A Trauma-informed Approach to Supporting New Professionals in the Criminal Justice System: A Resource for Professionals, Educators, and Employers

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Sharing This Resource

This resource is free to download on our website https://magnoliaproject.com.au.

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Contents

Acknowledgements

This project was made possible by an Augusta Zadow Award from SafeWork SA. Augusta Zadow was a major force in establishing the Working Women's Trades Union and investigated complaints about women's wages, work safety, and sanitary conditions. She was a trade unionist and factory inspector, born on 27 August 1846. She supported female clothing workers in the East End of London before emigrating to Adelaide in 1877, where she improved working conditions in the clothing industry.

Many thanks to the women who assisted us in creating this resource: Loraine, Louisa, Joanne, Rachel, Delilah, Netra, Ella, Kailah, Meaghan, Tamiah, Madison, Sabrina, Emma, Evie, Cathy, Elizabeth, and Sahana.

Thanks also to Catia Malvaso for the beautiful cover artwork. Catia lives in Adelaide, South Australia and is a friend of Magnolia.

About Us

Andrew Day and Katherine McLachlan are co-founders of the Magnolia Project (https://magnoliaproject.com.au/), an unincorporated community-based program that delivers projects aligned with trauma-informed and compassionate justice values. In our work, we seek to apply our understanding of trauma-informed approaches to the needs of those receiving criminal justice services and professionals in the workforce. We have worked with SA prisons to provide books for incarcerated parents to gift to their children to mark a special occasion. We have partnered with the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement to publish a guide to support the development of culturally safe practices in South Australian courts.

About This Resource

This resource is a product of our experiences working across various criminal justice settings, our consultations with new and established professionals, and our reading of Australian and international research.

In what follows, we have sought to understand the needs of new criminal justice professionals, particularly women, from a trauma-informed perspective. This immediately focuses attention on recognising and responding to the psychological impacts of work and what this means for any organisation seeking to support employees. It also highlights the importance of self-care so that employees keep themselves safe and are equipped to cope with the stress that comes from their professional roles in the justice system.

In this resource, we draw on published research and the experiences of a group of early-career professionals who participated in a Magnolia roundtable event. The literature review, along with a series of short videos in which experienced and new criminal justice professional women talk about their experiences, is available for viewing on the Magnolia website (https://magnoliaproject.com.au).

These tell us that whilst many people seek careers in justice to promote the well-being of others, it is not uncommon for those new to the workforce to experience both direct and indirect harm in the workplace. There are particular concerns about exposure to workplace hostility, witnessing traumatic events whilst at work, and the availability of support from supervisors. These and other concerns are particularly relevant for women and young workers in workplaces characterised by institutionalised and masculine cultures and practices.

This purpose of this resource is to raise awareness of some of the issues and challenges that new professionals may encounter, to encourage reflection on how best to navigate them and—importantly from our perspective at the Magnolia project—identify ways to ensure that new professionals flourish in the criminal justice system and make a positive contribution to those they work with.

We welcome any questions, comments, or feedback about any aspect of this resource. You can contact us through the Magnolia website or by email at admin@magnoliaproject.com.au

Who is This Resource For?

As an **early-career professional**, this resource can help you understand aspects of the workplace that may be stressful. It offers suggestions for self-care and ideas about when and how to respond to specific incidents in the workplace. It encourages you to seek support, companionship, and validation as you progress through your career.

Look out for the cream text boxes in each section.

Educators may make this resource available (e.g., posted on course home pages) for those enrolled in capstone courses or completing the final year of study in disciplines such as criminology, law, psychology, and social work. This resource could also be a key reading for courses that consider self-care and/or organisational aspects of the criminal justice system.

Look out for the green text boxes in each section.

Employers may wish to distribute this resource to new employees in professional roles, especially women, as part of an induction program. It may also be used to support new employees in peer supervision and line management and in recruiting new staff members. You may also wish to consider the extent to which your organisation's policies and procedures are truly trauma-informed.

Look out for the purple text boxes in each section.

We have also included personal quotes from several different CJS professionals, some of whom have had successful careers and others who are early career workers.

Look out for the blue and brown boxes, to see what they have to say....

How to Use This Resource?

This resource has six sections. You can work through the material sequentially or you may wish to jump to the section that interests you most or seems most relevant.

1. Why Work in the Criminal Justice System?

Here, we consider some reasons professionals choose to work in this area and how rewarding it can be.

2. How is Trauma Relevant? What is a Trauma-informed Approach?

This section introduces the ideas of workplace hazards, stress, and trauma. We then describe the principles of trauma-informed practice and the importance of recognising and responding to traumatic experiences.

3. What About Gender?

We invite you to reflect on some of the experiences shared by early career women in the criminal justice system and consider when and why gender is important to success at work.

4. How do Trauma-informed Organisations Work?

This section discusses how organisations can work to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their staff and the legal rights and responsibilities of employees.

5. What About You?

In this section, we consider the importance of self-care and wellbeing.

6. Where to From Here?

The final section discusses where to from here for early-career workers, educators, and employers.

