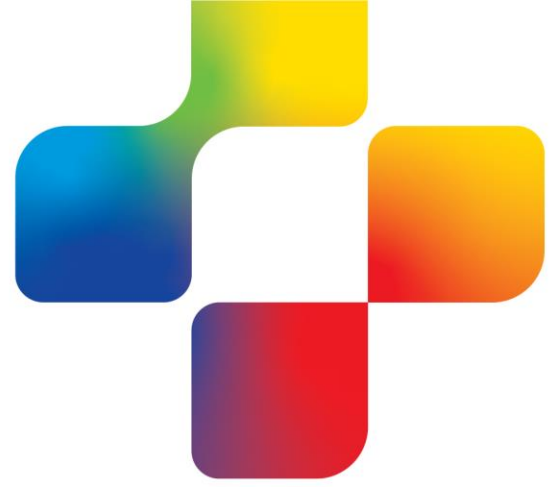


ESF IMPACT

newsletter



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IMPACT OF EMERGENCY SERVICE WORK ON FAMILIES



The impacts of emergency service work on first responder mental health are well known yet less is understood about the effects of service on families. A recent study (McKeon et al. 2021) found that compared to the general population, those who informally care for first responders have poorer health, as measured by psychological distress, sleep, quality of life and physical activity. Considering the role families play in the welfare of first responders, ESF sponsored [WPI students](#) to investigate the influence of a job characterised by trauma exposure, shift work and other psychosocial risks on partners, children, and others.

The students undertook a desktop review of literature and interviewed 25 family members. They found that when employees or volunteers sign up to work in the emergency management sector, they are inadvertently signing up their family too because the work so often pervades family life.

Interviewees reported positives from living with an emergency service worker, including a sense of pride and respect for what their family member does for the community. There were also negatives in relation to how the time demands of the work often disrupted personal and family life. Vicarious trauma associated with knowing about situations a loved one is exposed to could also be a burden that has an impact on the wellbeing of family members. Participants spoke about how, as young children, they were bewildered and deeply affected by the emotional state of their parent who had been impacted by the work they do.



The study provides recommendations including the need for resources and education to support people of all ages living with emergency service workers, and suggests using stories to acknowledge the important support role families play. [A short video produced by the students is a first step to illustrating the lived experience of family members.](#)

REACTIONS

This project was a break from the highly technical work our engineering students typically do. The students not only improved their library research and writing skills, but they developed effective ways to talk with community members and families about difficult topics through their interviews. Working outside the classroom, they gained a real appreciation for a sector most of them knew little about, and they now understand the enormity of emergency service workers' contributions. They also honed their creative skills and learned how it can influence change as they brought the voices and images of the families to life in a moving video that tells their story.

Lorraine Higgins, Teaching Professor at WPI

Thank you WPI and ESF. This presentation was very insightful and meaningful. These valuable insights and recommendations will really help to compliment the work we're doing to better support our people and their families.

Acting Health and Wellbeing Team Leader, DEWLP

It was so powerful to hear audio from the interviews, people sharing the pride and sacrifices made because their loved one works in emergency services. Thank you to ESF and WPI for exploring this gap in current research.

Lauren McDonald, Mental Health and Wellbeing Program Lead ESTA

Such a powerful message illustrating both the dedication and heartfelt pride in our emergency services workers - but also highlighting the less understood and significant impacts that this dedicated service has on families and loved ones

Catherine Greaves, CEO Life Saving Victoria

[VIEW A PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY HERE](#)