohort ^b	8.1 (6.8, 9.4)	18.3 (15.4, 21.1)	50.3 (43.4, 57.2)
12-13 years K cohort ^b	8.1 (6.8, 9.3)	18.9 (15.7, 22.1)	54.2 (47.2, 61.1)

Notes: a. Based on three waves of data; b. Based on five waves of data; c. Low satisfaction defined as a score below the 15th percentile for the full sample.

Table B2 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers reporting psychological distress by IPC categories

Age of LSAC study child	Maternal psychological distress	Inter-parental conflict		
		Never	Past or emerging	Persistent
4-5 years B cohort ^a	Clinical range	1.5 (1.1, 2.0)	4.3 (2.6, 5.9)	7.5 (3.4, 11.7)
	Broadband range	7.0 (5.9, 8.1)	14.5 (11.0, 18.0)	24.4 (17.0, 31.8)
8-9 years B cohort ^b	Clinical range	1.5 (1.0, 2.0)	3.1 (1.9, 4.4)	9.9 (6.3, 13.5)
	Broadband range	6.2 (5.1, 7.4)	12.2 (9.7, 14.7)	25.5 (19.9, 31.1)
12-13 years K cohort ^b	Clinical range	2.0 (1.4, 2.6)	4.0 (2.5, 5.5)	9.8 (5.9, 13.6)
	Broadband range	6.6 (5.3, 8.0)	13.1 (10.4, 15.7)	33.3 (26.6, 40.0)

Notes: a. Based on three waves of data; b. Based on five waves of data.

Table B3 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers reporting poor parenting by IPC categories

Age of LSAC study child	Maternal parenting	Inter-parental conflict		
		Never	Past or emerging	Persistent
4-5 years B cohort ^a	Low efficacy	12.7 (11.1, 14.2)	20.8 (16.9, 24.8)	26.6 (18.8, 34.4)
	High irritability	11.1 (9.7, 12.5)	17.2 (13.8, 20.6)	23.9 (16.7, 31.1)
	Low consistency	13.3 (11.8, 14.8)	20.9 (17.4, 24.5)	31.5 (23.7, 39.3)
	Low warmth	11.1 (9.7, 12.5)	13.0 (9.8, 16.3)	15.8 (10.4, 21.2)
8-9 years B cohort ^b	Low efficacy	11.7 (10.2, 13.1)	18.3 (15.4, 21.1)	26.2 (20.4, 32.1)
	High irritability	11.9 (10.6, 13.3)	16.0 (13.2, 18.9)	26.2 (19.9, 32.6)
	Low consistency	12.3 (10.7, 13.9)	19.6 (16.5, 22.6)	32.5 (25.9, 39.0)
	Low warmth	14.7 (13.2, 16.2)	16.5 (13.8, 19.2)	19.6 (14.2, 24.9)
12-13 years K cohort ^b	Low efficacy	9.0 (7.6, 10.4)	13.9 (11.1, 16.7)	25.3 (19.7, 30.8)
	High irritability	11.7 (10.3, 13.2)	19.2 (16.2, 22.1)	26.7 (20.7, 32.7)
	Low consistency	12.8 (11.2, 14.3)	22.7 (19.6, 25.9)	35.2 (28.4, 42.0)
	Low warmth	13.0 (11.5, 14.6)	15.8 (12.8, 18.9)	17.6 (12.0, 23.3)

Notes: a. Based on three waves of data; b. Based on five waves of data.

Table B4 Percentage (95% CI) of children with poor outcomes by IPC categories

Age of LSAC study child	Child outcomes	Reported inter-parental conflict			
		Never	Past re-emerging	Persistent	
4-5 years B cohort ^a	Global health	11.2 (9.8, 12.7)	15.2 (11.9, 18.6)	19.7 (12.8, 26.6)	
	Physical health	11.9 (10.5, 13.3)	17.7 (14.3, 21.0)	22.9 (15.9, 29.8)	
	Socio-emotional	13.6 (11.9, 15.3)	18.4 (15.0, 21.8)	23.0 (15.9, 30.0)	
	School readiness	14.1 (12.6, 15.7)	21.3 (17.4, 25.2)	22.8 (15.7, 29.9)	
	Vocabulary	12.6 (11.0, 14.2)	20.4 (16.4, 24.5)	24.4 (17.4, 31.3)	
8-9 years B cohort ^b	Global health	12.7 (11.1, 14.3)	15.8 (12.8, 18.9)	19.7 (14.2, 25.1)	
	Physical health	12.1 (10.5, 13.7)	18.9 (15.7, 22.0)	22.6 (16.8, 28.4)	
	Socio-emotional	12.2 (10.6, 13.8)	15.2 (12.5, 17.8)	18.4 (12.9, 23.8)	
	Matrix reasoning	11.5 (10.0, 13.0)	15.0 (12.1, 17.8)	15.5 (10.6, 20.4)	
	Vocabulary	12.9 (11.1, 14.7)	18.1 (14.8, 21.5)	22.9 (17.2, 28.7)	
	Approaches to learning	13.0 (11.4, 14.5)	17.7 (14.9, 20.5)	17.4 (12.4, 22.5)	
	Literacy	13.3 (11.5, 15.1)	19.0 (15.9, 22.1)	22.3 (16.6, 28.0)	
	Maths	13.4 (11.7, 15.1)	17.6 (14.7, 20.6)	21.0 (15.4, 26.6)	
	12-13 years K cohort ^b	Global health	13.8 (12.1, 15.5)	20.7 (17.6, 23.8)	24.4 (18.4, 30.5)
		Physical health	11.9 (10.1, 13.7)	18.9 (15.6, 22.3)	31.5 (25.0, 38.1)
Socio-emotional		13.1 (11.3, 14.8)	18.7 (15.4, 22.0)	21.1 (14.7, 27.4)	
Approaches to learning		12.7 (11.1, 14.4)	17.9 (14.7, 21.2)	20.3 (14.3, 26.2)	
Literacy		12.5 (10.8, 14.2)	17.6 (14.4, 20.9)	25.4 (19.0, 31.8)	

Notes: a. Based on three waves of data; b. Based on five waves of data. c. Measures listed in Table 2.1.

