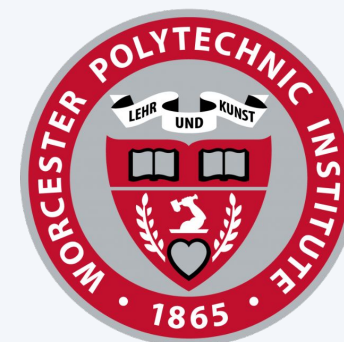




Hidden Voices

Exploring the Unseen Impact of Emergency Service Work on the Children of Victoria's First Responders

Megan Caten, Aiden Deady, George Love, Ellie Minor



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Our Goal

To identify how the nature of emergency service work in the Victorian emergency management sector **inadvertently impacts children** of emergency service workers, and suggest effective **support** options for these children to improve their wellbeing.

Objectives

Learn the types of experiences children of ESWs have had regarding their parents' occupation

Identify what children would find useful in terms of support

Bring attention to the experiences of these children and the need for action through persuasive media

Provide **recommendations** for support options

Project Inputs

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graph TD; A[Project Inputs] --> B[Literature Review]; A --> C[Children of Emergency Service Workers]; A --> D[Sector Leaders & WorkCover Agents]; A --> E[Mental Health Practitioners & Academic Experts];
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Literature
Review

Children of
Emergency
Service
Workers

Sector Leaders &
WorkCover Agents

Mental Health Practitioners
& Academic Experts

Literature Review



Respond & Protect

Emergency service workers are subject to trauma on a daily basis

- Death/grief
- Injury
- Violence
- Personal danger
- Verbal threats

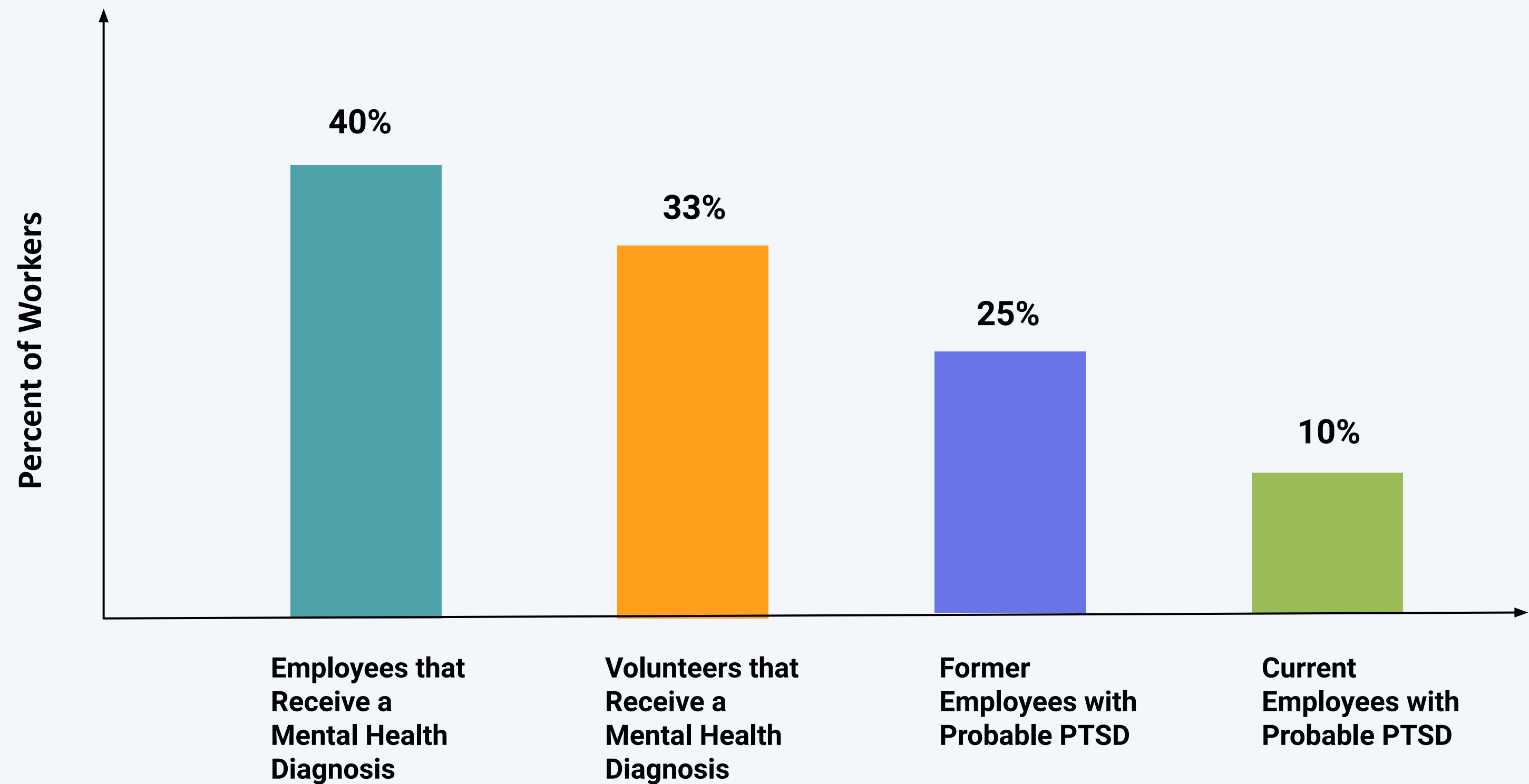


Emergency service workers also experience several workplace stressors

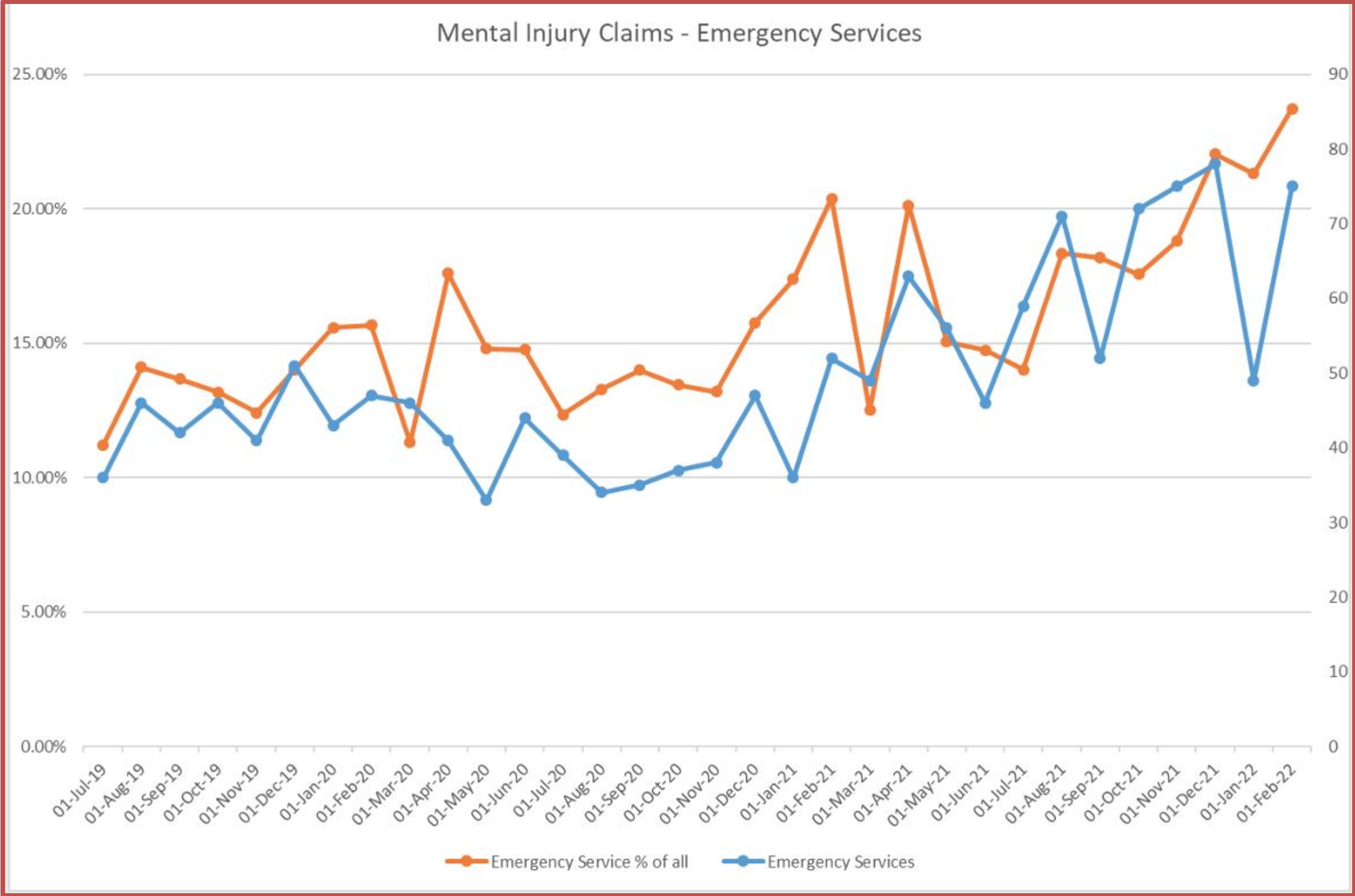
- Heavy workload
- Unpredictable
schedules
- Interpersonal conflict