1. Why Work in the Criminal Justice System?

There is little doubt that criminal justice work is not only hugely important for those who receive our services and the wider community but also often incredibly rewarding for those who work in this area.

Many criminal justice professionals bring a strong sense of purpose to their work. They may feel they have a calling or vocation to work in this area. We also know that a primary motivation for First Nations people to work in this sector is often to help their communities. For new professionals, it is important to bring a sense of optimism to work—believing it is possible to make a difference and enjoy walking alongside those you work with as they also navigate the criminal justice system.

However, professionals may have negative experiences of work, including concerns about being able to "prove oneself" and "do the job effectively", "the danger of the job", and the "stressful nature of the work".

Every new professional in any area of the justice system can expect to encounter high levels of psychological distress among the people they work with. This can be due to the nature and duration of confinement, the emotional challenges that justice-involved people often face, or the psychological tolls of physical and social isolation and economic disadvantage.

In our conversations with early-career workers, we learned that they are usually quite realistic about the potential challenges—and rewards—of working in the justice system. For many people, a career in this area offers them the chance to contribute positively to those who receive services directly and to the community more broadly.

Over time, though, some will still decide that they no longer wish to work with justice-involved people. They may have various reasons for this, including stigma and personal experiences with crime, concerns about their ability to work effectively, or how to balance dual loyalties to clients and the system. Alternatively, reluctance to stay in the sector can be based on more practical considerations, such as the (perception of) poorer pay, working conditions, and professional opportunities.

What is clear, though, is that the early stages of a career are critical to feeling that the criminal justice system is where a person wishes to have a career. On the next page are some quotes about how professionals in different stages of their careers feel about their work.

"Some of it is really, really like confronting and upsetting... ...some of them have been like offending their whole lives... ...there's no other outcomes for them, and that's so sad because you... ...can do your best but you know that there's... ...a whole system kind of built against them."

Early career professional

"I have felt like for the first time ever, like I've found my place doing something like I've never felt so like, like I always look. I'm like, so excited to go into work."

Early career professional

"A deeply held value that drove me into this work and still does, is the belief that people can change. That doesn't mean I naively think everybody will change. But there's, you know, I guess there's capacity for that."

Experienced professional

"It's inspiring people to change... just seeing that journey in some of these men and women and where they start and then where they end up towards the end of their rehabilitative journey... That's really rewarding because sometimes you do see a huge shift."

Early career professional

"I really like that there's a lot of job satisfaction to be had with the criminal justice system and I don't need to hurt by the challenges, the workplace challenges or the personalities that you may face in the workplace. Ultimately, it is a job that comes with its challenges, but also lots of benefits. And there are lots of fulfilment to be had."

Early career professional

Why Do You Want to Work in the Criminal Justice System?

Early-career professionals

What it is that you would like to achieve in your career?
What challenges do you expect to encounter and how will you overcome these?

Educators

What can you do to ensure that your graduates have realistic expectations about work in the CJS?
How does your teaching inspire, motivate, and energise students to pursue careers in the CJS?

Employers

What can you do to ensure that the expectations of new staff are realistic?
What are the best ways to help staff sustain their enthusiasm for the work over time?

2. How is Trauma Relevant?

We think a trauma-informed approach can help new professionals successfully adjust to a new workplace and navigate the challenges that will inevitably arise in the early stages of their careers.

A useful starting point is to think about **psychosocial hazards** in the workplace. Common psychosocial hazards at work, according to Safe Work Australia are:

- Job demands
- Low job control
- Poor support
- Lack of role clarity
- Poor organisational change management
- Inadequate reward and recognition
- Poor organisational justice
- Traumatic events or material
- Remote or isolated work
- Poor physical environment
- Violence and aggression
- Bullying
- Harassment, including sexual and gender-based harassment, and
- Conflict or poor workplace relationships and interactions.

Stress results from exposure to psychosocial hazards in the workplace and the imbalance when a person perceives that the demands they face - or that are placed on them- exceed their ability to cope. Impacts may include fatigue, negative thinking, and distressing emotions (anxiety, fear, frustration, anger, self-pity, depression), substance abuse, physical illness.

It is very important to remember that:

- Stress is a natural and normal response to psychosocial hazards in the workplace,
- How stress at work manifests is not the same for everyone. This will depend on a person's background, characteristics, and life experiences, and
- Stress also causes most harm when severe, frequent, or prolonged.

At its core, however, trauma-informed practice is concerned with preventing **vicarious trauma** and **secondary traumatic stress** in staff members and ensuring that they do not experience **compassion fatigue** and **burnout**. On the next page, we describe these terms, which are important concepts in trauma-informed practice.

Trauma: A severe or intense reaction to a stressor that is usually frightening or distressing, including serious psychosocial hazards in the workplace. Impacts may include psychological distress, avoidance behaviours, hypervigilance, irritability, and poor emotional regulation.

