



National Centre of Excellence
for Complex Trauma

Breaking Free

Welcome to the August edition of Breaking Free

Welcome to this month's Breaking Free. Around the country we are still facing the challenges of COVID-19. Extended lockdowns and social isolation have affected many of us and our community. Mental health is now a common topic in mainstream conversation, even for those without experiences of complex trauma. Different knowledge and tools can help support our mental health and well-being. That's why this month we are focussing on how our body responds to trauma and stress, and how we can learn how to calm our nervous system and self-regulate.

We've also included links to our Blue Knot fact sheets on Stress Response and Trauma Response. These resources can help explain and build understanding around the triggers, the stress response and the trauma response. There is also more information which may be useful on the Blue Knot website www.blueknot.org.au

A special thank you to our contributors, Celeste and Jill who have shared their experiences through their writing and artwork. And on that note we feature a colouring book which we hope you might find useful.

As always, if you are wanting support, information or referrals, please do reach out to the Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service for survivors of childhood trauma and those supporting them on 1300 657 380, Monday – Sunday, between 9am - 5pm AEST, OR National Counselling and Referral Service – Disability on 1800 421 468 for people with disability and experiences of trauma and those supporting them between 9am and 6pm AEST, Monday to Friday and between 9am and 5pm AEST on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays.

Until next time, take care.
The Blue Knot Team



Finding a sense of safety and connection

As human beings we are primed to detect threat and our survival system exists to respond to threat and keep us safe. Many survivors have lived in a world which was full of danger, often as a child but also at different ages and stages. This can mean that their stress response system remains on high alert and heightened into fight and flight responses. When you have lived under threat it can be hard to return to a state of calm but there are a range of things you can do to help calm your nervous system. We'll share some of these further down in this article.

At the moment with a resurgence of COVID and lockdowns many of us are additionally under threat and this can further trigger our stress response systems,

especially if they have been previously primed. This is why it is important to learn a little bit about nervous systems and how they work.

We also know that when under threat we can also have other responses - freeze and fawn which are shut down responses. There are different systems in our nervous system which mediate these responses – the sympathetic for our fight and flight response and the parasympathetic for the shut-down responses of freeze and fawn. We also refer to these states as being those of hyperarousal and hypoarousal.

A nerve called the vagus nerve is the one which looks after our parasympathetic nervous system. Let's talk

a little bit about the vagus nerve and a theory called the Polyvagal Theory, developed by Stephen Porges. It's important as it forms the basis of how we as human beings can find a sense of safety and calm. The vagus nerve has two branches, the one (dorsal) which causes us to shut down, become numb, disconnect from others, or dissociate and another one (ventral) which is about social engagement. Just as the sympathetic nervous system activates survival responses to danger and threat so the ventral vagal responds to cues of safety. It supports our ability to become calm, engage socially, connect and centre ourselves.

It can be helpful to start to recognise how we feel in different states when different parts of their nervous system are operating. Doing this is often not easy especially when we experience strong emotions which we find hard to manage. Often this is a gradual process, and one for which support can be helpful such as with a counsellor. For example, in a hyperaroused or sympathetic state, you might feel anxious, jumpy, angry and out of control. When you are in a parasympathetic state and the dorsal vagus is operating, you may feel numb, withdrawn, shut down, disconnected and hopeless. When your social engagement system (ventral vagal) is operating you may feel connected, engaged and playful and safe in the world.

What can you do to relax your nervous system and find a state of calm (activate your ventral vagus nerve)?

- Deep Slow Breathing
 - o Breathe in slowly for 4 seconds and hold your breath for 4 seconds
 - o Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds
 - o Do this for at least 2 minutes but ideally for up to 5-10 mins if you can
 - o Counting back from 10 can help you slow your breath. Say each number slowly, then breathe out and take a normal breath in between saying each number
- Singing, chanting, humming
- Blow bubbles for a few minutes every day
- Meditation – if this works for you
- Laughing
- Exercise – walking every day or as often as you can for as long as you can - up to half an hour or an hour is ideal if possible.



* stock image

The Face of Trauma - A Contribution from Celeste

With a special thanks to Celeste for so generously sharing her reflections and experiences.

So I am here to tell you what the face of trauma looks like, it could be the face of a person hunched over crying on the street or it could be the face of a person dancing around in a flamingo costume with a giant smile on their face, just as I did. Because that is my point, there is not one face of trauma, there are many faces of trauma. And trauma works in strange and complex ways, ways that as a collective we are only beginning to understand. Because of the complexity of trauma, our patriarchal dominated justice system needs to understand that there is no grey area to abuse.

Abuse is abuse and all survivors of abuse deserve a chance to be heard. As a survivor of severe abuse I advocate that every person in the police force and justice system receive trauma informed training. So that they can begin to understand the delicate brains that our systems are only further fracturing. Or maybe they could stop asking people what they were wearing and begin to ask survivors what it feels like to live in the prison of a traumatised mind and body, what it feels like to have an entire systematic denial of their reality and of their pain.

Because trauma survivors are teachers, and the justice system needs to learn from us. Because survivors of abuse are not victims, we are warriors and we have the most powerful voice

of them all. It is a voice of strength and purity. It is a voice that deserves to be listened to and believed. I tell my story no longer caring if anyone believes me, as I am tired of trying to convince a broken system that my experiences were real.

I know my truth and that's all that matters to me anymore. I still experience incredible pain every second of every day and I am still not at the end of my fight with the justice system, but I know I will get through it. Because I have now decided that I want to live, because I deserve to find my peace and no one and nothing will take that right away from me. I am now ready to move from post traumatic stress, to post traumatic growth. Because although you have to feel it to heal it, once you liberate yourself from the shame, trauma can be the catalyst for powerful healing. It is a hero's journey and builds such an incredible resilience in those willing to face their trauma that they are then able to go on to help others heal.

All the advice I can give to people who are going through the same horrendous experience that I did is, hold onto your truth. Find your grace in the disgrace. Do not let the stories that your abusers, the police and the justice system tell you, become the stories that you tell yourself. Because your body and mind knows truth, even if parts of your memory feel fractured, it was real. And to every survivor of abuse, I want to take this moment to acknowledge your experience, your pain, your strength and your truth.

- Celeste



What is EMDR therapy, and how does it help people who have experienced trauma?

This article originally appeared on The Conversation.

Earlier this year, Prince Harry revealed he has used a therapy called EMDR to cope with anxiety and trauma, including trauma resulting from his mother Princess Diana's death when he was 12.

He demonstrates the technique in the Apple TV+ docuseries *The Me You Can't See*.

EMDR stands for eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing. But what is this therapy and how does it work?

What is EMDR?

EMDR is a psychotherapy treatment that aims to reduce distressing emotions associated with traumatic memories.

It involves consulting with a trained psychologist, usually over about 12 sessions.

Broadly speaking, the sessions involve eight steps:

History and treatment planning: the psychologist will discuss the patient's specific reason for coming and take a detailed history

Preparation: the psychologist will talk to the patient about what they can expect from EMDR. In this phase, the psychologist will also teach the patient relaxation techniques they can use to calm themselves during or after sessions

Assessment: the psychologist will ask the patient to select a vivid image in their mind relating to the memory they wish to work on. The patient will also be asked to focus on any negative beliefs about themselves, or negative emotions associated with the event

Desensitisation: the patient will be asked to hold the traumatic memory in their mind while following the movements of the psychologist's finger back and forth with their eyes. The psychologist may also lead the patient in tapping (for example, the patient taps their knees with their hands in an alternating pattern) or auditory tones delivered through headphones. These alternatives to eye movements engage the same parts of the brain

Installation: the patient is guided to replace the original negative belief with a positive one

Body scan: the patient thinks of the original memory to see if there is any physical tension remaining in the body. Usually the memory processing is complete when the memory no longer causes the patient any distress. If it still does, step 4 will be repeated

Closure: this is the end of the session. If the memory has not yet been completely reduced in intensity, the psychologist will guide the patient in relaxation exercises to do until the next session

Re-evaluation: this is the start of the next session, where the psychologist and the client assess the previous session's work and re-evaluate the treatment plan as needed. The therapist continually checks in with the client throughout the process.