Mental health diagnoses are common among emergency service workers



**Since 2020,
mental injury
claims from
emergency
services
employers have
increased**



Source: WorkSafe Victoria, 2022

These stressors are brought home and impact their families





However, few studies exist that specifically examine the effects of emergency service work on children

The relationship between a parent and child directly impacts a child's well-being





**Strong support networks
lead to better well-being
for children**

Support resources generally available

Programs



- Children's programs
- Counseling programs
- Summits

Online Resources



- Educational resources
- Online forums
- Self-help programs

Financial Aid



- Scholarships
- Bereavement assistance
- Emergency hardships grants

Focus Groups

Risks and ethical considerations

1

Confidentiality



- Verbal and written consent
- Participant names held only by ESF

2

Anonymity



- No identifying information used in quotes or deliverables
- Video was not saved

3

Sensitivity



- Carefully worded and vetted questions
- Presence of mental health professional

Focus group specifics

- Children of first responders in Victoria
- 15-22 year-olds
- Online (via Zoom)
- Two interviewers
- Audio was recorded
- Mental health professional present



The poster is for the Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) and features a blue and white color scheme. At the top left is the ESF logo with the tagline 'better together'. The main text asks if the respondent's parent or guardian works or volunteers for a Victorian emergency service. A red circular graphic contains the age requirement (16-22) and a statement about chatting with them. A 'WHY?' section explains the goal of understanding the impact on families. A photo of a firefighter with his family is shown. At the bottom, a group of teenagers is featured with a call to action to help ESF understand how to support their kids. A small note at the bottom right says 'See Below For More Information'.

ESF EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION *better together*

Does your parent or guardian work or volunteer for a Victorian emergency service?

Are you aged between 16 - 22?

Then we would love to chat with you!

