

# Exploring the experiences of female paramedics in Australian ambulance services through arts based research

Ms Lisa Hobbs<sup>1,2</sup>

Dr Rebecca Scollen<sup>3</sup>

Associate Professor Beata Batorowicz<sup>3</sup>

Associate Professor Scott Devenish<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Southern Queensland

<sup>2</sup>School of Creative Arts, University of Southern Queensland

<sup>3</sup>School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedicine, Australian Catholic University

## SUMMARY

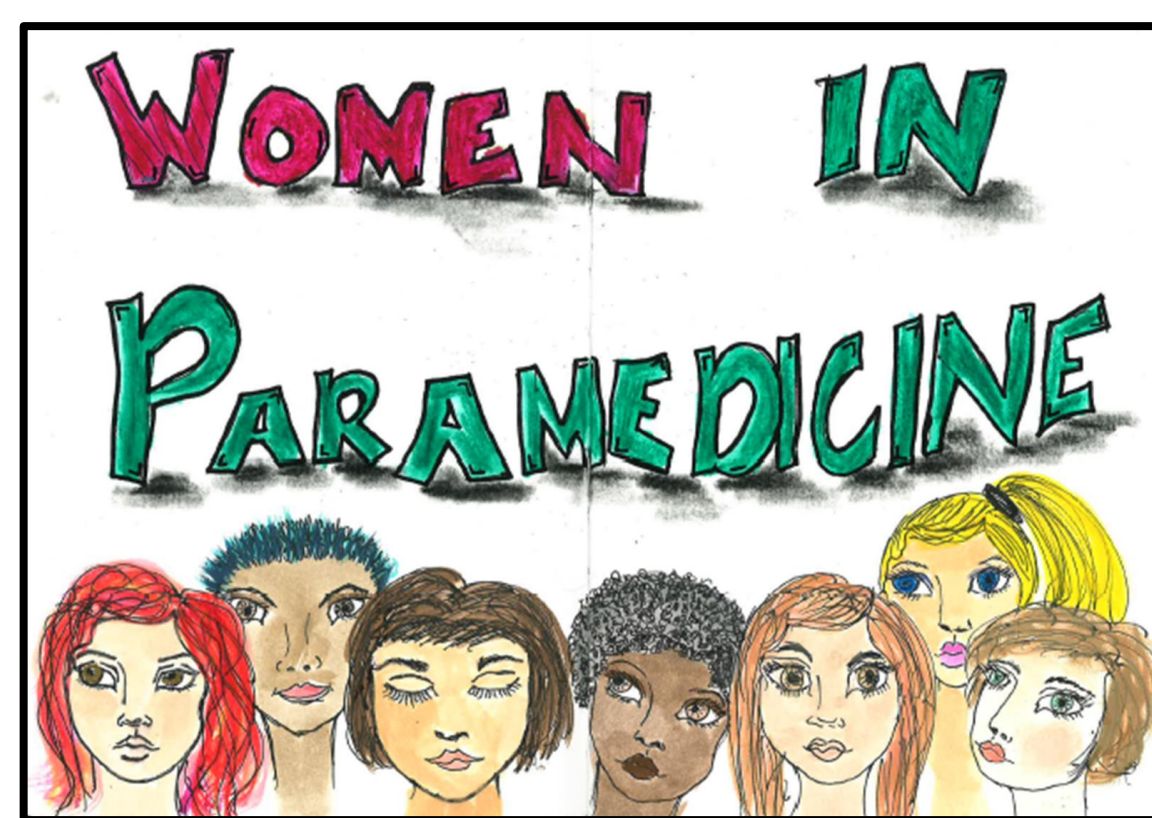
- Paramedics are pre-hospital emergency health care specialists who hold a unique skillset including unscheduled lifesaving medical interventions, stabilisation and transportation of the sick and injured<sup>1</sup>.
- As paramedic research primarily focuses on skills, procedures and interventions, the literature pertaining to paramedic lived experience is less prevalent. Thus, research into the experiences of paramedics who identify as females has received little attention.
- There are no studies in existence about the experiences of female paramedics utilising arts-based research.

## INTRODUCTION

- Australian ambulance service culture has over the last 10 to 30 years moved from being male dominated to become more accepting of female paramedics. Stories and experiences of women in Australian paramedicine are anecdotal or largely unreported.

## AIM

- The study will explore the experiences of female paramedics who have encountered the gradual feminisation of the ambulance service culture in Australia.