An important phase at the end of treatment involves looking to the future. The psychologist might ask the patient to imagine an anticipated challenge.

For example, if the patient had been in a car accident, they might imagine driving on a highway, perhaps at night or alone, and see if any distressing emotions arise. If they do, the patient might still need some more treatment.

A unique aspect of EMDR is that the person may not have to discuss any of their disturbing memories in detail. The psychologist may ask "What event do you remember that made you feel distressed?" and the patient may say, "It was something my father did to me." The process can be done without any extra information.

How does EMDR work? And who can use it?

The dual activity of thinking about a distressing memory and rapidly moving the eyes from side to side appears to reduce the level of emotion in the memory.

One theory is that thinking about a traumatic memory and following something with the eyes requires more memory capacity than is available, therefore the distressing memory is not completely accessed and loses its strength.

EMDR therapy is most commonly used to treat traumatic stress symptoms and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

A review of 26 clinical trials showed EMDR treatments significantly reduced symptoms of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and distress in people with PTSD.

The use of EMDR in children with PTSD has been demonstrated to be effective too.

People with phobias or anxiety concerns can also benefit, as can people with depression.

While the research suggests EMDR is an effective approach to reducing trauma, there may be some risks or side effects involved. These include:

- an increase in distressing memories
- heightened emotions or physical sensations during sessions
- light-headedness
- vivid dreams
- the surfacing of new traumatic memories.
- Should any of these occur, the treating psychologist would typically support the patient to process these during the sessions.

Is EMDR recognised?

The World Health Organization and the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies both recommend EMDR therapy as a treatment for adults and children with PTSD.

It's also endorsed by the Australian Psychological Society.

If this article has raised issues for you, or if you're concerned about someone you know, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.



Blue Knot Day 2021

Mark **Thursday October 28th** in your diary. It's our annual Blue Knot Day and like last year, we will be holding a Festival of Healing accessible digitally through social media and registered online events. This year's theme is Building a Trauma-Informed Community, which reflects the work Blue Knot does every day in creating community and disseminating trauma-informed understanding far and wide.

The day will include short sessions for survivors as well as sessions for those who support them. We will also be hearing from a number of people speaking personally about their

own healing journey, what has helped them, as well as some of the barriers they faced when services were not as trauma-informed as they could be. Several practitioners will also be joining us, including those with their own lived experience, and will speak about their trauma-informed visions and practice.

The festival will also include a range of activities which you can choose to take part in, and we will also be sharing some resources throughout the day which we hope you will find beneficial. We will continue to share more information about the day as plans progress, so watch this space!



Fact sheet: Stress Response and Trauma Response

We all feel threatened or experience stress at different times. Our brain detects the threat and sends signals to the rest of our body to react and go into survival mode. This fact sheet outlines the different types of stress responses that can occur automatically when we feel threatened. [Download the stress response fact sheet here](#)

Trauma is extreme stress which can overwhelm a person's capacity to cope. As a result a stress response may be activated, and particularly with complex trauma, this stress response can remain switched on. This fact sheet outlines how people who have experienced trauma or complex trauma may respond to different types of triggers.

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FACT SHEET:

Stress Response



- All people experience stress or feel threatened at different times.
- When we are threatened or feel threatened, a part of the brain (the amygdala) detects the threat. The amygdala signals to our body and brain that we are in danger and we feel fear, panic and distress.
- Our stress response takes over and we go into survival mode. In survival mode our conscious thinking brain switches off and we react automatically to protect ourselves.
- Our stress response is part of our biology. It helps us survive danger. It does not involve any planning or thinking.
- We respond to stress in one of three main ways. We fight, we run away (flight) or we freeze (shut down).
- When we fight or flee, we become agitated (on high alert). We call this hyperarousal.
- When we freeze, we shut down, go numb or dissociate (we disconnect from our current experience – this is not conscious). We call this hypoarousal.
- Freeze can be active or ‘play dead’ freeze. The ‘play dead’ (faint or fawn) happens when we cannot defend ourselves anymore and we appease or please instead.
- When the danger passes, our thinking brain turns back on. Our body becomes calm. We return to a resting state.
- In the resting state we can repair. This happens with everyday stress. Trauma is different.



Blue Knot Helpline **1300 657 380** | blueknot.org.au | **02 8920 3611** | admin@blueknot.org.au

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FACT SHEET:

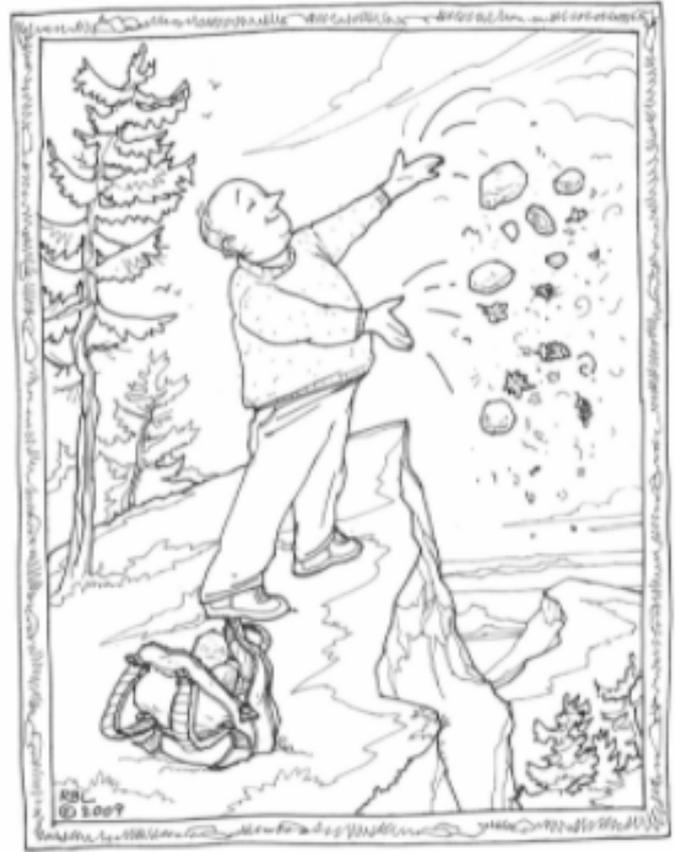
Trauma Response



- Trauma is extreme stress. The extreme stress of trauma overwhelms a person's capacity to cope. It is a response to threat or the perception of threat.
- Events which are a threat or perceived threat to our survival are traumatic but not all traumatic events are life-threatening.
- When our nervous system perceives a threat our stress response is activated. With trauma, this can happen over and over again. We can be triggered easily because trauma leaves us on 'high alert' for danger.
- With repeated trauma our stress response can stay switched on. This can make it harder to return to a resting state of calm.
- With trauma, especially complex trauma, we also react more to everyday stress. Even minor stress can trigger 'out of proportion' responses. This is because the body continues to react as if we are still in danger.
- A threat or trigger sets off the stress response. There are lots of possible triggers. Some triggers stimulate our senses – smells, sounds, sights, touch, tastes. Other triggers come from cues in our environment.
- Different people have different triggers. Some people are repeatedly 'triggered'. It can be hard to identify a person's trigger/s. It can be hard for the person as well as for the people around them.
- When a person's trigger is not identified, their reaction can seem to happen for no apparent reason. Triggers and trauma reactions can be hard to understand. Because reactions to triggers are hard to understand they are often misinterpreted.
- When people's reactions are misinterpreted, their behaviour can seem very challenging. Other people often judge and punish survivors of trauma for their reactions and behaviours.
- When other people think about behaviour as a survival response it is easier to empathise with the person, understand their behaviours and support their healing.