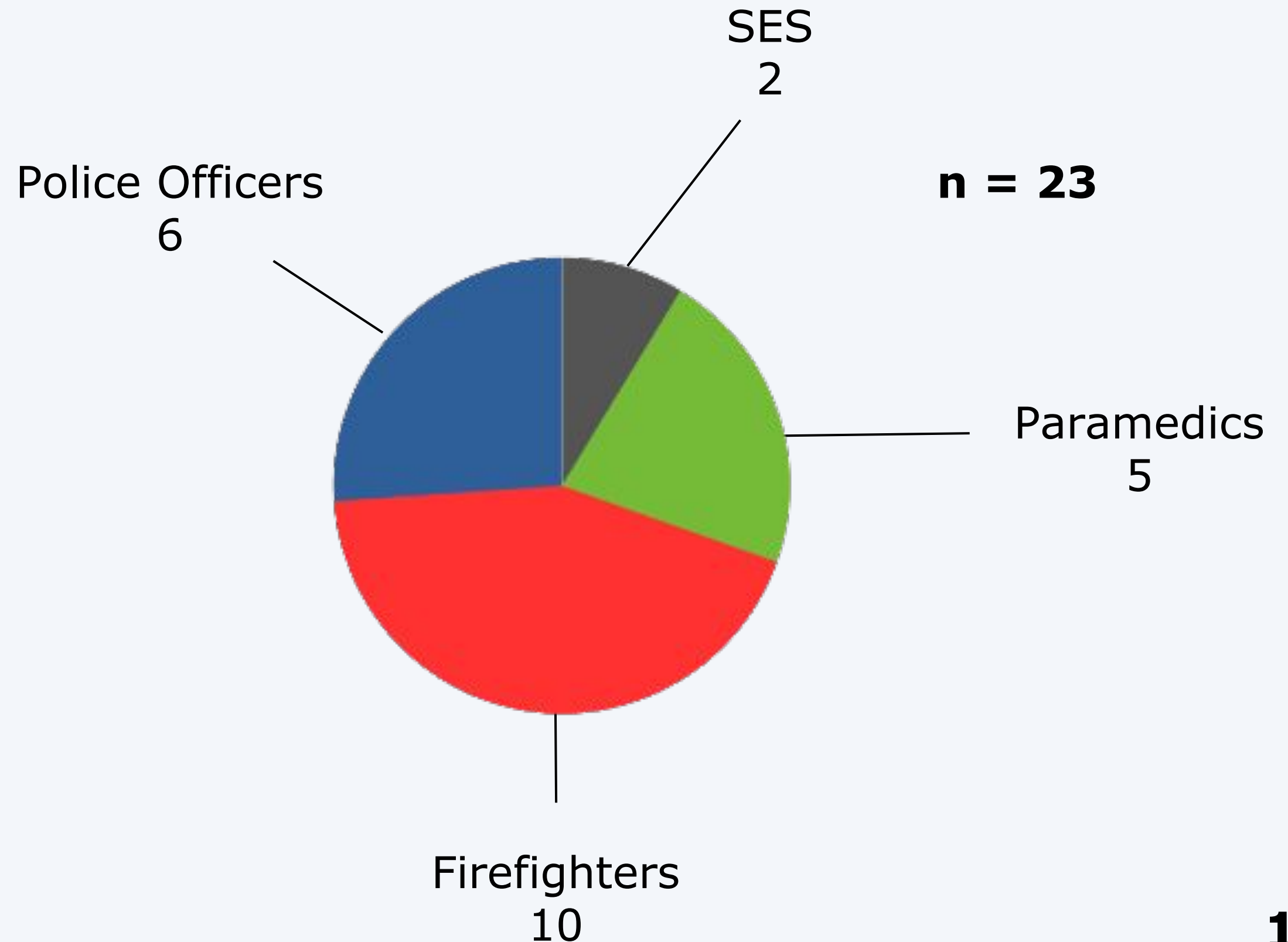
WHY?

We know it can be tough being the kid of an emergency services worker. This type of work can have a big impact on the whole family - but we want to hear about how it impacts YOU!

Can your teenager help ESF understand how we can support kids of ES workers?

See Below For More Information

Focus group demographics: Parent Occupation



Focus group topics

1

Were these children affected by their parents' work?