Table B5 Adjusted results: percentage (95% CI) of children with poor outcomes by IPC categories

Age of LSAC study child	Child outcomes	Inter-parental conflict			
		Never	Past re-emerging	Persistent	
4-5 years B cohort ^a	Global health	11.6 (10.1, 13.0)	14.2 (11.1, 17.3)	17.4 (11.1, 23.7)	
	Physical health	11.9 (10.5, 13.4)	17.4 (14.1, 20.6)	22.4 (15.6, 29.1)	
	Socio-emotional	13.8 (12.1, 15.5)	17.8 (14.6, 21.1)	21.8 (14.9, 28.7)	
	School readiness	14.6 (13.1, 16.1)	20.0 (16.4, 23.5)	20.1 (13.8, 26.3)	
	Vocabulary	13.7 (12.3, 15.1)	17.1 (13.9, 20.2)	18.2 (13.0, 23.3)	
8-9 years B cohort ^b	Global health	13.4 (11.8, 15.0)	14.8 (12.0, 17.5)	17.0 (12.2, 21.8)	
	Physical health	12.9 (11.2, 14.5)	17.5 (14.6, 20.3)	19.5 (14.6, 24.5)	
	Socio-emotional	12.7 (11.0, 14.3)	14.4 (11.9, 16.9)	16.6 (11.7, 21.5)	
	Matrix reasoning	12.1 (10.5, 13.6)	14.0 (11.4, 16.6)	13.7 (9.3, 18.1)	
	Vocabulary	14.4 (12.6, 16.1)	16.0 (13.2, 18.7)	17.6 (12.9, 22.3)	
	Approaches to learning	13.4 (11.8, 15.0)	17.0 (14.4, 19.6)	15.9 (11.3, 20.6)	
	Literacy	14.1 (12.3, 15.9)	17.6 (14.9, 20.4)	19.3 (14.4, 24.2)	
	Maths	14.2 (12.5, 15.9)	16.4 (13.7, 19.0)	18.4 (13.5, 23.3)	
	12-13 years K cohort ^b	Global health	14.6 (12.8, 16.4)	19.6 (16.7, 22.5)	20.7 (15.4, 25.9)
		Physical health	12.5 (10.7, 14.4)	18.0 (14.9, 21.2)	27.5 (21.6, 33.4)
Socio-emotional		13.3 (11.6, 15.1)	18.5 (15.3, 21.6)	19.5 (13.7, 25.3)	
Approaches to learning		13.0 (11.3, 14.7)	17.7 (14.6, 20.8)	18.7 (13.3, 24.2)	
Literacy		13.0 (11.3, 14.7)	17.1 (14.0, 20.2)	22.5 (17.0, 28.0)	

Notes: a. Based on three waves of data; b. Based on five waves of data.

Table B6 Percentage (95% CI) of mothers and children experiencing poor functioning by family structure and current reported IPC

Outcome measure	Intact families		Separated families	
	No IPC (n = 2469) ^a	IPC (n = 265) ^b	No IPC (n = 370) ^c	IPC (n = 248) ^d
Maternal outcomes				
Psychological distress (clinical)	3.4 (2.6, 4.4)	9.0 (5.6, 14.3)	7.0 (4.5, 10.7)	13.3 (9.4, 18.4)
Psychological distress (broadband)	8.2 (7.0, 9.5)	24.5 (19.0, 31.0)	13.4 (9.9, 17.9)	22.3 (17.3, 28.2)
Low efficacy	9.7 (8.4, 11.0)	15.9 (11.6, 21.6)	14.5 (11.0, 19.0)	21.1 (16.1, 27.0)
Irritability	14.1 (12.5, 15.8)	20.2 (15.5, 25.9)	15.4 (11.8, 20.0)	22.2 (17.0, 28.5)
Low consistency	15.6 (13.9, 17.4)	29.2 (23.2, 36.1)	21.4 (17.4, 26.0)	31.2 (24.8, 38.4)
Low warmth	12.8 (11.4, 14.4)	13.3 (9.0, 19.3)	13.5 (10.2, 17.5)	17.7 (13.1, 23.5)
Child outcomes				
Poor global health	15.5 (13.8, 17.3)	20.2 (15.1, 26.4)	14.0 (10.6, 18.3)	20.2 (15.2, 26.3)
Poor physical health	12.7 (11.2, 14.3)	22.8 (17.3, 29.4)	16.6 (12.8, 21.2)	23.5 (18.0, 29.9)
Socio-emotional problems	12.7 (11.2, 14.4)	13.8 (9.5, 19.7)	22.5 (18.0, 27.8)	27.5 (21.1, 34.9)
Poor approaches to learning	11.1 (9.5, 12.9)	13.9 (9.5, 19.8)	18.1 (14.1, 23.0)	21.1 (15.2, 28.5)
Poor literacy	12.4 (10.8, 14.2)	19.7 (14.1, 26.7)	24.0 (18.9, 30.0)	19.5 (13.4, 27.4)

Notes: : a. n ranged between 2,036 and 2,469; b. n ranged between 209 and 265; c. n ranged between 307 and 370; d. n ranged between 189 and 248. E. Measures listed in Table 2.1.

Table B7 Percentage (95% CI) of fathers experiencing poor functioning by family structure and current reported IPC

Paternal outcomes	Intact families		Separated families	
	No IPC (n=1834) ^a	IPC (n=190) ^b	No IPC (n=250) ^c	IPC (n=147) ^d
Psychological distress (clinical)	1.9 (1.3, 2.6)	5.0 (2.4, 10.4)	4.9 (2.8, 8.5)	7.3 (3.5, 14.6)
Psychological distress (broadband)	5.9 (4.8, 7.2)	14.2 (9.5, 20.7)	8.2 (5.4, 12.3)	15.0 (9.4, 23.0)
Irritability	13.6 (12.1, 15.3)	24.2 (18.4, 31.3)	5.1 (2.8, 9.2)	12.2 (7.1, 20.1)
Low consistency	17.7 (15.8, 19.7)	32.5 (25.3, 40.7)	29.4 (23.6, 35.9)	29.2 (21.5, 38.2)
Low warmth	14.5 (12.6, 16.6)	19.7 (14.1, 26.9)	4.7 (2.4, 8.9)	6.1 (3.1, 11.7)

Appendix C: Tables of multivariate analysis results from AIFS Family Pathways studies

Table C1 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with the study child, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSP W2-W3