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A Coloring Book of Healing Images for Adult Survivors of Child Abuse

By Ellen Lacter, Ph.D. Illustrated by Robin Baird Lewis and Jen Callow

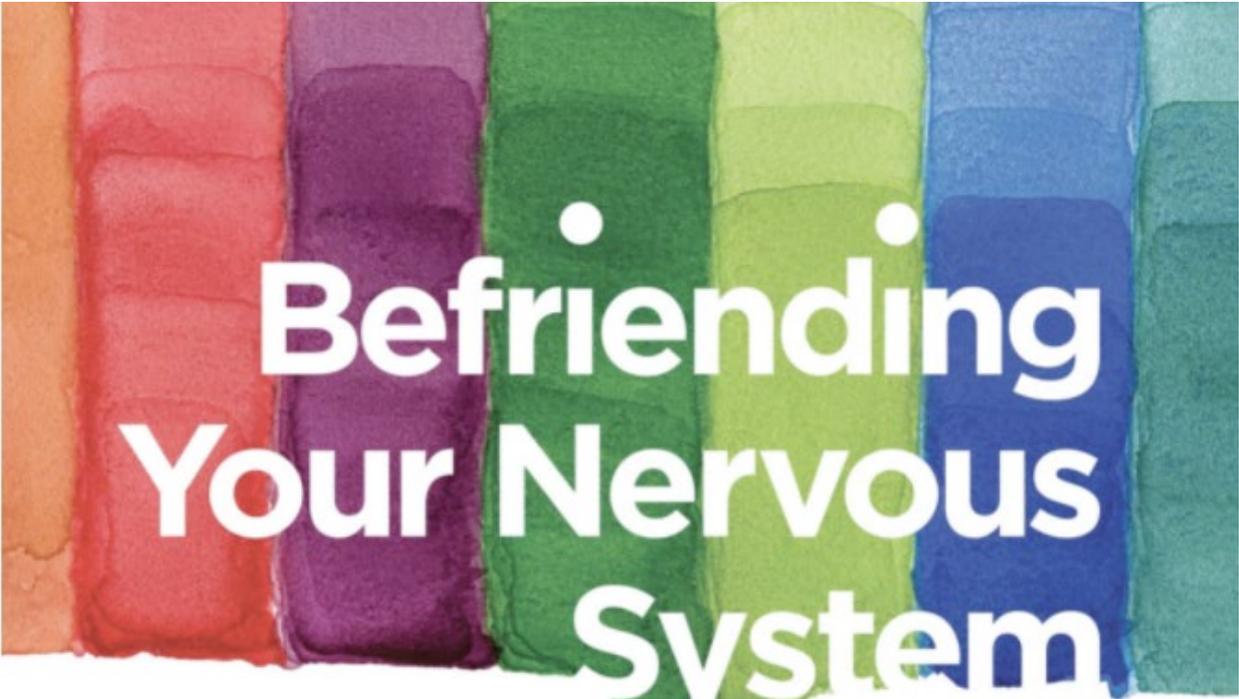
The images in this coloring book have been lovingly conceived and developed by the author and illustrators to bring healing to anyone who was abused as a child. The author has been observing, learning, and collecting “what works” for over 30 years.

Each chapter begins with a page or two describing an aspect of healing. Next, most chapters include a list of ideas to facilitate that aspect of healing. This is followed by suggestions for creative expression. Then the coloring images are listed, each with a self-affirming intention. The next pages are a series of full-size healing images on heavy weight paper suitable for most art media.

It is the hope of the author and illustrators that as the reader-artist colors these images and lingers on their meaning, all that they hold of value will be slowly digested and integrated into mind, body, and soul. Within each child abuse survivor are resources of intelligence, creativity, sensitivity, and wisdom which not only survived the abuse, but also likely developed in extraordinary ways because of the abuse. Our hope is that these messages and images will tap into these inner resources and help them realize their full potential.

“In this lovely, one-of-a-kind coloring book and through the healing power of words and images, the author and artists offer reader-artists many affirming avenues for their journeys to overcome the ravages of child abuse.” Wanda Karriker, Ph.D. Psychologist, Author of *Morning Come Quickly*, Co-creator of *The Extreme Abuse Surveys*.

Order the book at <https://colortoheal.com/>



Befriending Your Nervous System

DEB DANA

Looking Through the Lens of Polyvagal Theory



Audiobook

Befriending Your Nervous System – Deborah Dana LCWS

In *Befriending Your Nervous System*, clinician Deb Dana presents a simple, hopeful message: When you approach these subconscious processes with openness, mindful attention, and - above all - curiosity, you can gain the understanding necessary to shape their outcomes. She bases her audiobook on the large amount of research in polyvagal theory, which suggests the repeated exercises can help us consciously regulate our survival responses through the vagus nerve.

The audiobook is available through Audible via subscription or purchase at <https://www.audible.com.au/pd/Befriending-Your-Nervous-System-Audiobook/168364462X>

Podcasts



Don't Quit on Me

Dr. Cathy Kezelman - The Journey of Healing



00:00 | 37:11

The Journey of Healing

Dr. Cathy Kezelman joins Nick C. on this podcast which is part of the series, Don't Quit on Me. Listen to the podcast at <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1656601/8996247>.



Book Club

Opening Your Eyes: Navigating Childhood Trauma with 'The Deepest Well'



00:00



NOTES



APPLE PODCASTS

Opening Your Eyes: Navigating Childhood Trauma with 'The Deepest Well'

Why is it in all our best interests to understand the long-term effects of childhood adversity?

To answer this question, host Dr Johanna Lynch; a GP, enlists her trusted friend and colleague, Dr Cathy Kezelman AM; a medical practitioner and mental health consumer advocate, to the joint task of unpacking the popular book – 'The Deepest Well: Healing the Long Term Effects of Childhood Adversity' (2019) – by renowned pediatrician, Nadine Burke Harris. Listen to the podcast at https://mhpn.org.au/podcasts/Book-Club-Episode/Opening-Your-Eyes?fbclid=IwAR3DvjPiYkSkSZXgoAQTxcTTAlYzDv_Kvhg85F9BAxFqNu2QezgsUM83ktE.



Feedback from a caller to our Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service

With gratitude to Jill not only for sharing her experience of calling Blue Knot but for her inspiring artwork as well.

We are always so humbled to receive feedback from survivors who have been helped by our Blue Knot Helpline counsellors. Jill has shared the following with us, and it fills us with so much joy to know that we have been able to assist and support Jill on her recovery journey.

"I am a survivor of 30 years of abuse. My first memory is around the age of 6 and I am now 57 years old. For the first time in my life here is the person I always knew I was. This is due to my GP who mentioned about complex trauma, no-one had ever said that about my story before. I then contacted Blue Knot. I spoke with counsellors twice. I had never shared my story before to the extent I did with them. They were the kindest, most understanding and inspiring people. Their energy gave me the energy to take the next step and link in with a specialist counsellor. Without Blue Knot I would never have taken the most important steps in my life that have helped free me from the guilt, shame, responsibility, and misunderstanding around my story. I look back now at the me of only a few months ago and the me now. My little Jill (me at 6) is now safe within me. She is nurtured, loved and never mistreated. I am not an artist and have never really drawn but after talking with the wonderful people at Blue Knot I was inspired to draw this picture. Thank you to the beautiful souls at Blue Knot. You are the hand that helps untie the knot."

- Jill Reid



Simone Biles saying ‘no’ at the Tokyo Olympics might be her most powerful performance yet

By Lucia Osborne-Crowley
 Posted Sun 1 Aug 2021 at 5:00am

When Simone Biles announced she was withdrawing from the Olympic team finals for gymnastics this week, I burst into tears. Not because I felt sad or disappointed — because I felt completely overcome with relief.

Biles is the most decorated gymnast in US Olympic history. She is the star of her team. The pressure on her to perform is unfathomable to most people — but not quite as unfathomable to me.

I was an elite gymnast until I was 17. I competed in national championships each year and frequently won. I competed in world championships in 2004 — when I was 12.

Once, my coaches took us all on a trip to see Cirque du Soleil. All of us planned to join the circus when we hit our 20s and had to retire from competitive gymnastics. On the first page of the program that night was a quote that etched itself into my brain: Anything is possible if you lose your mind to it.

It became my mantra. I would say it to myself before every training session and every competition. I

would write it on my hand at school. Every one of my teenage diaries had those words written in big letters on the opening page.

I had finally found a way to express what I had always been taught: push yourself as far as you can go, and then further.

That’s what Simone will have been taught, too. It becomes a way of life. But in making the decision to step away, she sent a message that I would have given anything to hear as a gymnast: Sometimes it’s not worth it.

