

# WHAT ABOUT ME (US)?

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# HOW THIS CAME ABOUT

Both presenters have experienced professional risks and their impact

- One has published on the impact of psychosocial risk on evaluators (Williams 2018)
- Other has worked in disaster recovery, has professional knowledge of risk minimisation strategies useful in other professions
- Both aware that as evaluation increasingly expands into new fields and around the globe, risks are likely to increase
- Today intended to start the conversation; hope some of you will participate in next steps

## HOW WE RESEARCHED THE TOPIC

As members of RREALI at CDU, took a realist approach, ie

- How is risk to evaluators caused, in what contexts for which evaluators, and what are its outcomes?
- How can risks to evaluators be reduced and/or their harmful impacts minimised – and what would the outcomes be for which evaluators in what contexts?

In view of our own self-care and sanity, did a VERY quick realist analysis of a few pieces of literature, and after HREC ethics approval, conducted six interviews.

## FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

- The key finding: Very little written on the topic of evaluator risk outside of the 'telling truth to power' risk, which focuses on risk to truth and risk to livelihood
- Organisational risk literature, where relevant, seemed to focus on physical risk, but not psychosocial risk
- Striking contrast between emphasis on participant safety in HREC processes and lack of complementary awareness of evaluator risk (anywhere)

## WHAT THE LITERATURE INDICATES 'WORKS'

- Literature in risk management strategies for other professions, eg first responders, indicates:
- Importance of personal characteristics and of accumulation of stress
- Steps can be taken before entering the situation to prepare participants for what they will face and potential impact on them
- Debriefing afterwards also important, timing and credibility of process critical

# INTERVIEWS

Only six interviews but chosen to provide:

- Two with experience in first response, disaster recovery risk identification and management
- Two with experience in commissioning evaluations, being internal evaluators; two with experience working as independent evaluation consultants; two in academic setting, one in consulting company
- Three male, three female
- Importantly, two Australian Indigenous evaluators, able to talk about cultural safety and cultural risk for evaluators

# INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Variety of risks identified including:

- Vicarious trauma from interviewing traumatised participants over hours, days, weeks BUT ALSO
- *'... she had frustration with people [doing interviews] being told to debrief ... in her experience, sitting alone at the computer looking at row after row after row and column after column after column of data, you know, of children who had been abused... can be really difficult in a different way but equally, you know, quite impactful...*

## INTERVIEW FINDINGS, CONT'D

- More than vicarious trauma - some topics may be distressing due to personal/family/friend connection , eg eating disorders, homelessness, Family & Domestic Violence
- Cultural risks to evaluators: there are professional risks and personal risks.
- *there are professional risks and personal risks ... for Aboriginal evaluators, those lines can blur ...*
- *... there's an extra element of responsibility, community responsibility which we feel as Aboriginal evaluators which can impact on the self-care dimension...*
- Feeling of responsibility for programs, participants a key factor

## INTERVIEW FINDINGS, CONT'D

Relationships with commissioners/users, fear of telling truth to power, truth to friends and worst – telling truth to power about friends – what will happen to the information

- *sometimes ... you feel like you're the ones who actually care more about how well the program is going than the people managing it or the commissioner of the evaluation...*

Exacerbating factors include stress and exhaustion, physical danger or life stressors

- *... it's compounded with the stresses that you have in your own life and your own work, it does add a layer. I think people need the space to work through it and you don't always get that when you're at work...*

## OVERALL FINDINGS TO DATE

Some AES members – have some procedures in place, but

Borrowing Pawson's categories, risk factors found at four levels:

- Individual (eg personality);
- Interpersonal (especially the relationship between the evaluator and evaluand(s), evaluation participants
- Institutional, ie the degree of support and understanding provided by the evaluator's organisation (some AES agencies noted here)
- Infrastructure, in the funding policies that drive short timeframes, the post-truth environment, but also the lack of policies and standards etc.

# WHERE TO FROM HERE

We have also identified four areas for potential next steps:

- Institutional guidelines and tools for improved evaluator safety
- Adding one or more items relevant to this to AES Professional standards
- Self care knowledge
- Commissioner education/negotiation (as timelines but also evaluation use emerged as important factors in risk)

## NEXT STEPS

- Sheet of paper at your place, for you to fill in if you're willing, by category, with examples from your personal experience: individual; interpersonal; institutional; infrastructure (and any strategies you'd like to share)
- Paper also has space for you to indicate if you would like to be part of a group to follow up on this topic, prepare paper on it (for AES or other bodies, also for publication)
- We ask you to fill these in and return them to us by end of session
- BUTCHERS PAPER – Suggestions by table for action at personal, institutional, professional, commissioner level