	Fathers						Mothers					
	SRSP		LSSF W2		LSSF W3		SRSP		LSSF W2		LSSF W3	
Experienced abuse/violence a	-0.214	*	-0.047		-0.112		-0.143	*	0.067		0.004	
Study child's age	-0.054	***	-0.043	***	-0.046	***	-0.047	***	-0.061	***	-0.065	***
Study child's age-square	-0.002		-0.003		-0.001		0.003	*	0.006	**	0.002	
Study child gender: girl	0.133		0.042		0.104		-0.046		0.069		0.049	
Currently re-partnered	0.073		0.189	***	0.233	***	-0.052		0.021		0.051	
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months	-0.057	**	0.019		0.006		-0.044	***	0.006		-0.014	
Inter-parental relationship	0.336	***	0.234	***	0.319	***	0.140	***	0.052		0.073	**
Had safety concerns	-0.373	**	-0.032		-0.398	***	0.099		-0.077		-0.092	
Ratings of emotional health			0.312	***	0.304	***			0.229	***	0.279	***
Care time (ref. = share time: 35–65% of nights with each parent)												
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	-6.465	***	-6.163	***	-5.950		0.602	***	0.214		0.220	**
Mother 100% of nights & father daytime only	-2.202	***	-1.591	***	-2.170	***	0.478	***	0.110		0.169	*
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.994	***	-0.654	***	-0.676	***	0.282	***	0.080		0.082	
Father 66-99% of nights	0.455	*	0.203		0.058		-0.909	***	-0.815	***	-1.171	***
Father 100% of nights	0.740	***	0.109		0.265		-3.937	***	-3.147	***	-4.020	***
Education (ref. = degree or higher)												
Other post-school qualification	0.121		0.202	*	0.166	*	-0.022		0.257	**	0.006	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.262	*	0.298	**	0.332	***	0.088		0.361	***	0.129	*
Employed	-0.028		-0.253	*	-0.214	*	-0.008		0.095		0.041	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)												
Indigenous	-0.265		0.256		-0.058		0.307	*	0.268		-0.324	*
Overseas born	-0.109		0.243	**	0.165	*	0.124		0.114		0.111	
Constant	7.404	***	6.463	***	6.143	***	8.389		7.314	***	7.504	
Adjusted r ²	0.390		0.447		0.472		0.257		0.185		0.259	
No. of respondents	2617		2226		3965		3032		2183		3773	

Notes: a. Violence/abuse refers to the experience in the last 12 months prior to the interview in LSSF W2 and W3, and the experience since separation for SRSP. The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C2 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with the study child, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSP W2-W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	-0.052	***	-0.056	***	-0.054	***	-0.054	***	-0.047	***
Study child age-square	0.002		0.002		0.001		0.001		0.000	
Study child gender: girl	0.147		0.155		0.137		0.137		0.132	
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	0.151		0.120		0.122		0.129		0.085	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.290	*	0.224		0.202		0.210		0.177	
Employed (W3)	-0.228		-0.260	*	-0.297	*	-0.319	**	-0.384	**
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							-0.029		0.014	
Re-partnered	0.219	***	0.196	***	0.157	***	0.163	***	0.205	***
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	-0.088		-0.081		-0.146		-0.140		-0.110	
Overseas born	0.181		0.166		0.171		0.175		0.164	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	-6.730	***	-6.665	***	-6.243	***	-6.231	***	-6.164	***
Mother 100% of nights & father daytime only	-2.424	***	-2.387	***	-2.239	***	-2.232	***	-2.098	***
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.760	***	-0.742	***	-0.729	***	-0.724	***	-0.667	***
Father 66-99% of nights	0.099		0.100		0.139		0.140		0.142	
Father 100% of nights	-0.035		-0.013		0.212		0.215		0.216	
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.385	***	-0.246	**	-0.120		-0.112		-0.115	
Physical hurt	-0.646	***	-0.371	**	-0.102		-0.093		-0.088	
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			-0.642	***	-0.275	**	-0.262	**	-0.200	*
Inter-parental relationship (W1)					0.385	***	0.385	***	0.355	***
Change in inter-parental relationship (W1-W3)					0.342	***	0.342	***	0.313	***
Had safety concerns (W3)					-0.419	**	-0.406	**	-0.391	**
Ratings of emotional health (W3)									0.285	***
Constant	8.573	***	8.816	***	7.274	***	7.292	***	6.386	***
Adjusted r ²	0.442		0.454		0.475		0.475		0.488	
No. of respondents	2287		2287		2287		2287		2287	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (this is noted only for violence/abuse variables) * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C3 Coefficients of OLS regression of parents' satisfaction with their relationship with the study child that mothers reported in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	-0.073	***	-0.074	***	-0.074	***	-0.074	***	-0.068	***
Study child age-square	0.004	**	0.004	**	0.004	**	0.004	**	0.004	*
Study child gender: girl	0.055		0.055		0.053		0.053		0.065	
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	0.032		0.035		0.031		0.045		0.057	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.166	*	0.159	*	0.149		0.162	*	0.158	*
Employed (W3)	0.203	**	0.203	***	0.197	**	0.161	*	0.088	
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							-0.043	*	-0.007	
Re-partnered	-0.001		0.001		-0.002		0.014		0.046	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	-0.563	***	-0.563	***	-0.567	***	-0.563	**	-0.538	***
Overseas born	0.191	*	0.182	*	0.182	*	0.187	*	0.180	*
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35–65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	0.159		0.152		0.202	*	0.201	*	0.188	
Mother 100% of nights & father daytime only	0.079		0.075		0.083		0.086		0.082	
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.018		0.013		0.004		0.008		-0.001	
Father 66-99% of nights	-1.064	***	-1.056	***	-1.053	***	-1.054	***	-1.002	***
Father 100% of nights	-3.546	***	-3.531	***	-3.480	***	-3.465	***	-3.332	***
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.132	**	-0.106		-0.084		-0.072		-0.062	
Physical hurt	-0.211	**	-0.168	*	-0.121		-0.104		-0.092	
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			-0.112	#	-0.047		-0.027		0.018	
Inter-parental relationship (W1)					0.057		0.056		0.049	
Change in inter-parental relationship (W1-W3)					0.053		0.051		0.042	
Had safety concerns (W3)					-0.095		-0.082		-0.058	
Ratings of emotional health (W3)									0.278	***
Constant	8.686	***	8.719	***	8.491	***	8.513	***	7.555	***
Adjusted r ²	0.173		0.174		0.175		0.177		0.209	
No. of respondents	2444		2444		2444		2444		2444	

Notes: : The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (this is noted only for violence/abuse variables); * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C4 Coefficients of OLS regression of parenting stress, fathers and mothers, LSSF W1-W2