Biles made her decision after having missed a landing on her vault in the team qualifying rounds. To be very clear, her performance was outstanding. She is among the greatest athletes of all time. But for her, it wasn’t quite right. She knew something was wrong — I could see it in her face that day.

Nothing about her skills as a gymnast had changed. But psychologically, the pressure had become too much, and that was showing in her performance. Perhaps she recognised what I have only just learned, 10 years after retiring from the sport: The body keeps the score.

'Practice does not make perfect'

This week, my parents sent me a video of me competing at national championships in 2005. In the months leading up to that competition, something in me had changed. The pressure started to overwhelm me. All of a sudden, moves I could have performed in my sleep became terrifying. In training, again and again, I choked. I just couldn't do it.

There was one element of my floor routine that I had been particularly afraid of. I used to lie awake all night thinking about it. When I did get to sleep, I dreamt about that one move, over and over again. I dreamt about attempting it and missing a landing, breaking my ankle, ending my career.

Eventually, my coaches brought in a sports psychologist. He sat down with me and tried to switch off the part of my brain that was getting in my way. I remember him saying to me: "Practice does not make perfect. Practice makes permanent." The more times you choke on this move, he said, the more likely it is that you will never be able to perform it again. This, of course, just felt like more pressure.

In the video of me on competition day, you can see in my face when the move is coming up. I look terrified. I ran and attempted the tumbling move, and then, right there in front of the judges, I stopped mid-way through. As soon as I realised I had choked, I did something very unexpected. I just ran diagonally across the floor, back the way I had come, and performed the tumble.

In that moment, I felt I had no choice. I injured my ankle on the landing and had to improvise my choreography because I was suddenly at the wrong corner of the floor — but I had done it.

The lesson I took from that day? Anything is possible if you lose your mind to it. I reinforced the idea that I was only valuable and worthy if I was pushing beyond my limits. I was injured for weeks after that competition.

And it was this determination to push myself that ultimately did end my career. In my final competition, I missed a landing in my opening move. I remember thinking to myself: I can't be the girl who walks off the floor. So I finished the entire routine with a broken ankle. I never recovered from that injury.

Practice does not make perfect. Practice makes permanent.

Biles and Osaka have given us incredible gifts

That's why what Biles did this week is so powerful. In the athletic world — and, sometimes, in life — we are taught that it is a failure of our moral character to say no. To protect yourself.

"It's the Olympic Games," Biles told the press. "But at the end of the day, we want to walk out of here, not be dragged out here on a stretcher."

Biles decided to protect her mental and physical health rather than push herself and put herself in danger. To me, as someone who knows what it feels like to put yourself at risk through sheer force of will, that is braver than anything she has ever done on that floor.

Of course, Biles is one of hundreds of Olympic gymnasts who was sexually abused by the national team's former doctor, Larry Nassar. Nassar was last year found guilty of molesting hundreds of athletes and sentenced to up to 175 years in prison.

Biles is not just an athlete; she is a trauma survivor. That is another thing she and I have in common. The traumatised body is taught to live forever in fight-or-flight mode, always ready to perform, always ready to run away. The traumatised body finds it very hard to switch off, to properly regulate itself.

Tennis champion Naomi Osaka, the highest paid female athlete in the world, also withdrew from a major competition this year. She stepped away from the French Open, saying she was experiencing depression and severe symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Like Biles, she also gave us an incredible gift: helping us all to understand the connection between trauma, pressure, performance, and breakdown. Like Biles, she was brave enough to say no, to protect herself.

Similarly, Biles saying no was not just evidence of her bravery as an athlete, but also as a survivor. It made me want to reach back to my younger self, that 12-year-old on the gym floor, and tell her what Biles said this week.

But I also needed to hear it as my adult self, the abuse survivor who still feels every day like she needs to prove she is worth something, that she is worth fighting for, that her survival is important.

Lucia Osborne-Crowley is a journalist and writer. Her second book, *My Body Keeps Your Secrets*, will be published by Allen & Unwin in September. She tweets at @LuciaOC_.



#LetUsSpeak campaign helps Chrissie Foster win the right to say her daughter's name

Chrissie Foster AM has endured more hardship and tragedy in one lifetime than most of us could comprehend.

With one daughter dead, and another permanently brain damaged, Chrissie never thought she would end up back in court demanding the right to be able to say her deceased child's name in public.

But in October last year, the Victorian government declared it a crime to publish the names of all deceased rape victims, without explicit court approval.

The ban, Government argued, would "enhance the privacy" of the deceased.

For Chrissie, who has spent 25 years campaigning on behalf of her daughters – both of whom were sexually abused – the effect was devastating: if she continued to name her deceased daughter, Emma, she could face prosecution and even jail



Hillsong leader Brian Houston charged over the concealment of alleged child sex offences

By crime reporter Mark Reddie

Hillsong founder Brian Houston has been charged with allegedly concealing information about child sexual abuse following a two-year investigation.

Sources close to the investigation have revealed Mr Houston, 67, is accused of failing to report the historic alleged abuse of a young male by his late father — Frank Houston.

"Police will allege in court the man knew information relating to the sexual abuse of a young male in the 1970s and failed to bring that information to the attention of police," a NSW Police spokesperson said.

Detectives served his lawyer with a court attendance notice, which requires the pastor to appear before a Sydney magistrate at the Downing Centre on October 5.

Brian Houston has been charged with concealing a serious indictable offence.

The evangelist has been based in the United States for several months despite the Australian border being closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr Houston preached at a service in Mexico last month.

On Sunday, Mr Houston gave a sermon from California, which was streamed live.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse heard Frank Houston admitted to the abuse, which took place in Australia and New Zealand several decades ago.

Frank Houston was allowed to retire from the church before the abuse became public.

He died in 2004.

Mr Houston has since released a statement stating he would "set the record straight", concerning the allegations.

"These charges have come as a shock to me," he said.

"I vehemently profess my innocence and will defend these charges, and I welcome the opportunity to set the record straight."



WATCH
4m 16s

Grace Tame says change is a marathon effort. But Australia Talks data shows our perception of sexual assault is changing

Since Grace Tame was first allowed to speak out in 2019, there's been a major shift in Australians' attitudes towards sexual assault survivors.

But the Australian of the Year says there's still a lot of work to be done to reckon with a culture that protects perpetrators of abuse.

Extensive research shows that the prevalence of false sexual assault allegations reported to police is very low. Despite this evidence, a myth that victims (most commonly women) lie about sexual assaults has persisted.

Data from the Australia Talks National Survey 2021 has revealed a significant increase in the proportion of people who believe survivors: 55 per cent of Australians now agree that allegations of sexual assault are almost always true.

That has risen 14 percentage points since the last Australia Talks survey in 2019 — the same year Ms Tame spoke publicly about her own abuse and Tasmanian laws that prevented survivors of sexual assault from self-identifying.

The laws have since been changed.

Ms Tame described the shift in public opinion as "a huge symbol of progress".

"It's incredibly hopeful and encouraging," she said.

"What we've seen is a stark increase in the value of speaking up, using our voices to call out injustice, and through that, we've seen an increase in awareness and an understanding of these issues, which clearly, as the metrics prove, produces change in attitudes.

"To actually have metrics to quantify that change is incredible. It's powerful.

"We're still only at 55 per cent, which shows that there's a lot of work to be done in this space."

The Australia Talks data showed 18 per cent of the population felt neutral or didn't know where they stood on the topic, but 22 per cent still disagreed that allegations of sexual assault were almost always true.

"I think that is indicative of the remaining victim-blaming cultures that are a product of systemic injustices that continue to protect perpetrators," Ms Tame said.

"(Those views) are hard to shift. But change is a marathon effort, it's one step at a time. In two years, to see that increase, it shows we have the capacity to change."