Vicarious trauma: The psychological impact of helping professionals empathically engage with chronic and repeated exposure to traumatic material from clients. Impacts may include chronic (long-term, ongoing), including difficulty talking about feelings, worrying that you are not doing enough for your clients, diminished interest in things you enjoyed previously, diminished feelings of satisfaction/ personal accomplishment, low motivation, blaming others, feelings of hopelessness associated with work and/or client, changes in appetite, hypervigilance, depression, anxiety, suspiciousness, anger/irritability, intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and isolation.

Compassion fatigue: A reduced capacity or interest in bearing the suffering of others. Impacts may include physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion from prolonged exposure to other people's distress.

Secondary traumatic stress (STS): An acute state of physical or psychological distress that occurs by observations of, or exposure to, traumatising experiences. Impacts may include symptoms that resemble those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including intrusion, avoidance, and arousal.

Burnout: The product of a poor working environment and high levels of occupational stress. Impacts may include emotional exhaustion, the sense of feeling drained, and a sense of depersonalisation, which is linked to cynicism and the view of people at work being sources of problems.

Sometimes, you will experience events that are traumatic or are made aware of the potential for exposure to frightening or distressing events that have the potential to traumatise…

> *"Every single person that you talk to has either had their house broken into, had their house attempted to be broken into, or know someone who had their house broken into.*
>
> *Like I know most of the time these kids don't wanna hurt you. They don't want anything to do with you. They want the things that you have. [But] I 'm really struggling at night time because I'm just.. …it's like this constant state of like fear"*
>
> Early career professional

Sometimes, the people you meet at work and the stories you hear affect you the most…

"I have never seen such clear examples of how intergenerational trauma affects like these kids… And it's like they are like committing crimes that you would never even like, dream of being able to do. …And they have, like, multiple times, there's just hurt. Like they're just so hurt and they're so, like lost. It's just so sad."

Early career professional

"And then I remember the first week working [in the CJS] and dealing with the sexual, like sex offender stuff. And I remember literally texting my partner and I was like, I just wanna, like, set a boundary right now, pretty much that that our kids……aren't having sleepovers at anyone's house"

Early career professional

Sometimes, you will simply reflect on what it means for life outside of work…

And sometimes you may find it difficult to switch off when you leave work…

"… when I've been basically feeling overloaded with lots of details about a …person's traumatic experience or a client's historical experiences of neglect, abuse, different kinds of trauma, memories… I've noticed I have basically stuck in my own brain a little bit… I've had trouble, you know maybe switching off from that particular story or I have found myself imagining what that might have been like for a particular client, which was really challenging"

Experienced professional

Trauma and the Criminal Justice System

Different types of psychosocial hazards, stresses, and trauma may be more common in different areas of the criminal justice system:

Police officers are often the first responders at fatalities, regularly exposed to victims of domestic, sexual and child abuse, and facing the risk of injury or potential harm themselves. Dealing with death can be particularly challenging. Police can also be exposed to adversity in the form of assaults or threats of assaults. Some of the

more challenging work experiences reportedly relate to child and family abuse, shift work, and internal policies and practices perceived to be non-supportive. Policing organisations may themselves cause traumatic responses through the paramilitary, hypermasculine culture that is often present.

Prison officers may also be exposed to stressful situations, including violence between prisoners, prisoner deaths, challenging interactions with prisoners, prisoner self-harm and suicidal behaviours, and violence and interpersonal harm directed at staff.

Community corrections workers may also be exposed to threats of personal harm or the adversity of others, as well as organisational factors that lead to stress, such as high workloads and limited autonomy.

Lawyers are not always trained to recognise the precursors or acknowledge the risk of psychosocial harm or vicarious trauma. Legal practice can promote silence around issues relating to mental health and wellbeing, with the culture of the legal profession sometimes enabling and condoning sexual and gender harassment.[i]

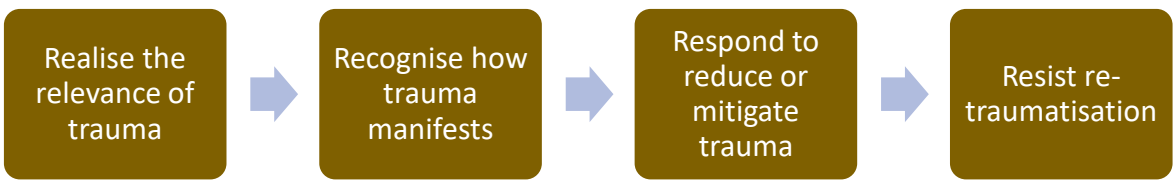
What is a Trauma-informed Approach?

At the most basic level, trauma-informed practice involves adopting strategies that protect the physical, psychological, and cultural safety of those who receive criminal justice services *and* those who provide them.

A trauma-informed approach is based on **realising** and **recognising** workplace factors (including characteristics of both the work environment and the job) that can lead to psychosocial harm and **responding** in ways that promote the trauma-informed principles of practice:

- Safety,
- Trust and transparency,
- Collaboration,
- Peer support,
- Empowerment, voice and choice, and
- Recognition of the relevance of gender, culture, and personal histories.