	Fathers				Mothers			
	LSSF W1		LSSF W2		LSSF W1		LSSF W2	
Experienced abuse/violence a	0.125		0.200	*	0.101		-0.113	
Study child age	0.014		0.020	*	0.018		0.001	
Study child age-square	-0.002		0.000		-0.005	**	-0.005	*
Study child gender: girl	-0.118	*	-0.117		-0.083		-0.075	
Currently re-partnered	0.121	**	0.030		0.256	***	0.137	**
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months	0.106	***	-0.001		0.164	***	0.083	***
Inter-parental relationship	0.039		0.058		-0.045		0.003	
Had safety concerns	-0.304	***	-0.085		-0.312	***	-0.352	***
Ratings of emotional health			-0.355	***			-0.641	***
Care time (ref. = share time: 35-52% of nights with each parent)								
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	0.015		-0.448	*	0.555	***	0.461	**
Mother 100% of nights & father daytime only	0.056		-0.012		0.417	***	0.479	***
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.107		-0.223	*	0.460	***	0.496	***
Father 66-99% of nights	0.506	***	0.395	*	0.168		-0.245	
Father 100% of nights	0.863	***	0.571	**	-0.031		-0.116	
Education (ref. = degree or higher)								
Other post-school qualification	-0.157		0.001		-0.269	**	-0.121	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.012		0.128		-0.306	**	-0.249	*
Employed	0.025		0.084		-0.180	*	-0.119	
Country of birth & Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)								
Indigenous	0.063		0.039		0.003		-0.316	
Overseas born	0.297	***	-0.031		0.199	*	0.159	
Constant	2.795	***	3.905	***	3.643	***	5.732	***
Adjusted r ²	0.038		0.057		0.049		0.131	
No. of respondents	4371		2930		4523		3184	

Notes: : a. Violence/abuse refers to the experience before/during separation in LSSF W1, and the experience in the last 12 months prior to the interview in LSSF W2. The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C5 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1-W3

	Fathers			Mothers				
	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3
Experienced abuse/violence ^a	-0.516 ***	-0.725 ***	-0.566 ***	-0.651 ***	-0.425 ***	-0.298 ***	-0.388 ***	-0.511 ***
Study child age	0.050 ***	0.054 ***	0.059 ***	0.058 ***	0.057 ***	0.071 ***	0.070 ***	0.018
Study child age-square	0.010 ***	0.009 ***	0.008 ***	0.008 ***	0.010 ***	0.013 ***	0.012 ***	0.010 ***
Study child gender: girl	0.109	-0.003	0.119	-0.012	0.099	-0.052	0.022	0.081
Currently re-partnered	0.075	0.068	0.171 ***	0.174 ***	0.017	0.027	0.003	0.042
Financial hardship	-0.061 **	-0.082 ***	-0.034	-0.055 **	-0.087 ***	-0.138 ***	-0.084 ***	-0.057 **
Inter-parental relationship	1.128 ***	1.042 ***	0.950 ***	1.066 ***	0.756 ***	0.715 ***	0.694 ***	0.657 ***
Had safety concerns	-0.875 ***	-0.887 ***	-0.887 ***	-0.842 ***	-0.603 ***	-0.572 ***	-0.486 ***	-0.599 ***
Ratings of emotional health			0.229 ***	0.254 ***			0.333 ***	0.308 ***
Care time (ref. = share time: 35-52% of nights with each parent)								
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	-3.764 ***	-3.018 ***	-3.849 ***	-3.993 ***	1.333 ***	0.824 ***	0.793 ***	0.838 ***
Mother 100% of nights & father daytime only	-2.005 ***	-1.604 ***	-1.581 ***	-1.807 ***	0.189	-0.096	0.037	0.386 **
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.931 ***	-0.774 ***	-0.686 ***	-0.972 ***	0.114	0.209 *	0.007	-0.006
Father 66-99% of nights	0.174	-0.015	0.069	0.213	-0.820 ***	-1.016 ***	-0.670 **	-0.682 ***
Father 100% of nights	1.059 ***	0.407 *	0.644 **	0.946 ***	-2.595 ***	-2.315 ***	-2.373 ***	-2.093 ***
Education (ref. = degree or higher)								
Other post-school qualification	0.068	0.076	-0.002	0.132	0.241 *	0.085	0.083	0.211 *
Year 12 and no qualification	0.126	0.201 *	0.148	0.159	0.307 ***	0.172	0.198	0.522 ***
Employed	0.094	-0.048	-0.160	-0.103	-0.166 *	-0.158 *	-0.054	-0.102
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)								
Indigenous	0.074	0.191	0.151	0.082	0.255	0.148	0.062	-0.250
Overseas born	0.260 **	0.268 **	0.263 **	-0.013	0.093	0.161	0.182	0.023
Constant	2.608 ***	3.596 ***	2.742 ***	2.228 ***	4.319 ***	4.615 ***	3.399 ***	3.364 ***
Adjusted rw ²	0.495	0.451	0.458	0.535	0.328	0.271	0.260	0.283
No. of respondents	2618	4388	2946	3914	3015	4468	3158	3722