RESPONSES FOR:

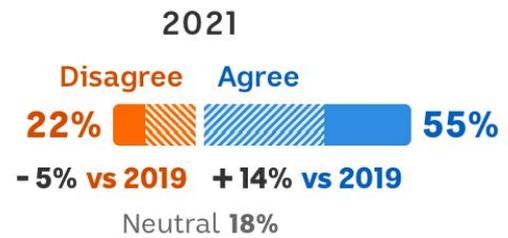
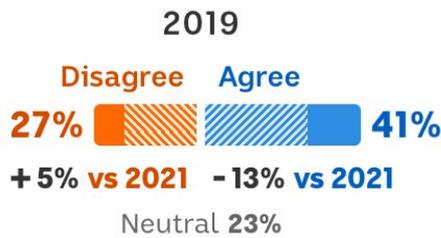
Allegations of sexual assault are almost always true.

Disagree

Strongly Somewhat

Agree

Somewhat Strongly



Sample size

2019 = 21,756 2021 = 17,420



It's a culture Ms Tame has been working to dismantle since she began her fight to speak about her own abuse. She has continued to be a public advocate for fellow survivors, and inspired many to share their own stories of assault and abuse.

Brittany Higgins credited Ms Tame's powerful Australian of the Year acceptance speech as part of what galvanised her to come forward with the allegation that she was raped in Parliament House while working as a staffer for a senior government minister.

Their stories, and their bravery in recounting them publicly, acted as a lightning rod that sparked nationwide protests against sexism and gendered violence, and encouraged many others to speak up.

Criminologist Bianca Fileborn, who specialises in researching sexual violence and harassment, said it was this sustained conversation that has contributed to changing attitudes picked up in the Australia Talks survey, which was fielded in early March, just before the March4Justice protests.

"It's a reflection of quite a sustained conversation over a number of years, particularly since the Me Too movement took off, and the fact that we're hopefully having a more nuanced and accurate conversation about the realities of sexual violence as a country," she said.

There's been a spike in sexual assault reports since survivors spoke out

In the same month Ms Higgins spoke out, there was a historic spike in the number of reports of sexual assault being filed with New South Wales police, according to data published today by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics (BOCSAR).

There was a 61 per cent surge in women reporting sexual assaults in March this year, compared to the monthly average of reports in 2020, which BOCSAR executive director

Jackie Fitzgerald has linked to the national discussion around sexual violence.

"I really have never seen anything like this before and I've been working with data for 20 years in this criminal justice space," Ms Fitzgerald told the ABC's The World Today program.

"The increase in sexual assault reporting synchronises almost perfectly with that increased public discussion of sexual violence."

Ms Fitzgerald said the increase amounted to about 300 more sexual assaults being reported than in the previous month of February 2021.

Chanel Contos, the former Sydney school student who began an online movement of current and former students discussing sexual assault, said the news of the spike filled her with mixed emotions.

"I'm obviously so sad that this has happened to so many people, but I'm also so happy that it's it's been reported people are feeling empowered to tell their story to authorities," she told The World Today.

Men are less inclined to agree sexual assault allegations are almost always true

The Australia Talks data showed a considerable divide in how women and men perceived allegations of assault.

While nearly 70 per cent of women agreed that allegations of sexual assault were almost always true, just 40 per cent of men did.

Dr Fileborn said this split reflected the broader perceptions of rape culture and stereotypes.

"Whether or not people believe survivors is itself often tied to rape myths and misconceptions," Dr Fileborn said.

“Research has very consistently shown gendered differences in terms of the extent to which people blame survivors for their own experiences or minimise the attitudes of perpetrators.”

The survey also showed age was a factor. Agreement was strongest among young women, with 83 per cent of 18-24s and 81 per cent of 25-29s saying they believed sexual assault allegations were almost always true.

Ms Tame observed that part of the reason for the split could also be attributed to personal experiences of abuse.

“This is a crime that affects both men and women, both men and women are victims of sexual abuse, but survivors are predominantly women, and perpetrators are more often than not, men,” she said.

“So I think this data shows women are more likely to relate to the experience of being a survivor.”

According to the Australia Talks survey, 30 per cent of women said they had experienced sexual assault and 8 per cent of men said the same.

Women were also more likely to say they had experienced sexual harassment (52 per cent) and discrimination on the basis of sex (51 per cent).

Those who were disinclined to believe assault allegations made up 1 in 5 Australians, according to the survey.

Dr Fileborn said in reality, false allegations were rare.

“It is much more likely that survivors won’t disclose or report than for them to make a false report or false allegation,” she said.

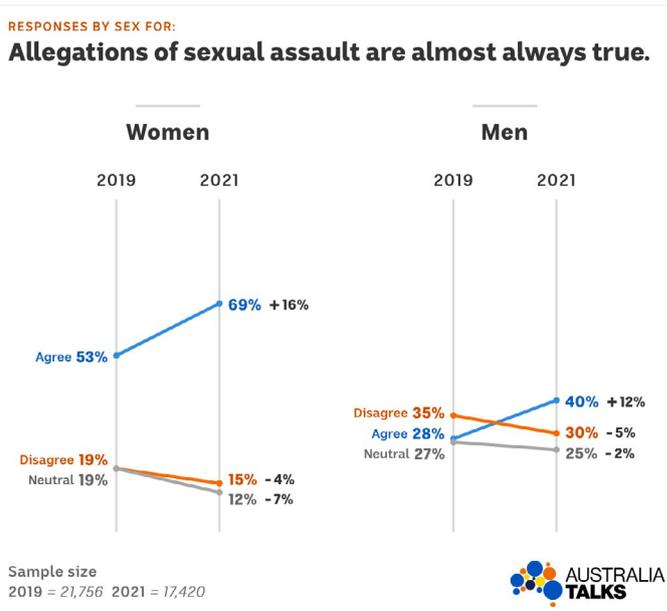
The figure varies across studies, but on average, around 5 per cent of reports made to the police are deemed false. Dr Fileborn said even that figure was problematic.

The vast majority of sexual assault survivors don’t report to the police, and Dr Fileborn said there were also issues in terms of how allegations were labelled as false.

“So even that 5 per cent figure isn’t necessarily false reports that are flagrantly made up, or wild accusations that have no basis in reality. They reflect the process of police decision making.” Tame says we still don’t understand how assault really works

Ms Tame said Australia still had a lot of work to do to address the gap in our collective understanding about sexual violence.

She said victim-blaming stereotypes that represented sexual assault as cases of ‘he said, she said’ created a false impression that perpetrators and the people they abuse were equal.



“It feeds into this idea that there are these two equal characters. It’s really not like that,” she said.

“It’s two characters, one of whom has a clear power advantage over a target. They manipulate that power, psychologically, in order to abuse their target.

“Less is understood about the psychological manipulation that underpins a lot of these crimes. It’s the stuff that you don’t see.

“There’s also a lack of understanding about how much coercion is involved in taking advantage of someone and that imbalance of power.”

Ms Tame said she wanted to prioritise teaching Australians about these less understood facets of sexual abuse, like grooming, coercive control and gaslighting, through refocusing conversations in the media and changing sexual education.

Beyond that, she said institutional change was required. She said inconsistency across state and territory jurisdictions around the definitions of consent and sexual assault was undermining progress.

“Unless you’ve got a solid concept of something, how can you properly educate around it and understand it?” she said.

Ms Tame said she wanted states to get together and work towards a standardised uniform approach to sexual assault laws.

“Let’s get a uniform definition of consent. Let’s get a uniform definition of sexual assault. Let’s get a uniform definition of sexual intercourse. Let’s get a uniform definition of what it means to be a child,” she said.

“There’s all these grey areas that perpetrators of crimes are often aware of and will use, they’ll capitalise on any ambiguity to perpetuate unhelpful victim-blaming stereotypes.”

Ms Tame said her focus was on supporting other survivors of sexual assault to continue speaking out where they feel safe and comfortable to do so, and changing the systemic injustices that protect perpetrators.

“It’s incredibly encouraging and hopeful. But I’m never one to stop and rest on their laurels. I’m always looking for ways that we can improve,” she said.

“So we’ve still got a lot of work to do.”

The Australia Talks National Survey asked 60,000 Australians about their lives and what keeps them up at night. Use our interactive tool to see the results and how your answers compare.

Editor’s note (September 9, 2021): This story has been edited to clarify that it refers to research examining the prevalence of sexual assault allegations reported to police which were established to be false.