A trauma-informed approach aims to avoid or **resist** causing new or further trauma or psychosocial harm.[ii]



"You learn a lot about how trauma can affect your clients, but you don't have to learn about how it can vicariously affect you… …the things you read, the footage. You see, it does affect you a lot faster than you think it does".

Early career professional

It is essential, from a trauma-informed perspective, to **recognise** when trauma is present in the experiences of anyone who is working in the criminal justice system, whether they are experienced or new to the role. At its most basic level, trauma-informed practice involves adopting strategies that protect the physical, psychological, and cultural safety of those who receive criminal justice services *and* those who provide them.

A trauma-informed approach is based on **realising** and **recognising** workplace factors (including characteristics of both the work environment and the job) that can lead to psychosocial harm and **responding** in ways that promote the trauma-informed principles of practice.

Often, people are unprepared or ill-equipped to realise when a person has been exposed to trauma or how it is affecting them.

The quote below about hypervigilance illustrates just how hard it can be to distinguish between a trauma reaction and a common-sense approach to the realities of the risk of working in the criminal justice system.

"I just found it really interesting how much like change goes through personally working in the justice system, like there's nobody really talks about how much like the psychosocial harms or vicarious trauma as practitioners like you guys go through."

Early career professional

"The hypervigilance, I think, just becomes part of life, really. The way you walk, the way you sit, or you stand entering a restaurant. You know, you always know where the exits are. You watch people and you often can pick up very easily different people's energies. You become very protective."

Experienced professional

How is Trauma Relevant for You?

Early-career professionals

How will you know if you are experiencing a high level of stress? What are the warning signs for you? What is the difference between feeling stress and experiencing workplace related trauma? How do you monitor emotional exhaustion?

Educators

How do you prepare your graduates to understand stress, traumatisation, and burnout? What can students learn from those who have experienced burnout in their careers and those who have not? What supports do you put in place to support people after they graduate?

Employers

What measures are in place in your organisation to monitor vicarious traumatisation and burnout? What support is made available to those who are experiencing stress?

3. What About Gender?

It is important to draw attention to some specific challenges women entering the justice system may encounter. From a trauma-informed perspective, gender is key - consider the principle of practice "gender, culture, and personal histories".

We know that criminal justice agencies are typically dominated by men, both in terms of the gender profile of those in the system (most are men) and, to a lesser extent, of the workforce itself. So, we wanted to hear how women who were new to the sector experienced gender in the workplace.

The quotes on this page act as a reminder that for women in the criminal justice system there are aspects of the work environments that affect how safe and how trustworthy it is. And this may impact on the extent to which early career professionals are able to flourish in their work.

"But it's like, why are women always having to put themselves out in a certain way themselves in order to gain … the same power when men just get it naturally?"

Early career professional

"I honestly think if there was one or two other males in this room, this conversation would not even be in this direction, because we wouldn't be able to be empathetic, compassionate, transparent without fear of ridicule, judgement, criticism" [and when men are present…] we're much more mindful about what we say"

Early career professional

"One of the biggest things which I think a lot will relate to when I first started, I had this idea of I wanna help others. And then as a female, having that idea, you get criticised.

I had a male colleague that made a comment of those who believe they can rescue people are the ones who breach boundaries. And I'm like, I'm not asking to rescue. I'm asking to give people an opportunity, but like, it actually likes stuck with me. So then I felt guilty having anything compassion as a clinician."

Early career professional

How is Gender Relevant For You?

Early-career professionals

What difference does it make identifying as woman in a criminal justice professional role?

How can I recognise and respond to experiences where I am being treated differently because of my gender?

Educators

What do you aim to teach students about gender in the workplace?

What does gender-responsivity look like in your course materials?

Employers

What measures are in place in your organisation to support people who identify as female?

How do you know when gender discrimination occurs in the workplace?

4. How do Trauma-informed Organisations Work?

Understanding Legal Rights and Responsibilities

It is important to remember that it is not the employee's responsibility to tolerate workplaces that cause harm. Understanding rights and responsibilities relevant to work health and safety is important.

South Australia has introduced new regulations to help workers and employers manage the risk of psychological injuries and illnesses in the workplace. Under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2012* (SA), these changes provide better guidance to workers and employers of their obligations under the Act.

Broadly speaking, these make it clear that employers have a primary duty of care to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of all workers (including volunteers and contractors). Failure to do so can attract significant criminal penalties, including fines and/or imprisonment. Among the many legislated measures to ensure that employers meet their duty of care are the need to:

- Provide workers with adequate information, training, and instruction relevant to their jobs,
- Consult with workers individually,
- Review past incidents to identify and implement strategies to minimise recurrence, and
- Implement approved codes of practice on the management of both workplace health and safety risks and workplace psychosocial hazards.

The main purpose of work health and safety laws is to protect workers by controlling (i.e., eliminating or minimising) any risks to health and safety arising from exposure to workplace hazards that can cause physical or psychological harm or injury. While physical hazards can cause physical and psychological harm, psychosocial hazards can arise from the design or management of work, the nature of the working environment, workplace interactions or behaviours, or workplace equipment.