Notes: a. Violence/abuse refers to the experience before/during separation in LSSF W1, the experience in the last 12 months prior to the interview in LSSF W2 and W3, and since separation for SRSP data. The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C6 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements that fathers reported in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	0.052	***	0.043	**	0.050	***	0.049	***	0.055	***
Study child age-square	0.011	***	0.009	***	0.009	***	0.009	***	0.008	***
Study child gender: girl	0.055		0.074		0.021		0.018		0.013	
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	0.128		0.042		0.033		0.052		0.014	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.347	*	0.169		0.085		0.107		0.079	
Employed (W3)	0.179		0.108		0.015		-0.045		-0.096	
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							-0.078	**	-0.044	
Re-partnered	0.210	***	0.148	**	0.032		0.049		0.083	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	0.115		0.119		-0.061		-0.045		-0.025	
Overseas born	0.037		-0.007		0.007		0.018		0.008	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35–65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	-5.396	***	-5.222	***	-4.006	***	-3.965	***	-3.901	***
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	-2.239	***	-2.123	***	-1.692	***	-1.670	***	-1.551	***
Mother 66-99% of nights	-1.087	***	-1.038	***	-0.996	***	-0.982	***	-0.934	***
Father 66-99% of nights	0.058		0.064		0.150		0.152		0.153	
Father 100% of nights	0.176		0.260		0.888	***	0.898	***	0.901	***
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.836	***	-0.461	***	-0.099		-0.078		-0.079	
Physical hurt	-1.651	***	-0.897	***	-0.149		-0.120		-0.115	
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			-1.751	***	-0.729	***	-0.689	***	-0.638	***
Inter-parental relationship (W1)					1.151	***	1.152	***	1.127	***
Change in inter-parental relationship (W1–W3)					0.998	***	0.998	***	0.974	***
Had safety concerns (W3)					-0.852	***	-0.815	***	-0.804	***
Ratings of emotional health (W3)									0.237	***
Constant	6.999	***	7.649	***	3.038	***	3.081	***	2.326	***
Adjusted r ²	0.294		0.375		0.513		0.514		0.522	
No. of respondents	2257		2257		2257		2257		2257	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C7 Coefficients of OLS regression of flexibility-workability of care-time arrangements that mothers reported in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	0.017		0.008		0.014		0.014		0.020	
Study child age-square	0.012	***	0.011	***	0.010	***	0.010	***	0.009	***
Study child gender: girl	0.080		0.087		0.062		0.063		0.074	
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	0.065		0.094		0.057		0.088		0.103	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.469	***	0.389	**	0.289	*	0.318	**	0.316	**
Employed (W3)	-0.020		-0.017		-0.067		-0.151		-0.233	*
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							-0.099	***	-0.057	*
Re-partnered	-0.052		-0.030		-0.063		-0.024		0.012	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	-0.134		-0.127		-0.144		-0.137		-0.107	
Overseas born	0.117		0.023		0.004		0.014		0.006	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	0.469	**	0.372	*	0.920	***	0.919	***	0.904	***
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	0.488	**	0.427	*	0.464	**	0.473	**	0.467	**
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.189		0.121		0.018		0.026		0.017	
Father 66-99% of nights	-0.798	**	-0.702	**	-0.687	**	-0.690	**	-0.629	*
Father 100% of nights	-2.621	***	-2.406	***	-1.881	***	-1.864	***	-1.734	***
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.619	***	-0.321	**	-0.095		-0.067		-0.056	
Physical hurt	-0.793	***	-0.290	*	0.180		0.221	#	0.233	#
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			-1.328	***	-0.679	***	-0.632	***	-0.579	***
Inter-parental relationship (W1)					0.673	***	0.671	***	0.662	***
Change in inter-parental relationship (W1-W3)					0.624	***	0.620	***	0.609	***
Had safety concerns (W3)					-0.599	***	-0.569	***	-0.540	***
Ratings of emotional health (W3)									0.323	***
Constant	6.916	***	7.298	***	4.611	***	4.658	***	3.543	***
Adjusted r ²	0.072		0.142		0.229		0.233		0.251	
No. of respondents	2410		2410		2410		2410		2410	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (only for violence/abuse variable); * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C8 Coefficients of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1-W3

	Fathers					Mothers										
	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3				
Experienced abuse/violence a	0.624	**	0.224		0.494	*	0.312		-0.024		0.018		-0.245		0.098	
Study child age	0.110	***	0.043	*	0.088	***	0.048	*	0.108	***	0.095	***	0.093	***	0.091	***
Study child age-square	0.008	*	0.003		0.001		0.000		0.005		0.010		-0.002		0.001	
Study child gender: girl	-0.236		0.172		0.141		-0.013		0.124		-0.143		-0.172		0.005	
Currently re-partnered	0.420	**	0.045		-0.061		-0.144		0.117		0.021		0.359	*	0.016	
Financial hardship	0.012		0.086	*	0.048		0.033		0.143	***	0.190	*	0.114	*	0.144	***
Inter-parental relationship	-0.136		-0.333	***	-0.397	***	-0.250	**	-0.184	*	-0.140	*	-0.115	*	-0.003	
Had safety concerns	0.991	***	1.143	***	1.201	***	1.138	***	0.521	*	0.852	***	0.645	*	0.257	
Ratings of emotional health					-0.233	*	-0.261	***					-0.587	***	-0.383	***
Care time (ref. = share time: 35-52% of nights with each parent)																
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	1.837	***	1.006	***	1.887	***	1.309	***	0.241		-0.367		-0.058		0.537	
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	0.848	**	0.680	**	1.499	***	1.194	***	0.409		0.031		0.379		0.587	*
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.944	***	0.571	**	1.066	***	0.647	**	0.012		-0.286		-0.035		-0.088	
Father 66-99% of nights	-0.867		0.034		-0.057		-0.550		0.760		0.316		0.560		1.067	**
Father 100% of nights	0.055		-0.749		0.636		0.041		1.229	**	1.160	**	2.057	***	1.497	***
Education (ref. = degree or higher)																
Other post-school qualification	0.039		0.236		-0.120		-0.206		-0.138		-0.160		0.378		-0.314	
Year 12 and no qualification	-0.020		0.115		0.307		0.095		-0.099		-0.155		0.171		-0.587	**
Employed	-0.577	**	-0.167		-0.068		-0.356		-0.478	*	-0.103		-0.487	*	-0.407	*
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)																
Indigenous	0.737		-0.010		0.261		0.742		0.691		0.493		0.936	*	0.402	
Overseas born	0.343		0.201		-0.013		0.069		0.467	*	0.184		0.122		0.094	
Constant	-4.281	***	-2.928	***	-2.478	***	-1.508	**	-3.321	***	-3.186	***	-2.427	**	-2.090	***
Chi2	163.4	***	227.6	***	199.6	***	249.4	***	106.5	***	146.3	***	145.1	***	162.0	
df	18		18		19		19		18		18		19		19	
r ² (pseudo)	0.136		0.120		0.185		0.143		0.095		0.088		0.150		0.114	
No. of respondents	2585		4322		2891		3824		3032		4511		3190		3758	

Notes: a. Violence/abuse refers to the experience before/during separation in LSSF W1, the experience in the last 12 months prior to the interview in LSSF W2 and W3, and since separation for SRSP data. The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C9 Coefficients of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas, fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1-W3

