

# ESF IMPACT

## newsletter



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## VICARIOUS TRAUMA

It is well recognised that emergency services are a high-risk industry and that first responders are often affected by trauma. What about other people who work in the sector in all manner of administration, support, and recovery roles? We are only beginning to talk about how they may also be affected by trauma.

An emotional response is also a human one, yet vicarious trauma can be the cost of empathic engagement with people who have experienced trauma. The term 'vicarious trauma' was coined in the 90s and most often applied to the experience of psychologists. In recent years, evidence has emerged that disaster management places significant burdens on those tasked with carrying out planning, response, and recovery functions, especially where human contact is involved. Through our Insight Conversation it is clear we need to be aware of how people in support roles can also be affected.

ESF brought together four people to discuss the topic of vicarious trauma and its impact on people in the emergency services.

**Assoc Prof Erin Smith** found herself deeply affected by vicarious trauma after conducting a research project which involved listening to the stories of 9/11 first responders. She shared her lived experience including how self-stigma hindered her ability to recognise symptoms and tips for selfcare.

**Heather Miller** spoke of how she first became aware of the impact of secondary trauma when working with fundraising people at Beyond Blue who found themselves often speaking with a family member who wanted to donate after a suicide. She spoke of the great benefit of peer support and leaders who are in tune with their teams and the importance of check-ins.

**Darren Hodge** is an AV Flight Paramedic who wrote a book called *A Life on the Line*. He was unprepared for the unintended consequences his

stories had on some readers and spoke about how first responders tend to have higher resilience, but everyone needs a strong network of support.

**Emma Scheele** and her team are responsible for very difficult patient experience reviews at Ambulance Victoria. In trying to improve the patient experience they are often adversely affected listening to audio of '000' calls, reviewing clinical paperwork and discussing details with family members of the most critical and complex cases. She spoke of the need for organisations to firstly be aware of the risk of vicarious trauma and ensuring there are a suite of support options available to meet individual needs.

[YOU CAN LISTEN TO A RECORDING OF THE CONVERSATION HERE](#)



## REACTIONS

Fantastic open sharing of a really interesting topic, very thought provoking. Thank you for bringing this into the conversation.

**Rachel Treeby, VicSES Manager Mental Health & Wellbeing.**

Massive thanks to you all for lending your expertise, vulnerability, and audience to this topic.

**Peta Wigmore**

Wonderful session! Thanks for so many valuable insights. These vulnerable conversations are so valuable for our sector. Much to take back to our teams and I look forward to sharing the recording more broadly.

**Lucy Bell, DELWP Gippsland**

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