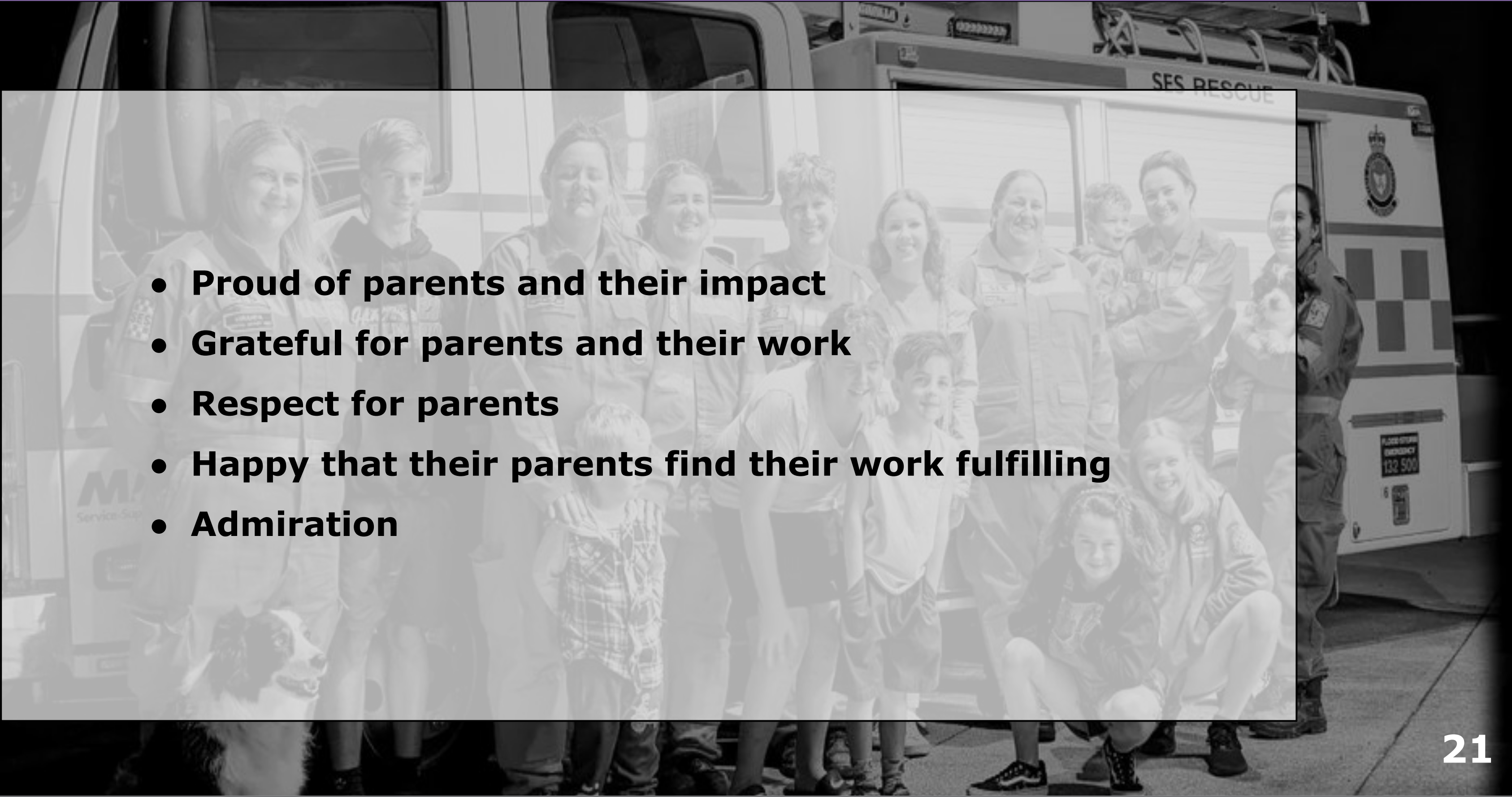
2

How did they manage these impacts?

3

How can we better support these children?

Children recognize the value of their parents' work

- 
- A black and white photograph of a group of approximately 15 people, including adults and children, posing in front of a white emergency vehicle. The vehicle has "SES RESCUE" written on its side and a logo featuring a crown and a shield. The group consists of several adults, some in uniform, and several children of various ages. A dog is visible in the lower left corner. The image is semi-transparent, allowing the text overlay to be visible.
- **Proud of parents and their impact**
 - **Grateful for parents and their work**
 - **Respect for parents**
 - **Happy that their parents find their work fulfilling**
 - **Admiration**

However, children face unique challenges due to their parents' occupation

- **Worry/fear for parent's safety**
- **Confusion over parent's behavior or absence**
- **Disappointment over a parent missing events**
- **Hypervigilance due to hearing about parent's experiences at work**
- **Bullying/isolation from peers because of parent's occupation**

Sector Leaders & WorkCover Agents

What we wished to understand

- What is currently being done to support the children of emergency service workers?
- How are these support options being utilized?
- What is the effectiveness of these support options?
- What other support options could be effective?

Currently, the primary method of support these organizations offer is through EAP programs. However, many expressed the need to offer more.

Mental Health Practitioners & Academic Experts



Life Supports



Prodigal Family Services

Addiction Specialist, Counselling & Consulting

"Connection Through Crisis"



**Military and Emergency
Services Health Australia**

Findings

- Children are often negatively impacted by their parents work
- Communication between the parent and child is weakened
- Mental health literacy is vital for children
- Children prefer to speak to someone who understands their experiences
- Interactions between children can be beneficial to mental health

Key Findings

Summary of findings

Many children express feelings of **pride** regarding their parents work. However, the job demands, and parents desire to **protect** their children, makes children feel **isolated** from their parents.