Safe Work Australia has also developed a Model Code of Practice for managing psychosocial hazards under s 274 of the Model Work Health and Safety Bill 2023.[iii] This provides practical guidance for employers to achieve the requisite work health and safety standards. This requires consideration of:

- Job demands, or aspects of the job associated with psychological costs (e.g., sustained time pressure, long working hours, excessively high workload, role uncertainty, and/or workplace conflict), and
- Job resources, or physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job that help meet job demands and achieve work goals (e.g., insufficient

amounts of autonomy, work breaks, training, role clarity, supervisor support, job security, organisational support).

Additionally, changes to the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) place a positive duty on organisations and businesses to take reasonable steps to eliminate sexual harassment. Trauma-informed practice is key to achieving this.[iv]

What Can be Expected of Criminal Justice Agencies that Aspire to be Trauma-informed?

What does it mean for employers to create a trauma-informed workplace for staff? In short, the workplace should show you it cares for new professionals, especially women who may experience additional challenges working in the sector. It should encourage you to develop and maintain self-care strategies and offer opportunities for peer support.

The workplace should show sensitivity to stress and an awareness of vicarious trauma and burnout in young female professionals and encourage flourishing. "Flourishing" refers to psychosocial functioning, achieved by meeting the human psychological need for relationships, respect, self-esteem, competence, meaning, and purpose in life. It is a reminder that criminal justice system work is inevitably concerned with human flourishing and how this is closely related to self-care strategies.

Guidelines for the legal profession have been written to provide a roadmap to help the profession assess and address workplace factors known to impact psychological health and safety.[v] Below is a broader series of questions that employers might ask about their efforts to become more trauma-informed[vi]:

- **Governance and Leadership:** How do the agency's mission statement and/or written policies and procedures include a commitment to providing trauma-informed services and support?
- **Policy:** How do human resources policies address the impact of working with people who have experienced trauma?
- **Physical Environment:** How has the agency developed mechanisms to address gender-related physical and emotional safety concerns (e.g., gender-specific spaces and activities)?
- **Engagement and Involvement:** How is transparency and trust among staff and clients promoted?
- **Training and Workforce Development**: How does the agency address the emotional stress that can arise when working with individuals who have had traumatic experiences? How does the organisation ensure that all staff (direct care, supervisors, front desk and reception, support staff, housekeeping, and maintenance) receive basic training on trauma, its impact, and strategies for trauma-informed approaches across the agency and personnel functions? How

does ongoing workforce development/ staff training support staff in developing the knowledge and skills to work sensitively and effectively with trauma survivors? What workforce development strategies are in place to assist staff in working with peer support and recognising the value of peer support as integral to the organisation's workforce?

What Does it Mean to Work in a Trauma-informed Workplace?

Here we include what it means to feel supported and safe at work, based on comments from the early career professional women who participated in the Magnolia roundtable. They map out what a trauma-informed approach in the workplace would look and feel like for new professionals.

We also asked these early career professionals how they know when an organisation is responding in a trauma-informed way. These were their responses…

"Valuing and practicing inclusivity"
"Taking safety concerns seriously"
"Addressing employee concerns"
"Listening to them"
"Included them in decisions that directly impact you"
"Genuine caring"
"Investing in training"
"Acknowledging systemic problems"
"Recognising people's differences and working to their strengths"

Safety

…when physical and psychological safety is prioritised within the organisation for staff and those who receive the service. It follows that understanding how people perceive safety is key.

We also asked the early career professionals what safety at work looks and feels like. Their comments are here.

"Value and practice inclusivity"
"Treated equal"
"Experiences of women/minority groups are considered"
"Safety concerns are taken seriously"
"Remind staff about supports and don't normalise traumatic experiences"
"Duress alarms, cameras, safety protocols"

Trustworthiness and Transparency

… when an organisation conducts its business transparently. It follows that the goal is to build trust among all who interact with the service.

"Free of personal judgement"
"Proactive in responding to/addressing employee concerns"
"Provide and encourage upward progression"
"Someone who you can be vulnerable with in sharing thoughts/ concerns.
"Supportive and receptive"

Collaboration and Mutuality

… when everyone has a role. Power differences between staff and with the people receiving the service are levelled in favour of shared decision-making.

"Consult staff about… changes to my responsibilities.
"Trauma of the job.
"Coping mechanisms and support services.
"Workload expectations.
"Psychological health.
"Barriers and limitations.
"Workplace boundaries.
"Ensuring well-rounded safety.
"Importance of self-care.

Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

… when individuals' strengths and experiences are recognised and built upon. It follows that the organisational culture is one of listening to all stakeholders rather than promoting compliance.

"You are listened to"
"You feel you matter"
"Co-workers feel safe to discuss differing opinions"
"Everyone is heard and valued"
"You are included in decisions that directly impact you"

Peer Support

… when people's stories and lived experiences are valued and recognised as key to building safety, establishing trust, and growth after healing.

