Trauma That is Not Their Own:
Rape Crisis Center Staff and Vicarious Trauma

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How we will spend our time together

o Define vicarious trauma
   o Differentiate from compassion fatigue

o Identify effects of unmitigated vicarious trauma on workers and organizations

o Discuss resiliency building tools for individuals and organizations

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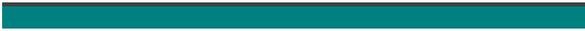## Secondary Traumatic Stress

o Compassion Fatigue

o Vicarious Trauma

Compassion Fatigue

"I'm tired, Sam. I'm tired of this job, this life...

this weight on my shoulders, man. I'm tired of it."

-Dean Winchester, *Supernatural*

Compassion Fatigue

o A decreased ability to feel compassion or empathy for others.

o Characterized by energy depletion or burnout.

o Caused by ongoing or cumulative exposure to:
  o Trauma survivors' continuing needs
  o Institutional advocacy barriers

o Most common in shelter advocates and sexual assault outreach workers and prevention staff.

Compassion Fatigue

o Professional impact includes:
  o Signs of burnout or exhaustion
  o Disengagement with the movement
  o Negative attitude toward coworkers, survivors, or institutions

o Resulting in substandard service to survivors and the community

Vicarious Trauma

"The memory, it isn't mine. And I shouldn't have to carry it."

-River Tam, *Serenity*

Vicarious Trauma

o Internalized trauma experienced by a professional as a direct result of exposure to primary trauma survivors' stories.

   o Most commonly caused by sexual violence trauma exposure.

o Characterized a shift in the professional's worldview, sense of safety, self-esteem, spirituality, or hope of the future.

o Caused by single event exposure, not by cumulative effects.
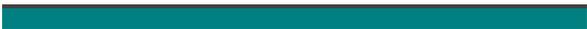
Vicarious Trauma

o The more personal the trauma is to the professional the higher the likelihood of vicarious trauma.

   o Trauma history is indicated as both a risk and protective factor.

o Most commonly experienced by sexual assault advocates, counselors, therapists, and crisis workers.

o Large caseloads and frequent on-call shifts increase the likelihood of experiencing it.

Vicarious Trauma

"There are things inside you that no one wants to face. Things that you keep secret, even from yourself. But secrets are funny. The things you try to hide always turn out to be the things you can't forget."

-George Lass, *Dead Like Me*

Vicarious Trauma

o Professionals experiencing vicarious trauma may have:
  o Exaggerated startle reflex
  o Nightmares or flashbacks
  o Distrust of others
  o Sense of hopelessness
  o Inability to focus or stay on task
  o Disassociation

o Resulting in harm to the professional and substandard services.

Impacts of Vicarious Trauma

o Individual

o Organizational

Individual Impacts

"But the human soul is not a rubber ball. It's vulnerable,

impermanent, but stronger than you know.

And more valuable than you can imagine."

-Death as played by Julian Richings

Individual Impacts

oDecreased interest in or ability to provide services

oDisconnection from previously important relationships

oInability to maintain or create new self-care routines
oIncreased reliance on unhealthy coping skills

oDecreased ability to plan for the future

oDisconnection from the movement

Individual Impacts

oDistrust of others:
oSystems
oCoworkers
oSurvivors

oFatigue, exhaustion, malaise
oTardiness
oAbsenteeism

Organizational Impacts

o Decreased interest in or ability to provide services

o Disconnection from previously important relationships

o Decreased ability to plan strategically or for the future

o Distrust of others:
  o Systems
  o Peer Organizations
  o Survivors

Organizational Impacts

o Increased staff turnover
  o Skilled workers leaving the movement

o Disorganized and preoccupied leadership
  o Personally affected leaders
  o Organizational chaos

o Organization operating in continual crisis

Mitigation Factors
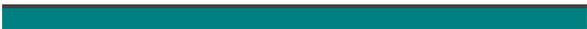
o Resilience in individual workers

o Supportive organizational culture

Individual Resilience

"Mother, make me a big tall tree, so I can shed my leaves

and let it blow through me."

-"Mother", Florence + the Machine

Individual Resilience: Effective Self-Care

o Personal use of counseling or therapy services

o Community engagement in social justice issues
  o Altruism Born of Suffering

o Work/personal life boundaries

Individual Resilience: Professional Readiness

o Self-education about vicarious trauma

o Continuing education about sexual violence

o Peer and supervisor consult

o Empathy and trust building exercises

Vicarious Posttraumatic Growth

"If you were happy every day of your life, you wouldn't be a human being. You'd be a game show host."

-Veronica Sawyer, *The Heathers*

Vicarious Posttraumatic Growth

o Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) is the positive changes that occur in a survivor after dealing with the stress and challenges of trauma.

o Vicarious Posttraumatic Growth (VPTG) is an extension of PTG.
1) Professional experiences vicarious trauma from working directly with a survivor.
2) Ongoing services yield positive outcomes for the survivor, which helps professional cope with vicarious trauma.
3) When survivor experiences PTG, professional experiences VPTG through compassion satisfaction.

Organizational Resilience: Leadership

"Over identifying with someone's experience can be as much of a barrier to perspective taking as not identifying at all."

- Brené Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me*

Organizational Resilience: Leadership

o Culture is created from the top down.

o Sexual violence program leaders are typically promoted advocates.
  o How much vicarious trauma are leaders bringing to their jobs?

o Organizational resilience is not possible without resilient leadership.

Organizational Resilience: Supervision

o Effective supervisory structure and meetings
  o Professional Quality of Life Scale (Stamm, 2012)
  o Burnout Potential Inventory (Potter, 2005)

o Variance of caseload and job requirements
  o Compassion Satisfaction

o Initial training and orientation

Organizational Resilience: Self-Care

o Benefit packages
  o Paid time off
  o Access to mental health services

o Daily productivity expectations
  o Out of an 8 hour work day, how many hours of service are staff expected to provide?
  o What does a direct service staff member's client load look like?

Organizational Resilience: Culture

o Creating sense of coherence in organization
  o Is your program hiring for internal motivation to do the work; credentials and training; or a combination thereof?
  o Does your on-boarding process include acclimation to the nature of the work?

o Supportive policies and procedures
  o How do employees take time off?
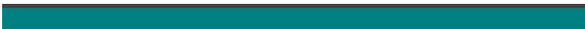 o Does your organization formally acknowledge vicarious trauma in their employee documents?

Creating a Culture of Coherence & Self-Care

"Stand too close to the painting, all you see are patches of color.

Stand too far back, you can't see any of the details.

Right now, this is your particular perspective."

-Rube Sofer, *Dead Like Me*

Creating a Culture of Coherence & Self-Care

o Altruism Born of Suffering

o How does your program promote positive change in the community?

o How does your staff support survivors in creating social change?

o Is your program rooted in social change work?

Creating a Culture of Coherence & Self-Care

oOrganizational Policies and Procedures

oStatement on organizational principles

oStatement on Secondary or Vicarious Trauma

oRemove barriers that discourage self-care

Creating a Culture of Coherence & Self-Care

"Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and

that is an act of political warfare."

-Audre Lorde

Resources

Vivian, P. and Hormann, S. (2013) *Organizational Trauma and Healing.* North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace

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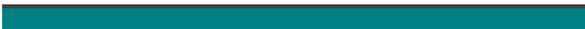
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