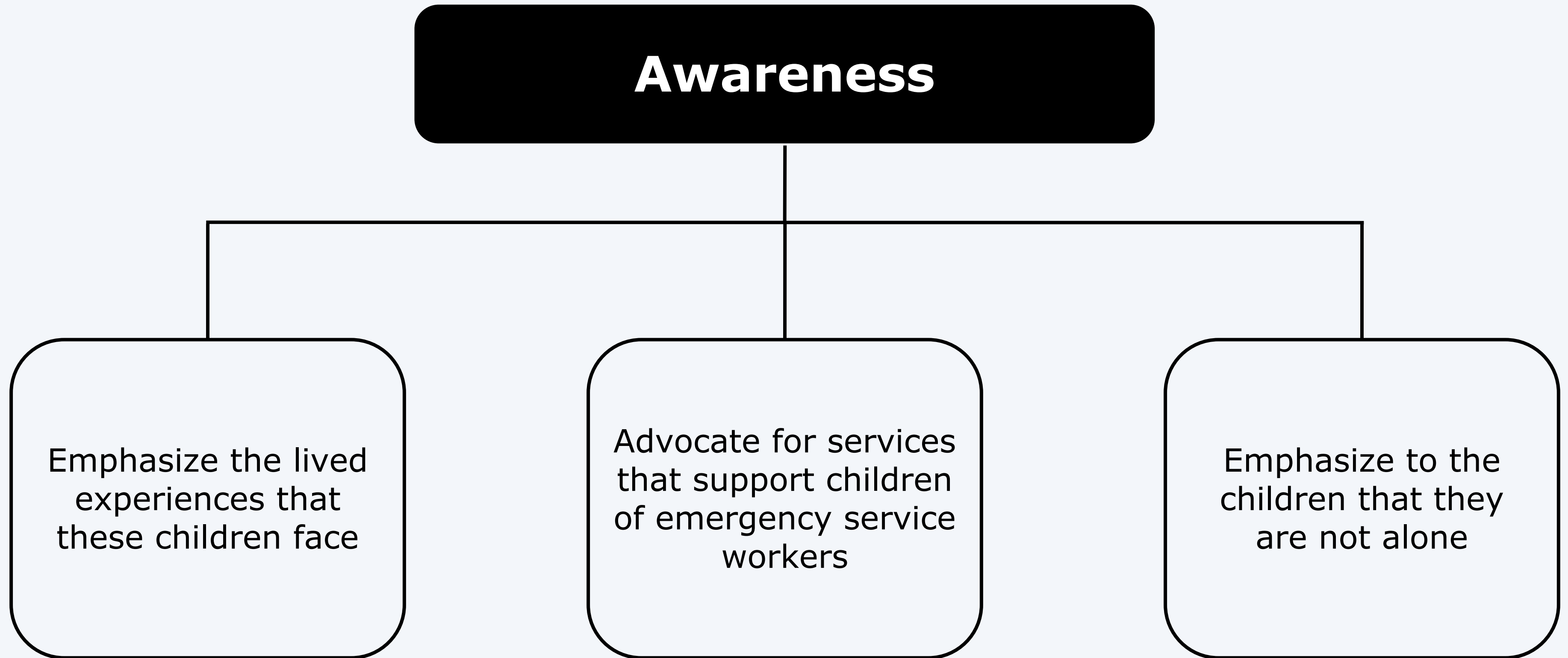
Some children are **bullied** as a result of their parents' occupation. Children also may become more **hypervigilant** when exposed to their parents' job experiences.

Children often **do not understand** the mental health issues their parents are experiencing, and **stigma** exists around reaching out to seek professional help.

Children are **eager to seek support** and talk to people who understand their experiences, and **organizations are keen to better support these children.**

Recommendations: A.C.E.

Recommendations - A.C.E.



Recommendations - A.C.E.