	Fathers					Mothers						
	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3	SRSP	LSSF W1	LSSF W2	LSSF W3
Experience abuse/violence ^a	0.091	0.492	0.556	0.285	0.195	0.266	0.131	0.248	0.195	0.266	0.131	0.248
Study child age	0.052	0.041	0.048	0.043	0.035	0.037	0.062	0.048	0.035	0.037	0.062	0.048
Study child age-square	-0.004	-0.014	-0.007	-0.003	-0.004	-0.007	-0.014	-0.001	-0.004	-0.007	-0.014	-0.001
Study child gender: girl	-0.525	-0.470	-0.678	-0.462	-0.372	-0.545	-0.365	-0.375	-0.372	-0.545	-0.365	-0.375
Currently re-partnered	0.145	0.181	0.046	-0.116	0.160	0.073	-0.071	0.011	0.160	0.073	-0.071	0.011
Financial hardship	0.068	0.059	0.000	0.027	0.093	0.148	0.096	0.121	0.093	0.148	0.096	0.121
Inter-parental relationship	-0.183	-0.123	-0.219	-0.184	-0.248	-0.123	-0.162	-0.021	-0.248	-0.123	-0.162	-0.021
Had safety concerns	0.464	0.791	0.447	0.695	0.264	0.335	0.223	0.247	0.264	0.335	0.223	0.247
Ratings of emotional health			-0.236	-0.251			-0.438	-0.313			-0.438	-0.313
Care time (ref. = share time: 35-52% of nights with each parent)												
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	0.932	0.843	2.133	1.125	0.036	0.172	0.150	0.240	0.036	0.172	0.150	0.240
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	0.159	0.473	0.786	0.560	0.059	0.123	0.030	-0.105	0.059	0.123	0.030	-0.105
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.206	0.330	0.081	0.421	-0.049	0.026	-0.105	-0.085	-0.049	0.026	-0.105	-0.085
Father 66-99% of nights	-0.438	0.048	-0.362	-0.104	0.356	0.319	0.486	-0.082	0.356	0.319	0.486	-0.082
Father 100% of nights	-0.015	0.348	0.264	0.028	0.736	0.856	0.641	0.893	0.736	0.856	0.641	0.893
Education (ref. = degree or higher)												
Other post-school qualification	-0.031	0.186	0.044	-0.144	0.156	-0.104	-0.358	0.093	0.156	-0.104	-0.358	0.093
Year 12 and no qualification	-0.103	0.263	0.002	-0.306	-0.061	-0.146	-0.507	-0.199	-0.061	-0.146	-0.507	-0.199
Employed	-0.263	-0.015	-0.350	0.010	-0.204	-0.179	-0.363	-0.217	-0.204	-0.179	-0.363	-0.217
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)												
Indigenous	0.771	0.211	-0.453	0.297	-0.363	0.356	-0.624	-0.750	-0.363	0.356	-0.624	-0.750
Overseas born	-0.214	-0.598	-0.178	-0.243	-0.246	-0.218	-0.198	0.112	-0.246	-0.218	-0.198	0.112
Constant	-1.030	-2.037	-0.153	-0.033	-0.887	-1.221	1.001	-0.543	-0.887	-1.221	1.001	-0.543
Chi2	94.2	180.7	127.9	273.2	130.4	141.4	176.9	228.4	130.4	141.4	176.9	228.4
df	18	18	19	19	18	18	19	19	18	18	19	19
r ² (pseudo)	0.053	0.081	0.087	0.085	0.058	0.060	0.098	0.068	0.058	0.060	0.098	0.068
No. of respondents	1915	2436	1823	3511	2145	2341	2074	3628	2145	2341	2074	3628

Notes: a. Violence/abuse refers to the experience before/during separation in LSSF W1, the experience in the last 12 months prior to the interview in LSSF W2 and W3, and since separation for SRSP data. The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (friendly) to 5 (excellent), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C10 Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome), fathers and mothers, LSSF W2-W3

	Fathers				Mothers			
	LSSF W2		LSSF W3		LSSF W2		LSSF W3	
Experienced abuse/violence ^a	-0.051		-0.116	*	-0.040		-0.066	
Study child age	-0.007		-0.039	***	-0.028	***	-0.036	***
Study child age-square	0.007	***	0.007	***	0.006	***	0.004	***
Study child gender: girl	0.121	*	0.193	***	0.176	***	0.138	***
Currently re-partnered	0.026		0.090	***	-0.052		0.004	
Financial hardship	-0.030		-0.039	**	-0.058	***	-0.045	***
Inter-parental relationship	0.131	***	0.110	***	0.068	*	0.059	**
Had safety concerns	-0.205	*	-0.473	***	-0.163	*	-0.209	***
Ratings of emotional health	0.194	***	0.211	***	0.268	***	0.296	***
Care time (ref. = share time: 35-52% of nights with each parent)								
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	-1.123	***	-0.694	***	0.011		0.012	
Mother 100% of nights & father daytime only	-0.190		-0.178	*	-0.055		-0.070	
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.061		-0.142	**	0.012		0.017	
Father 66-99% of nights	0.204	*	-0.032		-0.305	*	-0.274	*
Father 100% of nights	0.013		0.085		-0.408		-0.958	***
Education (ref. = degree or higher)								
Other post-school qualification	-0.092		0.022		-0.013		-0.019	
Year 12 and no qualification	-0.135		0.065		0.062		0.057	
Employed	-0.124		-0.140	*	0.114		0.051	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)								
Indigenous	0.004		0.036		0.304		0.004	
Overseas born	0.025		0.016		0.115		0.053	
Constant	5.983	***	5.850		5.676	***	5.653	***
Adjusted r ²	0.108		0.152		0.128		0.129	
No. of respondents	1940		3769		2139		3746	

Notes: a. Violence/abuse refers to the experience in the last 12 months prior to the interview in LSSF W2 and W3. The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C11 Coefficients of OLS regression of BITSEA scale (higher score = worse outcome), fathers and mothers, SRSP and LSSF W1

	Fathers				Mothers			
	SRSP		LSSF W1		SRSP		LSSF W1	
Experienced abuse/violence ^a	0.690	*	0.533	***	0.567	*	0.365	*
Study child age (ref. = 1 year)								
2 years	0.664	*	0.328	*	0.656	*	0.561	***
3 years	0.975	**	0.564	**	0.239		0.436	*
Study child gender: girl	-0.199		-0.396	**	-0.486	*	-0.436	***
Currently re-partnered	-0.021		0.268	**	0.331		0.218	
Financial hardship	0.062		-0.088		-0.176		-0.151	*
Inter-parental relationship	2.014	***	1.299	***	0.514		0.431	*
Had safety concerns	0.155	**	0.212	***	0.196	***	0.256	***
Care time (ref. = share time: 35-52% of nights with each parent)								
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	1.596		0.428		-1.106	*	-0.705	*
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	0.364		0.299		-0.557		-0.630	*
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.206		0.380	*	-0.517		-0.609	*
Father 66-100% of nights	-0.579		-0.390		-0.550		-0.037	
Education (ref. = degree or higher)								
Other post-school qualification	0.668		0.256		0.064		-0.180	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.654		0.419		0.383		-0.078	
Employed	-0.855	*	-0.237		-0.243		-0.462	***
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)								
Indigenous	0.814		-0.008		-0.031		0.603	*
Overseas born	0.913	*	0.509	**	0.173		-0.001	
Constant	1.104		1.034	*	2.251	*	2.799	***
Adjusted r ²	0.156		0.134		0.075		0.083	
No. of respondents	491		1475		781		1866	

