

Local GP intervention a positive step for women living in fear of their partner

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A world first trial has found intervention by general practitioners (GPs) in cases of domestic violence made impacts on women's symptoms of depression but not their quality of life.

University of Melbourne researcher and practising GP, Associate Professor Kelsey Hegarty from the Department of General Practice is leading research into domestic violence and primary care.

The study "Effect of screening and brief counseling for [abused women](#) on quality of life, safety planning and mental health : A primary care cluster randomized controlled trial Associate Professor Hegarty and her collaborators wanted to test if support and counselling from the GP could lead to positive changes in women leading to safety planning and improved mental health and quality of life.

The findings, published this week in *The Lancet*, reports on a large screening and [early intervention](#) trial involving 55 GPs and up to 20,000 women. Participants were sent a screening survey and filled out questions relating to health, well-being and [mental health issues](#), including whether they were afraid of their partner.

"Domestic violence is the leading contributor to death and disability for women of childbearing age and the health sector has lagged behind other sectors in a response," she said.

"Through this project, we have been trying to determine if counselling from the GP has helped to improve how women feel. It is another way of offering safety to women and their children,"

"Our findings indicate that GP intervention works to some extent and the screening of women and offering them counseling, fits with the National Action Plan's suggestion for the health setting to be a focus of early intervention."

The study found that GPs can be trained to ask about safety of women and children and to offer counseling to support women on their journey to escape the effects of [intimate partner violence](#).

Provided by University of Melbourne

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