

## Community Services Vicarious and Secondary Trauma for casework staff

Dr Martin Daley at the School of Human Ethics at Western Sydney University is supervising research into impact exposure to child maltreatment has on people working in child protection. The survey will close on 30 November 2016.

The PSA strongly encourages all caseworkers and casework managers in child protection (including roles such as Intake, Child Protection, Out of Home Care and JIRT) to participate in this important research project.

Access the survey [HERE](https://uwsssap.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0Sv8JEM2eXuDqOF).  
([https://uwsssap.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0Sv8JEM2eXuDqOF](https://uwsssap.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0Sv8JEM2eXuDqOF))

Child Protection work is, by its very nature, traumatic and hazardous. The abuse and neglect our members encounter in their daily work is frequently distressing. Indeed the Wood Report stated the amount of sick leave taken by Community Services staff was higher than average. It also found there were a large amount of workers compensation claims, many for psychological injury.

In 2014 Professor Eileen Munro made a specific recommendation in her Practice First pilot review report which was not acted upon:

“Community Services should consider how to make more support available to caseworkers to help them cope with the increased psychological challenges of working closely with families where there are child protection concerns.”

The PSA has repeatedly raised concerns about the risk and incidence of vicarious and secondary trauma, yet Community Services does not refer or

raise awareness of this risk in staff induction, training, ongoing professional development or supervision.

Members remain concerned Community Services may be failing to meet its legislative health and safety obligations to provide a safe working environment for child protection casework staff and specifically has failed to provide systems that are designed to manage and prevent vicarious and secondary trauma associated with child protection practice.

The health and safety of members working in child protection is a key priority of the PSA and has been repeatedly raised with the Department, Secretary and Minister. To date, Community Services has failed to acknowledge this problem or do anything to address:

- excessive and unsafe workloads
- escalating number of workers compensation claims
- secondary and vicarious trauma of employees working in child protection
- the need for regular, quality supervision
- overly complex, practice-unfriendly systems and the administratively burdensome operating framework in child protection and OOHC
- increasing obstacles placed on staff in accessing their leave and flex leave entitlements.

By participating in this research, we will be able to gather hard evidence in relation to the negative impact of personal and workplace practices on workers in child protection.