Women in Paramedicine, 2022, Double Journal Page (18.5 x 53cm), by Lisa Hobbs



Escaping the Cycle, 2021, (50 x 50cm), Mixed Media Disc, by Lisa Hobbs

## METHOD

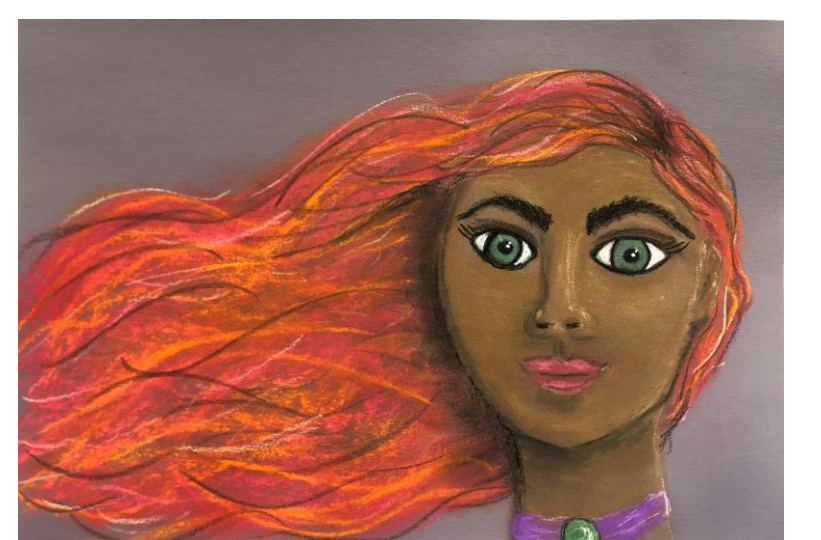
- Phase 1: An online survey will establish participant demographics, and explore experiences and perceptions about opportunities, challenges and advantages of female paramedics in a traditionally male orientated workplace.
- Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews designed to build on the data obtained from the online survey will occur. These one-on-one, face-to-face interviews will include a creative arts-based activity for participants to engage in whilst talking about their experiences as a female paramedic.
- The researcher will engage in creative arts practices throughout the entire study.
- Data analysis and arts-based research will provide a rich and deep understanding of the experiences of women working in a historically male dominated profession.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This poster was possible because of the work of the assistance of staff from the School of Creative Arts, University of Southern Queensland; the School of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Southern Queensland; and The Artist Tree.

## CREATIVE ARTS

- Creative Arts-Based Research is a structured approach that can be used at all stages of the research journey, thereby assisting the researcher to immerse themselves not only in the data, but in the entire study<sup>2,3</sup>.
- The use of creative arts as a form of individual processing, as well as making visible, issues that are often hidden or silenced within work cultures/environments is important within the context of this research study.
- By enabling participants to create during the interview process, it opens up the possibility for the researcher to uncover data that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to illicit.
- Artistic Influences: Judy Chicago, Jane Davenport, Brigitte Grade, Marta Lapkowska and DANSUN.



Ella, 2022, (29.7 x 42cm), pastels, by Lisa Hobbs

## LITERATURE

- Workplace Injury: female paramedics have a higher incidence of workplace injuries when compared to male paramedics<sup>4</sup>
- 70% of female paramedics in Canada reported being exposed to some form of workplace violence<sup>5</sup>
- Female paramedics currently account for more than half of the paramedic workforce on-road, yet a much small percentage of women are represented in higher clinical roles, executive office and managerial positions<sup>6</sup>
- As more women commence a career in paramedicine, paramedic employers should be implementing more flexible work arrangements to facilitate maternity leave and family friendly rostering<sup>7</sup>
- Shift work is correlated with negative health effects including reproductive disorders, irregular menstrual cycles, dysmenorrhoea and excessive bleeding<sup>8</sup>
- Because of their career choice, paramedics are at significantly higher risk of being exposed to extreme levels of stress and developing mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION

- As no existing studies on the experiences of Australian female paramedics are available, this study has potential to generate new knowledge and to fill a gap in the literature.

## REFERENCES

1. Spencer-Goodsir et al., 2022, *Australasian Journal of Paramedicine*, <https://doi.org/10.33151/ajp.19.978>
2. Leavy, 2020, Gilford Publications
3. NCRM National Centre for Research Methods, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpnexrLZBT4>
4. Sawyer et al., 2022, *Prehospital Emergency Care*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10903127.2022.2064019>
5. Bingham et al., 2014, *Prehospital Emergency Care*, [10.3109/10903127.2014.912703](https://doi.org/10.3109/10903127.2014.912703)
6. Stewart et al., 2021, *Australasian Journal of Paramedicine*, <https://doi.org/10.33151/ajp.18.861>
7. Devenish et al., 2021, *Australasian Journal of Paramedicine*, <https://doi.org/10.33151/ajp.17.872>
8. Albert-Sabater et al., 2016, *J Clinical Nursing*, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.13371>
9. Awais et al., 2021, *British Journal of Psychiatry*, <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.2020.193>