Connection

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graph TD; Connection[Connection] --> Online[Online:]; Connection --> InPerson[In-person:]; Online --> OnlineList["• Social media chat groups<br>• Online Events"]; InPerson --> InPersonList["• Bring your child to work day<br>• Brigade barbeque"]
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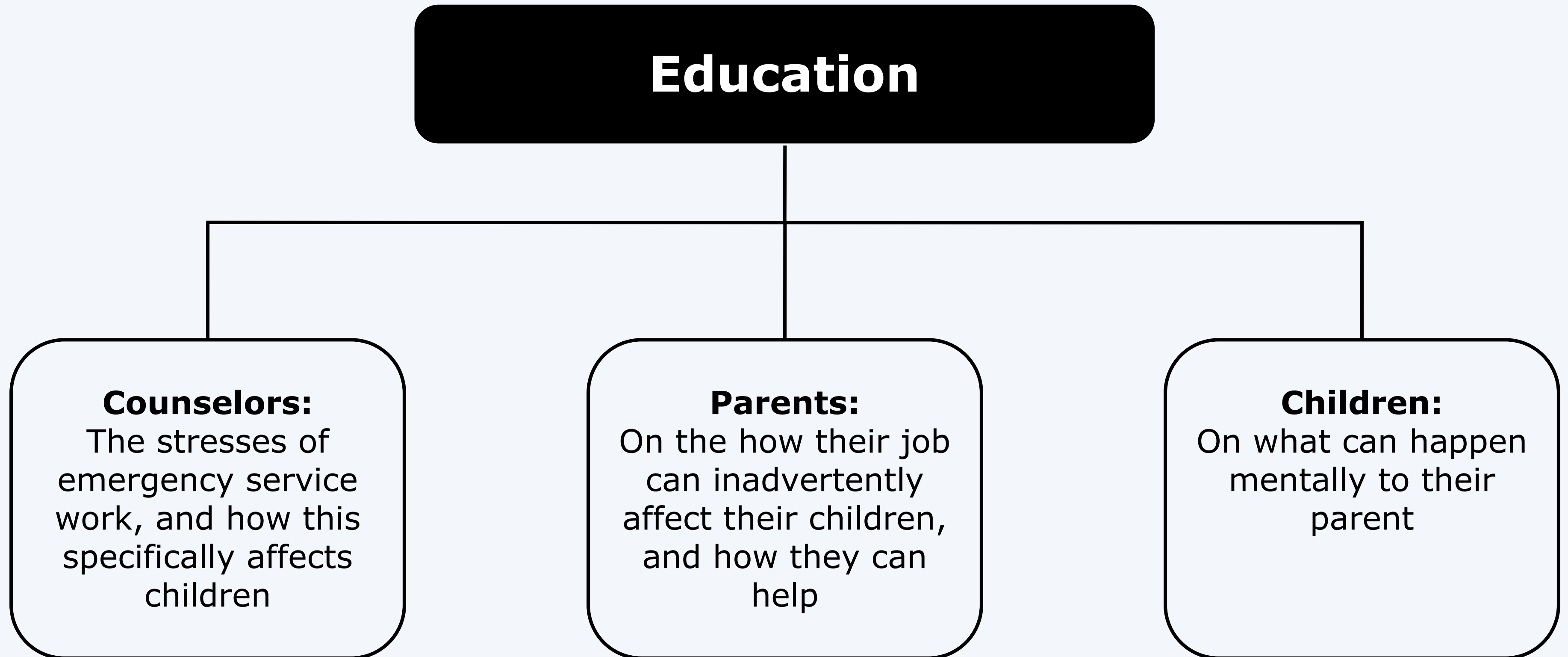
Online:

- Social media chat groups
- Online Events

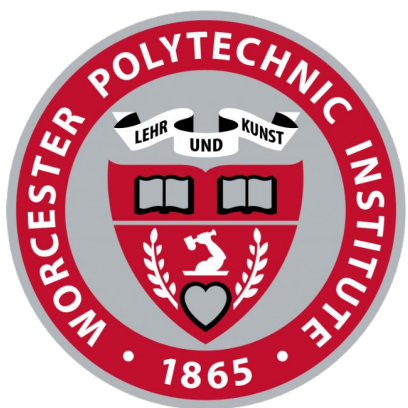
In-person:

- Bring your child to work day
- Brigade barbeque

Recommendations - A.C.E.



Thank you to the Emergency Services Foundation and Siusan MacKenzie, Murray Sibbison, Naomi Palmer, and all of the people we reached out to in order to make this study possible.



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