Churches, religious groups received millions of dollars in JobKeeper while staying in the black, accounts show

Dozens of Australia's biggest churches and other religious institutions pocketed millions of dollars in JobKeeper payments while remaining in the black during 2020.

An ABC investigation into the financial records of more than 100 religious organisations has found many qualified for the emergency wage subsidy despite seeing little financial impact from last year's COVID-19 economic shock.

Figures from the Australian Tax Office show about 3,500 religious entities received a total of \$627 million in JobKeeper payments during the life of the scheme, which ended in March.

That figure excludes payments to social welfare charities controlled by religious groups, such as Uniting Care, Mission Australia and the Brotherhood of St Lawrence.

Religious groups delivering the federal government's school chaplaincy program were among the biggest recipients, with the Scripture Union of Queensland receiving more than \$15 million in JobKeeper while seeing only a slight fall in government revenue during the year.

Its overall revenue excluding JobKeeper was down 11 per cent for the year, but the wage subsidy helped it post a surplus of \$11.7 million.

"Scripture Union QLD met the statutory decline-in-revenue tests for charities to qualify for JobKeeper support," the organisation said in a statement.

"We are grateful for JobKeeper as it meant we maintained employment for all of our staff despite the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic."

Other major JobKeeper recipients include the Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide, which received \$13 million while posting a surplus of just over \$7 million in 2020.

The archdiocese declined to comment.

Labor MP Andrew Leigh said religious organisations that remained in surplus while on JobKeeper should consider paying the money back.

"I also think that the Morrison government needs to be held to account for running a scheme which continued to hand out money to firms with rising earnings," Mr Leigh said.

Andrew Fenner wearing a suit and red tie with his arms crossed

Federal Treasurer Josh Frydenberg declined to do an interview but in a statement said he would welcome religious groups and other charities repaying JobKeeper "if they are in a position to do so".

"These organisations perform vitally important work," he said.

"That's why the Morrison government provided them with unprecedented support to ensure they could continue to help those Australians in need of their services during this once-in-a-century pandemic."

Religious organisations are typically registered as charities, meaning any surplus revenue at the end of the year — otherwise known as profit — is returned to the institution's cash reserves.

Yet only a fraction of the total amount of JobKeeper paid to religious groups can be traced because most religious institutions are exempt from financial transparency rules that require businesses and charities to submit annual financial statements to regulators.

"Their transparency requirements under the Australian Charities and Non-Profits Commission are much more lax than for other charities, such as environmental charities or social welfare charities," said Luke Beck, an associate professor of law at Monash University, whose research focuses on the legality of government funding of religion.

"It is very difficult to get a full picture of how much government money is going to religious groups at any time."

Religious practitioners such as priests, nuns, imams and rabbis were not initially included in the JobKeeper scheme when it was launched in March last year because clergy are not technically considered employees under Australian law.

But the government amended the scheme's rules in May

2020 to extend the payment to religious practitioners.

Like other charities, religious organisations could qualify for JobKeeper by forecasting a 15 per cent decline in revenue between March and September last year.

Mr Frydenberg said eligibility rules changed during the second stage of JobKeeper, which ran from October to March this year, and required organisations to demonstrate an actual decline in revenue.

"Our focus as a government was to get money out the door to support those who were in need."

Dr Beck questioned whether the decision to include religious practitioners fit with the original intention of the scheme.

"When the government first introduced JobKeeper at the beginning of the pandemic, they explained that this was to keep workers to their employers so that when things got better people would still have their jobs to go back to," he said.

"I'm not sure that there was really much risk that churches would have gone around sacking their priests, or pastors, or mosques would go around sacking imams."

But Matt Brain, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Bendigo, says ministers within his church faced serious financial hardship without JobKeeper.

He said without the wage subsidy, the diocese would have been forced to slash the stipend paid to its 45 clergy members.

"I would have had to put them in the Hobson's choice of doing a job that they thought was morally right, without any capacity to keep bread on the table," he said.

The Anglican Diocese of Bendigo received about \$1 million in JobKeeper during 2020, which Bishop Brain says helped make up for a revenue decline of between 30 and 50 per cent across its 32 parishes.

"I think we are in for another difficult year, like the rest of Australia, as we navigate the consequences of COVID-19," he said.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison's place of worship, the Horizon Church in southern Sydney, increased its surplus from \$42,816 in 2019 to \$81,101 in 2020.

The organisation's accounts do not disclose exactly how much JobKeeper it received, but it recorded \$533,694 in grants and subsidies.

In a statement, the church said it qualified for JobKeeper “under the law and was grateful for the ability to be able to support its staff and their families during that particular window in 2020”.

The Prime Minister declined to comment.

Financial statements for the Evangelical Christian group Power to Change show it received \$3.4 million in “government subsidies” in 2020, including JobKeeper, the federal government’s cash flow boost and Victorian Government business support funding.

It recorded a surplus of \$2.3 million.

“We have been audited by the government to ensure our compliance and satisfactorily complied. We are really grateful to the Government for JobKeeper,” Power to Change’s national director Allan Gibson said in a statement.

“We have looked in hindsight about the ethics of our receiving JobKeeper. As my team examined the various pressures, we actually thought that JobKeeper kept and is keeping somewhere between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of our team in employment.”

The Lutheran Church of Australia recorded a \$1.7 million surplus last year while receiving \$1.4 million in “government grants”, according to its financial statements.

Its accounts do not break down how much of that grant funding is made up of JobKeeper, but in a statement said the payment “enabled the retention of staff who otherwise may have been stood down given the high level of uncertainty prevailing during 2020”.

Worshippers raise their arms while a man speaks into a microphone on stage.

Financial records for the Crossway Baptist Church in Melbourne show it received \$2.8 million in “government stimulus”, which the organisation confirmed include JobKeeper revenue.

“Without JobKeeper, we would have been forced to make difficult decisions with regards to staff and this may have involved terminations,” it said.

The church recorded a \$3.4 million surplus for the year.

Melbourne-based Jewish religious charity the Mizrahi Organisation received \$4.1 million in JobKeeper and other government financial assistance. It posted a \$3.2 million surplus.

In a statement, it said it was “severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced a significant drop in revenue, well in excess of the criteria set under Jobkeeper”.

“As a result of this support, we were able to ensure that all staff were retained and that we could continue to provide vital support to the community during this time.”

Churches say JobKeeper not used for redress payments

Survivors of historical sexual abuse within religious institutions have criticised some organisations for receiving JobKeeper while also making payments through the national redress scheme.

“If the churches are paying the redress with money that was given to them for a specific purpose, that is quite wrong,” said Jim Luthy from Care Leavers Australia Network, an organisation that provides support to abuse survivors.

“The community would then be paying for their actions.”

But religious institutions contacted by the ABC insisted the payments under the National Redress Scheme were fully funded by their own cash reserves.

The Christian Brothers, which spent \$39 million on legal and litigation expenses last year, said none of the \$1.3 million it received in JobKeeper was used for compensation payments.

“For more than 30 years the Trustees have met the obligations of responding to past abuse through our own financial resources,” the Catholic order said.

The Bendigo Anglican Diocese paid \$961,204 in redress payments last year, but Bishop Matt Brain said no JobKeeper funds were used to cover the payments.

“We’ve set up a system that doesn’t rely upon the day to day running of our payroll in order to pay them, they are a priority.”

Any legal challenge to JobKeeper has ‘zero chance’ of success, expert says

The federal government is facing renewed scrutiny over the design of its JobKeeper scheme following revelations last week that \$4.6 billion in payments went to businesses that increased their revenue during the first three months of the scheme.

Australia's auditor-general is currently investigating the administration of the scheme, with its final report to be tabled in December.

Professor Luke Beck believes any inquiry into JobKeeper needs to examine whether the scheme was in breach of laws preventing the government funding religious organisations.

"JobKeeper for religious practitioners is almost certainly unconstitutional", he said.

"Australian courts have said that giving federal money to religious groups for non-religious purposes, such as education or social welfare programs, is valid. But giving money to religious organisations for religious activities is a valid matter for constitutional challenge."

But he says now that the scheme has ended, a legal challenge has "zero chance" of being successful.

"Firstly, the JobKeeper program is over, and the courts don't hear cases that are hypothetical," he said.