Notes: a. Violence/abuse refers to the experience before/during separation in LSSF W1, and since separation for SRSP data. The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C12 Coefficients of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, reported by fathers in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	0.063	*	0.069	*	0.082	**	0.081	**	0.079	*
Study child age-square	-0.001		0.000		0.000		0.001		0.001	
Study child gender: girl	0.426	*	0.432	*	0.438	*	0.451	*	0.450	*
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	-0.183		-0.163		-0.281		-0.289		-0.247	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.128		0.206		0.193		0.185		0.227	
Employed (W3)	-0.234		-0.199		-0.099		-0.047		0.002	
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							0.054		0.026	
Re-partnered	-0.117		-0.094		-0.047		-0.068		-0.098	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	0.577		0.662		0.818		0.812		0.754	
Overseas born	0.364		0.378		0.299		0.286		0.282	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	1.918	***	1.850	***	1.413	**	1.393	**	1.299	**
Mother 100% of nights & father daytime only	1.592	***	1.574	***	1.331	***	1.324	***	1.242	**
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.653	*	0.651	*	0.662	*	0.654	*	0.621	*
Father 66-99% of nights	-0.906		-0.927		-1.053		-1.044		-1.044	
Father 100% of nights	0.216		0.174		-0.246		-0.252		-0.245	
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	0.464	#	0.295		0.142		0.116		0.130	
Physical hurt	1.474	***	1.142	***	0.726	*	0.707	*	0.728	*
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			0.791	***	0.136		0.107		0.055	
Inter-parental relationship					-0.306	*	-0.309	*	-0.296	*
Change in inter-parental relationship					-0.395	***	-0.395	***	-0.379	**
Had safety concerns					1.410	***	1.378	***	1.367	***
Ratings of emotional health									-0.198	*
Constant	-3.878	***	-4.245	***	-3.095	***	-3.115	***	-2.404	**
r ² (pseudo)	0.111		0.126		0.185		0.186		0.190	
Chi2	104.5	***	118.7	***	174.5	***	175.5	***	179.7	***
df	16		17		20		21		22	
No. of respondents	2214		2214		2214		2214		2214	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (only for violence/abuse variable) * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C13 Coefficients of logit regression of child general health as fair or poor, reported by mothers in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	0.085	**	0.086	**	0.083	**	0.081	**	0.068	*
Study child age-square	-0.001		-0.001		-0.001		-0.001		0.001	
Study child gender: girl	0.251		0.249		0.246		0.250		0.232	
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	-0.230		-0.243		-0.234		-0.319		-0.338	
Year 12 and no qualification	-0.687	*	-0.671	*	-0.648	*	-0.724	**	-0.718	*
Employed (W3)	-0.799	***	-0.802	***	-0.823	***	-0.655	**	-0.522	*
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							0.189	***	0.150	**
Re-partnered	0.197		0.192		0.216		0.125		0.095	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	0.168		0.177		0.195		0.212		0.211	
Overseas born	0.044		0.064		0.052		-0.012		0.025	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	0.705		0.727	*	0.627		0.624		0.628	
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	0.545		0.562		0.611		0.596		0.599	
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.057		-0.038		0.003		0.009		-0.001	
Father 66-99% of nights	1.056	*	1.031	*	1.089	*	1.139	*	1.127	*
Father 100% of nights	2.017	***	1.985	***	2.017	***	2.003	***	1.806	**
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	0.312		0.239		0.057		-0.021		-0.039	
Physical hurt	0.510	#	0.384		0.098		0.027		0.007	
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			0.336		0.281		0.174		0.129	
Inter-parental relationship					-0.256	*	-0.240	*	-0.221	
Change in inter-parental relationship					-0.023		-0.011		0.012	
Had safety concerns					-0.080		-0.151		-0.167	
Ratings of emotional health							-2.625	***	-0.347	**
Constant	-3.410	***	-3.518	***	-2.507	***	0.105		-1.587	*
r ² (pseudo)	0.080		0.083		0.091		0.105		0.118	
Chi2	71.6	***	74.2	***	81.7	***	94.3	***	105.9	***
df	16		17		20		21		22	
No. of respondents	2438		2438		2438		2438		2438	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (only for violence/abuse variable); * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C14 Coefficients of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas that fathers reported in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	0.020		0.023		0.029		0.028		0.022	
Study child age-square	-0.001		0.000		-0.001		0.000		0.001	
Study child gender: girl	-0.604	***	-0.614	***	-0.608	***	-0.604	***	-0.608	***
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	-0.075		-0.046		-0.074		-0.085		-0.074	
Year 12 and no qualification	-0.131		-0.069		-0.076		-0.087		-0.078	
Employed (W3)	-0.042		-0.021		0.013		0.049		0.112	
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							0.043		0.010	
Re-partnered	-0.232	**	-0.216	**	-0.190	**	-0.201	**	-0.237	**
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	0.099		0.119		0.185		0.175		0.140	
Overseas born	-0.134		-0.121		-0.118		-0.129		-0.132	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	1.759	***	1.706	***	1.462	***	1.442	***	1.363	***
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	0.634	*	0.603	*	0.521		0.507		0.419	
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.435	**	0.429	**	0.427	**	0.419	**	0.378	*
Father 66-99% of nights	0.002		-0.002		-0.049		-0.049		-0.035	
Father 100% of nights	0.190		0.169		-0.047		-0.054		-0.043	
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	0.489	***	0.368	*	0.293	#	0.279	#	0.272	#
Physical hurt	0.887	***	0.652	***	0.437	*	0.419	*	0.407	*
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			0.538	***	0.219		0.199		0.145	
Inter-parental relationship					-0.229	**	-0.229	**	-0.209	*
Change in inter-parental relationship					-0.236	**	-0.235	**	-0.210	**
Had safety concerns					0.649	**	0.624	**	0.625	**
Ratings of emotional health									-0.252	***
Constant	-1.453	***	-1.668	***	-0.758		-0.782		0.026	
r ² (pseudo)	0.056		0.065		0.082		0.083		0.092	
Chi2	104.1	***	120.7	***	151.4	***	152.7	***	170.3	***
df	16		17		20		21		22	
No. of respondents	2042		2042		2042		2042		2042	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (only for violence/abuse variable); * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C15 Coefficients of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas that mothers reported in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	0.043	**	0.044	**	0.044	**	0.043	**	0.036	*
Study child age-square	-0.003		-0.003		-0.003		-0.003		-0.002	
Study child gender: girl	-0.297	**	-0.298	**	-0.298	**	-0.307	**	-0.328	**
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	0.212		0.206		0.207		0.149		0.132	
Year 12 and no qualification	-0.130		-0.114		-0.106		-0.162		-0.159	
Employed (W3)	-0.432	**	-0.432	**	-0.429	**	-0.287	*	-0.197	
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							0.162	***	0.126	***
Re-partnered	0.169	*	0.165	*	0.168	*	0.097		0.066	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	-0.688		-0.694		-0.686		-0.684		-0.723	
Overseas born	-0.291		-0.277		-0.278		-0.314		-0.295	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	0.099		0.115		0.084		0.095		0.104	
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	-0.056		-0.044		-0.052		-0.053		-0.051	
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.169		-0.156		-0.146		-0.156		-0.157	
Father 66-99% of nights	-0.124		-0.137		-0.137		-0.128		-0.166	
Father 100% of nights	1.195	**	1.171	**	1.156	**	1.181	**	1.078	*
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	0.426	**	0.373	*	0.337	*	0.285	#	0.280	*
Physical hurt	0.664	***	0.577	***	0.508	**	0.445	*	0.431	*
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			0.235	*	0.186		0.111		0.067	
Inter-parental relationship					-0.050		-0.044		-0.035	
Change in inter-parental relationship					-0.015		-0.007		0.003	
Had safety concerns					0.114		0.054		0.033	
Ratings of emotional health									-0.297	***
Constant	-1.757	***	-1.833	***	-1.631	***	-1.713	***	-0.732	
r ² (pseudo)	0.037		0.039		0.040		0.052		0.065	
Chi2	81.3	***	85.3	***	86.8	***	113.0	***	140.5	***
df	16		17		20		21		22	
No. of respondents	2374		2374		2374		2374		2374	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (only for violence/abuse variable); * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C16 Coefficients of OLS regression of socio-emotional development (0-10, higher score = better outcome) that fathers reported in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	-0.040	***	-0.042	***	-0.044	***	-0.044	***	-0.040	***
Study child age-square	0.008	***	0.007	***	0.007	***	0.007	***	0.006	***
Study child gender: girl	0.207	***	0.210	***	0.199	***	0.197	***	0.191	***
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	-0.010		-0.027		-0.020		-0.004		-0.028	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.002		-0.037		-0.037		-0.018		-0.037	
Employed (W3)	-0.089		-0.105		-0.132		-0.179	*	-0.221	**
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							-0.065	***	-0.036	*
Re-partnered	0.065	*	0.053		0.038		0.053		0.080	*
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	0.021		0.015		0.004		0.021		0.041	
Overseas born	0.063		0.051		0.053		0.064		0.057	
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	-1.085	***	-1.016	***	-0.858	***	-0.814	***	-0.745	***
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	-0.319	**	-0.300	**	-0.241	*	-0.225	*	-0.137	
Mother 66-99% of nights	-0.226	***	-0.215	***	-0.216	***	-0.204	**	-0.167	**
Father 66-99% of nights	-0.036		-0.036		0.002		0.004		0.005	
Father 100% of nights	-0.061		-0.048		0.058		0.064		0.065	
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.290	***	-0.206	***	-0.158	**	-0.141	*	-0.137	*
Physical hurt	-0.442	***	-0.273	***	-0.135		-0.113		-0.102	
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			-0.381	***	-0.197	**	-0.164	**	-0.125	*
Inter-parental relationship					0.124	***	0.124	***	0.105	**
Change in inter-parental relationship					0.117	***	0.116	***	0.097	**
Had safety concerns					-0.490	***	-0.457	***	-0.445	***
Ratings of emotional health									0.189	***
Constant	7.100	***	7.238	***	6.754	***	6.789	***	6.183	***
Adjusted r ²	0.064		0.083		0.107	.	0.113		0.138	
No. of respondents	2186		2186		2186	.	2186		2186	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (only for violence/abuse variable); * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Table C17 Coefficients of logit regression of poor child development in one or more areas that mothers reported in LSSF W3