"Non-judgemental, informed colleagues"
"Open and safe conversations—focused "team time"
"Team-building activities, e.g., coffee catchups, relationships with other employees outside of work"
"Checking in with genuine care"
"Feeling safe to debrief days/weeks after an incident rather than "move on"

Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

... when the organisation actively moves past biases, offers access to gender-responsive services, leverages cultural connections, and recognises and addresses historical trauma.

"Invests in training"
"Mandatory intensive cultural training"
"Training is designed and delivered by the cultures we work with"
"Recognising and addressing the complexities of intergenerational trauma"
"Understanding co-morbid presentations"
"Holds employees accountable for cultural insensitivity/ disrespect"
"Intersectionality"
"Understanding cultural differences.
"Acknowledge systematic problems and address to the best of their ability"
"Recognise people's differences and play to their strengths."

What Do Trauma-informed Workplaces Mean to You?

Early-career professionals:
Do you know your rights in the workplace? Do you know how to make a complaint about aspects of the work that potentially breach your rights? Who should you turn to for support and advice? What would it look like in your professional life to work in a trauma-informed environment? What will you do if you feel that the principles of safety, trust, and empowerment are not being adhered to? How do you monitor emotional exhaustion?

Educators:
Do graduates leave study with a clear understanding of the duty of care of employers? Are students prepared to recognise and respond to psychosocial hazards in the workplace? Do you connect graduates with professional associations and unions to help them understand their rights? How do you prepare your graduates to not experience trauma in the workplace? What alumni supports can you put in place for your graduates?

Employers:
How does the WHS legislation interface with attempts to provide a trauma-informed workplace? How can your agency best reduce psycho-social hazards? In your agency, are employees actively encouraged to report hazards? What steps has your organisation taken to eliminate sexual harassment? What measures are in place in your organisation to encourage trust, mutual support, and collaboration? How do you actively support women in the workplace?

5. What About You?

Resilience and Self-care

Psychological resilience is the ability to "bounce back" from adverse life experiences. It can be influenced by both personal traits (e.g., self-confidence) and by environmental/ situational factors (e.g., the availability of social supports).

Criminal justice workers who are highly resilient will be less likely to report burnout or other forms of emotional exhaustion due to their jobs and will report fewer desires to resign. Even those at high risk of exposure to traumatic events can learn to become more resilient.

Self-care can be understood as the actions that a person takes to achieve optimal physical and mental health. This often means engaging in activities that promote emotional well-being and alleviate feelings of burnout (e.g., meditating, mindfulness, journaling, counselling, and self-compassion). An extended failure to engage in self-care can result in emotional exhaustion, stress, and burnout.

Due to the unique challenges of working in the criminal justice system, every staff member should engage in self-reflection and, where available, supervision and debriefing.

The early-career workers we spoke to recognised the value of professional supervision—especially the social workers and psychologists, for whom this is standard practice.

> *"Speak up and speak out about things… …but that's not always possible or invited by my workplace."*
>
> Early career professional

To prevent psychosocial harms, it is also important to maintain a sense of balance and implement coping strategies (such as diversifying work roles, avoiding media content, appropriate humour, and exercise).