"Secondly, there is the problem of who would have standing to bring a case, and effectively the only people who have standing to bring a challenge to government action are people directly affected by it.

"And the people directly affected by this aspect of JobKeeper are the people receiving the money. And if you're receiving money from the government, you're hardly going to be motivated to go to court."

Josh Frydenberg rejected the suggestion the extension of JobKeeper to religious practitioners was unconstitutional

"The JobKeeper payment was established in full compliance with the requirements of the Constitution and Commonwealth law," Mr Frydenberg said.



Data reveals only 14 per cent of child sexual abuse claims before Family Court believed to be true by judges

By Helen Frost

Legal experts have raised concerns abused children could be slipping through the cracks of Family Court proceedings, after the release of new data.

A group of researchers reviewed seven years' worth of relevant cases — from 2012 to 2019 — and found that in only 14 per cent of contested cases, judicial officers expressed a direct belief that allegations of child abuse were true.

Researchers have released the findings in a bid to prompt a discussion around whether or not Australia's legal system is equipped to deal with these types of allegations.

Co-author of the report, Lawrence Moloney, said on the surface of it, the data looked counterintuitive.

"The key finding is really, that on any kind of normal expectation, it is a very low level of findings of child sexual abuse," Dr Moloney said.

The study also found that risk of sexual harm to a child was found in just 12 per cent of the 521 cases published in the Australasian Legal Information Institute's Australian database.

Dr Moloney, a clinical psychologist who is an adjunct professor with the School of Psychology and Public Health at La Trobe University, said roughly two-thirds of people who could be referred to as allegedly unsafe parents had the time they spent with their children increased by the court.

Authors say court needs more resources

The report authors also acknowledged that allegations of child sexual abuse posed agonisingly difficult issues for families, family law professionals and the courts.

Law professor Patrick Parkinson said the new data highlighted the challenges facing Family Court judicial officers and underlined the need for more resources to be made available to the courts to investigate these types of cases.

“The cases which go to trial in a family court are in the too-hard basket for the child protection system, they are the cases where the police don’t feel they are able to prosecute,” he said.

“The child protection authority hasn’t reached a clear view of whether abuse has occurred, the alleged perpetrator hasn’t just accepted he won’t be seeing his kids and dropped out of the process.”

The University of Queensland legal expert explained the evidence could be very ambiguous, often due to the children’s young age, and he believed more resources were required to determine if abuse had occurred.

“At the moment, people are very heavily reliant on independent experts, mostly child psychiatrists who are extraordinarily expensive, so it can be very, very costly to pursue an allegation in the family court — not just because of the legal costs, but because of the cost of the expert witnesses as well,” he said.

“What the government could do to improve this greatly is to have a system where the government pays for the investigation just as the states pay for child protection investigations in the state system.”

Lisa Young, a professor of law at the Murdoch School of Law and Criminology in Perth, said in cases involving allegations of sexual abuse it was typical for a single expert to be appointed to assist in determining the outcome of the matter.

The expert is usually appointed on the recommendation and agreement of the parties and the Independent Children’s Lawyer.

Professor Young explained there were cases on one end of the scale where allegations looked to be false, but on the other end there were cases with clear evidence.

She said the issue was there was a large grey area in the middle where it was uncertain what had taken place and

there was no finding of abuse.

“What this paper shows us is that it’s very likely in those cases the contact with the alleged abuser will in fact increase,” Professor Young said.

“It seems unlikely that there aren’t children in that grey area in the middle who are being abused, who aren’t being protected. That concern seems very, very, likely from the research I’ve seen.”

What could be done to provide protection?

Author of *See What You Made Me Do*, Jess Hill, said she received a lot of correspondence from parents, victims and survivors of abuse who pleaded with her as a journalist to help them navigate the family law system.

Ms Hill agreed with Professor Parkinson and Professor Young there needed to be more resources available for judicial officers to investigate the claims before them.

“I’ve heard really great suggestions around how these allegations can be better assessed in a triage process where you have two or three experts assessing this and discussing their conclusions rather than it just hinging on one person,” she said.

“It’s just not good enough, with just one person who has a psychiatric degree or a psychology degree. It does not qualify you to assess whether child sexual abuse or domestic abuse is likely to have occurred.”

False allegations

According to the report, just under half of sexual abuse allegations were regarded by judges to be genuinely believed by the parent alleging abuse but were believed to be mistaken by the court.

While 25 per cent of allegations in contested hearings were found to be deliberately misleading by the accuser.

Professor Young said the system dealt adequately with what she called the small number of false allegations of sexual abuse. She said that very often the person making the allegation was at grave risk of losing care of the child.

“One of my concerns in this area is that whenever it’s raised the focus seems to shift very quickly to the problem of false allegations,” she said.

“But I think what we need to be really clear about is that the false allegations are not the problem. The question is dealing with false denials and dealing with protection of children.”

Lack of data prompted research

Nola Webb, a barrister and legal researcher, approached her report co-authors, Bruce Smyth, Dr Moloney and Robyn Murphy after coming across a substantial number of mothers who told her their court cases were being dismissed.

“This appeared to fly in the face of the best research we had available, which has consistently found that a majority of these allegations are likely to be true,” Dr Moloney said.

Not all decisions or outcomes of court proceedings are published so the sample does not include the unpublished cases.

In response to the report, the Family Court issued a statement that said it was important to emphasise the legislative parameters the court operated under.

“The role and requirements of the Family Court are distinctly different to the state and territory criminal and children’s courts, which makes it very difficult to compare,” a spokesperson said.

“Allegations of family violence, including child sexual abuse, are frequently raised but also denied in family law proceedings.

“Crucial to any decision is the need for the judge to make findings of fact (based on evidence presented in each case) as to whether or not alleged events occurred or whether there is an unacceptable risk.”

The federal Attorney-General’s Office said in its statement that under Australia’s federal system of government, the states and territories had primary responsibility for child protection and criminal matters such as child sexual abuse broadly.

“The investigation of child abuse claims are therefore appropriately matters for state and territory child protection and policing bodies,” a spokesperson said.

While the Family Court can take into consideration allegations and substantiating evidence when determining matters before them, they have no independent investigatory capacity.

However, family law professionals including court staff, are required to notify the respective child welfare authority of any suspected child abuse, or risks of child abuse, for potential investigations.





Redress fails Stolen Generations survivors

A handful of counsellors won't reach Stolen Generations survivors in time to hear their stories and piece together the evidence about their abuse, Indigenous groups have told an inquiry.

An independent review of the second year of the national redress scheme's operation found the process needed to make a claim was traumatising, bureaucratic and too slow.

"There is a group that are very clearly potentially eligible for the scheme who are currently not able or currently are not accessing the scheme," review chief Robyn Kruk told a parliamentary committee on Wednesday.

English as a second, third or fourth-language is a barrier for the national program that depends on people telling their life history and re-living the trauma.

Many suffer anxiety, ill health or have a disability and need a lot of time to tell their story, and get over their distrust of government.

First Nations witnesses said many people in remote and isolated communities still don't know about the national redress scheme, particularly in the Northern Territory.

But Aboriginal organisations are working to reconnect Stolen Generations survivors with family and country, and help families to trace what happened to people who've already died.

Now they also need to be protected from predatory legal firms, the committee heard.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency director Sarah

Gafforini said the average waiting period of 12 months for an application outcome, after months of careful work to make the claim, is too long.

"It takes significant courage to talk about abuse and trust that the person you are telling believes you, and then comes the process of documenting," she said.

"The priority must be the removal of all barriers to access the scheme, including the exclusion of those incarcerated with serious criminal convictions," she said.

Funding the specialised trauma counselling for survivors, and staff hearing and transcribing their stories, is needed and sometimes lifelong counselling will be required.

Indigenous groups are also competing with mainstream groups funded to tackle the aftermath of the sexual abuse of children in schools, care homes, orphanages, churches and health facilities.

"Some of our clients suffer from memory loss from trauma and are embarrassed," chief executive of Link-Up Queensland Pat Thompson said.

She said even when people are brave enough to come forward, they then need to be supported through a 42-page application and get care records, which can take months or are missing.