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Study child age (W3, centred at 10 years)	-0.041	***	-0.043	***	-0.043	***	-0.043	***	-0.037	***
Study child age-square	0.004	**	0.004	**	0.004	*	0.004	**	0.003	*
Study child gender: girl	0.139	**	0.141	**	0.137	**	0.138	**	0.148	**
Education (ref. = degree or higher)										
Other post-school qualification	0.012		0.016		0.010		0.036		0.050	
Year 12 and no qualification	0.120		0.105		0.089		0.113		0.109	
Employed (W3)	0.274	***	0.273	***	0.268	***	0.197	**	0.124	*
Number of financial hardship in the past 12 months (W3)							-0.082	***	-0.045	**
Re-partnered	-0.067	*	-0.064	*	-0.068	*	-0.036		-0.004	
Country of birth and Indigenous status (ref. = Australian born, non-Indigenous)										
Indigenous	-0.032		-0.033		-0.043		-0.042		-0.020	
Overseas born	0.178	*	0.161	*	0.162	*	0.172	*	0.165	*
Care time (W3) (ref. = share time: 35-65% of nights with each parent)										
Mother 100% of nights and daytime	0.015		0.000		0.064		0.062		0.049	
Mother 100% of nights and father daytime only	-0.065		-0.076		-0.064		-0.059		-0.063	
Mother 66-99% of nights	0.032		0.021		0.008		0.014		0.006	
Father 66-99% of nights	-0.211		-0.194		-0.193		-0.199		-0.153	
Father 100% of nights	-0.886	***	-0.852	***	-0.811	***	-0.800	***	-0.680	**
Experience of violence/abuse before separation (W1) (ref. = neither)										
Emotional abuse alone	-0.129	*	-0.076		-0.030		-0.006		0.001	
Physical hurt	-0.340	***	-0.251	***	-0.162	*	-0.129	#	-0.117	
Experienced abuse/violence in last 12 months (W3)			-0.233	***	-0.147	*	-0.111	#	-0.066	
Inter-parental relationship					0.083	*	0.080	*	0.073	*
Change in inter-parental relationship					0.049		0.045		0.036	
Had safety concerns					-0.162	*	-0.138		-0.114	
Ratings of emotional health									0.281	***
Constant	6.772	***	6.840	***	6.511	***	6.554	***	5.586	***
Adjusted r ²	0.043		0.050		0.054		0.065		0.110	
No. of respondents	2430		2430		2430		2430		2430	

Notes: The variable of the quality of inter-parental relationship here takes values from 1 (fearful) to 5 (friendly), variable of emotional health here is assigned with values from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). The variable of change in inter-parental relationship is the difference between W1 and W3, with higher number indicating improvement in the relationship. # p < .10 (only for violence/abuse variable); * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

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