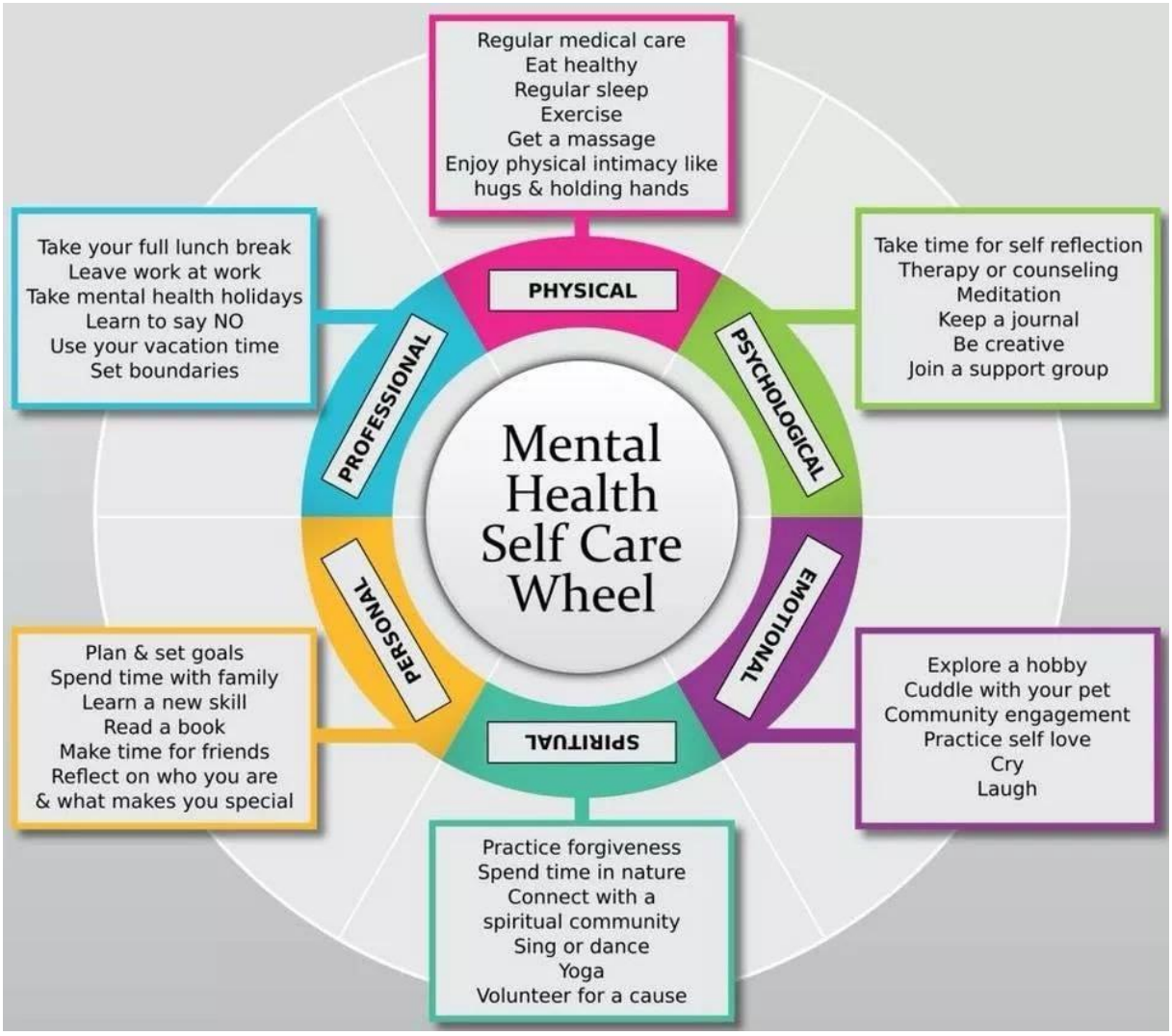
> *"It's very important to set… boundaries as well as your expectations of people, the colleagues you work with, the clients that you work with, right from day one. Because reputation is very important."*
>
> Experienced Professional

You can achieve wellness by recognising the warning signs and not being ashamed to seek help. Warning signs include:

- Feeling irritated about clients,
- Experiencing a low level of energy,
- Conflict or problems at home,
- Viewing the world and the people in it as unsafe, and
- Losing your sense of humour.

You can do many other things to help manage and reduce stress. The figure below shows different strategies across various functional domains that can help promote self-care. Think about which of the things listed you currently do.

What Else Can You Do to Practice Self-Care?



Strategies to Prevent Trauma Reactions

Three main strategies have been identified to prevent trauma reactions at work.[vii]

1. **Preventing and protecting from the spillover of traumatic stress**, such as:
    - Using trauma screening techniques with clients that are focused on current presentations rather than details of past traumatic events,
    - Applying low-impact disclosure methods to reduce trauma in colleagues and family members during formal or informal debriefings,
    - Developing a personal early detection system for the early stages of trauma-related reactions as a prompt to engage in support-seeking and self-care,
    - Identifying organisational strategies that are amenable to trauma-informed practices.
2. **Coping in the presence of trauma** by:
    - Adopting strategies for maintaining regulation in the presence of trauma-related material,
    - Identifying strategies for responding in helpful ways to clients who choose to disclose trauma stories,
    - Strategies for responding in the here and now to clients exhibiting posttraumatic symptoms or triggered by trauma reminders.
3. **Recovery in the aftermath of trauma exposure** through:
    - Understanding the role of appraisals in posttraumatic and secondary traumatic reactions and developing strategies to counter them in our own trauma stories and debriefing of colleagues,
    - Developing a culture of mutual support protective against trauma and stress among staff and between staff and supervisors,
    - Developing repertoires of individualised effective self-care strategies accessible: during the workday; during the transition between home and work; and while at home,
    - Developing a repertoire of longer-term strategies to enhance overall resilience and wellbeing, and
    - Identifying strategies for tapping into sources of compassion satisfaction, vicarious resilience, and personal meaning in trauma-related work.

Managing The Emotional Impact of Your Work

The following checklist has been adapted from research conducted on the emotional impact of providing counselling or therapy.[viii] It relates to the ethical imperative of self-care activities to maintain and promote emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing to best meet your professional responsibilities. It is relevant to all criminal justice professional work and provides useful advice about self-care.

(Note that when we refer to "clients" below, these may be any people you interact with during your work, such as people who have offended and people who are victims of crime, as well as members of the general public. Depending on your role, some of these strategies may resonate and make more sense than others.)