The Morrison government has committed to 25 of Ms Kruk's 38 recommendations and argues the remainder are major changes that require consultation with survivors, institutions and state governments.

"The legislative basis of the scheme needs an overhaul," Healing Foundation chief executive Fiona Cornforth said.



How early learning can help end intergenerational trauma

BY SHEVONNE HUNT

How do you alleviate trauma that has been over 230 years in the making? How do you heal emotional wounds that have been passed down from one generation to another? Emerging Minds and The Healing Foundation believe the answer lies in how we educate our youngest children. They've created a resource for First Nations kids – a program for early learning centres across the country. CEO of The Healing Foundation, Fiona Cornforth talks about how connecting young people to culture can help heal the pain of the past.

Listen to Fiona Cornforth on Feed Play Love: <https://babyology.com.au/podcasts/feedplaylove/how-early-learning-can-help-end-intergenerational-trauma/>

A screenshot of a podcast player interface. On the left is a yellow square thumbnail with the text 'Feed Play Love with Shevonne Hunt' and a photo of a woman and two children. To the right of the thumbnail is a play button icon, the title 'Feed Play Love', and the subtitle 'How early learning can help end intergenerational trauma'. The 'whooshkaa' logo is in the top right corner. Below the title is a waveform visualization of the audio, with a progress bar showing '00:00' at the start and '14:20' at the end. At the bottom are icons for document, Apple, share, download, and speaker.



IN THE NEWS

Women living with disability can face extra hurdles breaking free of abusers, survivor warns

BY NICK MCALLISTER

Nicole Lee was 24 when she met her now ex-husband, an amputee, through disability sports.

(Content warning: This story deals with sexual abuse and domestic violence.)

A couple of months after he had moved in with her, she became pregnant.

Six weeks after Ms Lee had given birth, her husband began to sexually, verbally and financially abuse her — and continued to do so for the 10 years they were married.

Ms Lee, a wheelchair user, said the situation was made worse by the fact her husband was her full-time carer.

A woman wearing a floral top takes a selfie shot lying down.

"I was completely physically reliant on him for support," she said.

"It also meant that he was listened to over me.

"So when I'd disclose (abuse) they would look to him, or he was always there so I couldn't disclose."

He also used her disability against her.

He told her "if she wasn't so hard to live with (their relationship would be better)", which compounded her mental health difficulties.

Ms Lee said the turning point for her was in 2014, when she attempted suicide.

"My husband left me on the floor and told me that he wasn't going to call anyone whilst I still had a heartbeat," she said.

"At the time, it was my sixteen-year-old son who found me and called the ambulance."

Child protection services and police then became involved.

People with a disability face far higher risk of assault

Ms Lee is one of many people living with a disability who are disproportionately more at risk of assault in Australia.

Data collected by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) shows people with a disability were 1.8 times as likely to have experienced physical and sexual violence from a partner compared to a non-disabled person.

Ms Lee said accessing support as a domestic violence victim with a disability added another hurdle.

"I feel unless the disability sector and the NDIS start to recognise their part in breaking down the systemic barriers for disabled women and people then we are going to struggle," she said.

"All domestic violence services must be accessible, but we need support from the disability sector to be able to fully engage with domestic and family violence services.

"They always talk about making refuges accessible, but it's more than that.

"We need access to supports to be able to get to, and stay there safely.

"No woman should face having to wait eight weeks like I did to do something as simple as a shower, begging for help to be able to live independently and look after my children.

"The family violence sector can only do so much, we need the disability sector to lift their game."

Survivors carry huge burden when telling their story

The first time Ms Lee spoke about what had happened to her was in 2015 at Victoria's royal commission into family violence.

"That was a pivotal moment for me," she said.

"Because what I had to say at that time was unfiltered and raw."

Ms Lee said speaking out had been a journey for her, that had helped with recovery.

She took part in the campaign to change Victoria's laws that restricted what sexual assault victims could say publicly.

But she said now that story has been told, she had to be careful to set boundaries.

"How I position my experience has shifted," Ms Lee said.

"It's helped me with recovery, it's helped me understand the broader issue that disabled women face and the intersecting factors that are built up over a lifetime.

"It's helped me unpack and make sense of my experience, having in-depth conversations with researchers and experts.

"I've gained a lot from speaking out, but I have to be mindful of being able to say no and setting personal boundaries.

"I find now that I ruminate over conversations or interactions I've had after speaking out. I guess this is grief, trauma and the next stage of recovery. Sitting with it all."

Control, isolation used to overwhelm victims

Head of support group 1800Respect Fiona Mort said the central characteristic of domestic violence was control.

"People choosing to use violence will stalk through digital devices, bank statements, or tracking devices," she said.

"They may also isolate a person from their family and friends and other support networks."

Ms Mort said coercive control and emotional abuse was prevalent in almost every abusive relationship.

"An example of this might be in the early stages of a relationship, they will be loving and idolising and then gradually over time, the way they speak, treat and respond to you will change and deteriorate," she said.

"The victim can feel broken down, disempowered and unworthy, or overwhelmed, as though they're going crazy."

Look out for red flags, advocate warns

1800RESPECT's national partner Hannah Taylor said what Ms Lee experienced was not an uncommon predicament for domestic abuse survivors.

"If this behaviour occurs at home and then in front of people, this can be a red flag," she said.

"It shows the perpetrator is becoming more confident in their abuse."

"It can also include financial abuse where they make you feel incompetent when it comes to money.

“Perpetrators may make large purchases with your combined money without consulting you, sell your property or possessions, force you to get loans in your name or refuse to pay for things to support you and your children.”

Ms Taylor said the victim was often shamed and blamed by the perpetrator for triggering their behaviour.

“It’s important to know, you are not responsible for someone else’s choice to be abusive,” she said.

“When people say they feel they provoked it, it’s because

they have been manipulated by the person using violence to think that way.”

Ms Lee said people who find themselves in a similar situation should reach out.

“Even if ten people have ignored you, the eleventh might be the one to listen,” she said.

“It was the last time that I reached out after being ignored by so many ... it was that eleventh person who listened and took some action, and it saved my life.”





Stronger privacy protections set to be locked in for disability royal commission witnesses

Disability advocates have long raised concerns a lack of privacy safeguards was stopping people from coming forward to share their stories with the royal commission.

Stronger privacy protections to better protect witnesses of the disability royal commission have unanimously passed the Senate following long-held concerns over a lack of safeguards.

The Royal Commissions Amendment (Protection of Information) Bill 2021 passed on Wednesday with the support of the government as well as Labor and Greens senators, and did not require a formal vote.

The bill is aimed at boosting the trust of people with disability and potential whistleblowers to come forward to share evidence.

It will ensure information provided to the commission would remain in confidence after the inquiry ends, and guarantee stronger protections for those who expose institutional failures.

The passing of the bill comes more than two years after the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability commenced.

Attorney-General Michaelia Cash said the amendments will address lasting privacy concerns.

“The amendments will ensure that all persons wishing to engage with the disability royal commission can be confident that they can tell their stories or provide information in a way that protects the confidentiality of their sensitive information and protects them against potential adverse consequences,” she told the Senate on Wednesday.

The laws also ensure sensitive information provided to the inquiry outside private sessions can be accorded the same confidentiality as those within.

The chair of the commission, Ronald Sackville, a former Federal Court judge, first requested the changes in February last year after campaigning from disability advocates.

Since then, advocates have continued to stress the urgent need for stronger protections, saying a lack of safeguards was preventing witnesses from sharing their experiences with the royal commission.

The government announced its intention to address the issue through legislation last October. But since then, the push has been held up by outstanding concerns the initial measures did not go far enough.

Greens Senator Jordon Steele-John has been engaged in long-term discussions with the government around ways to ensure adequate protections would be provided.

He told the Senate on Wednesday the reforms would allow witnesses to come forward with trust.

“With the passage of this legislation, we encourage everyone to come forward and share their experience of violence abuse, neglect or exploitation with the commission,” he said.

“It is vital to ensuring that this investigation is able to do its work.”

The bill will now go to the House of Representatives before officially becoming law.

The royal commission was extended for an extra 17 months in May this year, and is now due to deliver its report on 29 September, 2023.



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