

when working in this field, and that individual coping strategies are not necessarily correlated with reduced levels of vicarious trauma, better efforts must be made to recognise vicarious traumatisation in the whole range of professions dealing with sexual assault. Occupational health and safety measures need to be put in place to protect workers from harm. This should not result in a stigmatisation of these professions, but rather the recognition of the extraordinary efforts of these workers and the wisdom they hold about an important yet under-recognised aspect of our society. Increased prestige should be given to these workers and mechanisms created to politically and culturally mobilise them as a group.

Overall, this paper has documented the profound harm and sheer costs of sexual assault. While people and communities do and will recover from sexual assault, sexual assault is a trauma that is preventable, and significantly more effort needs to be made in this direction. It is simply not good enough for sexual assault to continue to be largely privatised and a taboo topic. Awareness-raising about these issues needs to be such that talking about sexual assault becomes commonplace. Strategies to prevent sexual assault need to be increased, including strategies that focus on creating greater respect for women and other disempowered people, and on communicating the social unacceptability of all violence. Non-violence should be promoted as a fundamental social and community value.

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