- Ask your clients what has been most helpful. Take to heart their frequent compliments about your presence, affirmation, and support.
- Resist the pressures to define yourself as a nameless and disembodied "provider" and maintain your individual identity as a distinctive professional practitioner.
- Internalise the relational contradictions of your work to promote community safety and help people.
- Assess your motives for becoming a criminal justice professional and consider how these facilitate or hinder your effective self-care.
- Prioritise your self-care by putting specific times in your schedule to practice specific self-care strategies.
- Develop self-empathy (i.e., your capacity to notice, value, and respond to your own needs as generously as you attend to clients' needs).
- Practice what you tell your clients about nourishing the self and embrace a mix of effective strategies.
- Assess your own self-care on a weekly or monthly basis.
- Track your self-care by maintaining a journal, calendar, or behavioural log of activities.
- Complete structured questionnaires on burnout and self-care periodically to facilitate your self-awareness and self-monitoring.
- Ask someone significant (such as a friend, partner or trusted colleague) for honest feedback about your work-life balance, functioning, and self-care.
- Value and grow the person you are as a criminal justice professional.

What about Self-care Strategies for You?

Early-career professionals
What does your self-care plan look like?
How do you monitor emotional exhaustion?

Educators:
Do you talk with students about self-care strategies?
Do you talk with students about the importance of thriving not just surviving at work?

Employers:
How can your organisational leaders promote self-care and employee wellbeing?

6. Where To From Here?

This resource has used a trauma-informed perspective to draw attention to some issues that new professionals may face in the criminal justice system. As you embark on your career, it is important to ensure that you feel positive about your job, develop strong work relationships, and do meaningful work that accomplishes things you value.

Good luck!!!

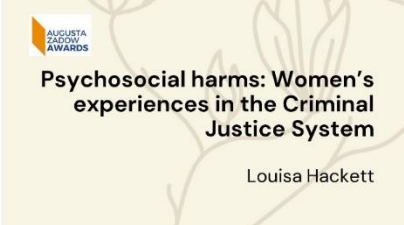
> *"Enjoy the work. It's meaningful. It is purposeful. But make sure you always are looking after yourself. Ask for help when you need it. Your well-being is always number one and on finishing, don't let it change you too much. Never lose your sparkle or your drive."*
>
> Experienced Professional

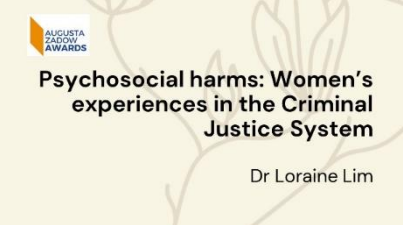
Videos

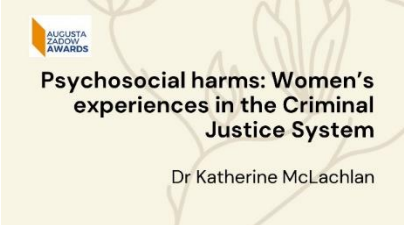
Short videos featuring early-career and experienced professional women in the criminal justice system are available on our website. These women generously share their experiences at work and offer helpful suggestions and advice for those embarking on a career in criminal justice. Take the time to see what they say and reflect on their experiences as you prepare—or help others prepare—for working in this sector.

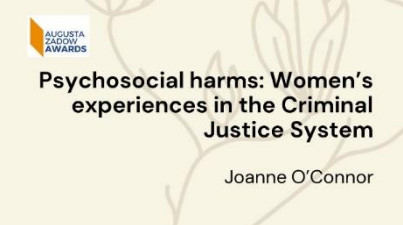
If you have a PDF copy of this report, you can click on the images below to be directed to the videos featuring criminal justice professionals and early career workers talking about their experiences and expectations of working in the criminal justice system.

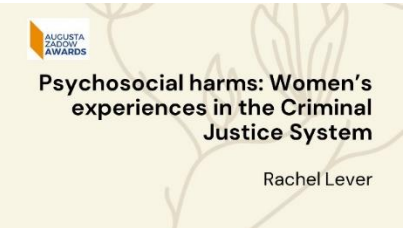
The direct link is: https://magnoliaproject.com.au/our-projects/winning-the-augusta-zadow-award/augusta-zadow-trauma-informed-resources-to-support-new-professionals-in-the-criminal-justice-system/

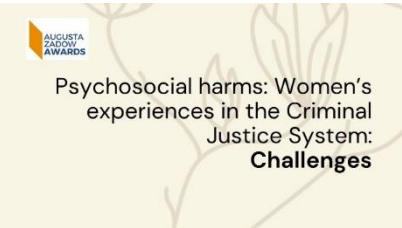


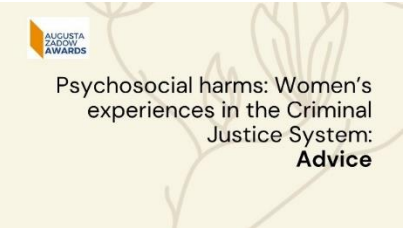


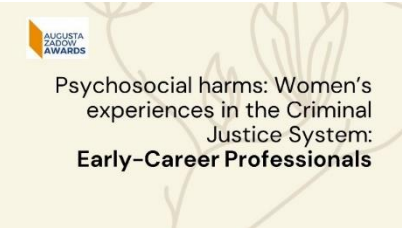












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