“Our capacity to help others is greatest when we are willing, able, and even determined to be helped ourselves.” - Lipsky, 2009

“Just as no survivor can recover alone, no therapist can work with Trauma alone” – Herman, 1992

**Vicarious Resilience** refers to the positive transformation of the therapist’s inner experience resulting from empathetic engagement with the client’s trauma material. It is a process characterized by a unique and positive effect that transforms the therapists in response to client trauma survivor’s own resiliency. It refers to the positive meaning making, growth and transformation in the therapist’s experience resulting from exposure to client’s resilience in the course of therapeutic process addressing trauma recovery.

Vicarious resilience emanates from a conversation about how our witnessing impacts us and transforms us. It is a vicarious learning process. It is not an instantaneous process and unfolds over time in the therapeutic relationship. It is a process of discovery for client and helper.

**Resilience**: A culturally embedded definition by Ungar (2008)

*In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to negotiate for these resources to be provided to them in culturally meaningful ways.*

**Vicarious Resilience & Therapist Gains**

The therapeutic relationship is not an equal relationship. Power is a factor because there is no reciprocity. Vicarious Resilience is about acknowledging how we benefit more than we let on, and that we learn and grow, as we accompany the client on the healing journey. It is about the therapist’s process and how the therapist benefits.

Why do we need to examine how we transform ourselves as a result of the work we do with our clients?

1. It is a reciprocal relationship, so we need to recognize our part. We need to bring awareness to the fact that there is mutual impact in a helping relationship.
2. We need to create balance in the hierarchy. It helps us to deconstruct the relationship. It helps us to develop the use of self in the therapeutic relationship, especially in culturally congruent ways.
How Therapists Benefit From Vicarious Resilience

What are some of the therapist gains, especially the ones that are not commonly spoken about? We gain from skills, and a knowledge base, but we also gain material benefits. It is important to acknowledge these important gains, so there is mutuality and reciprocity. We restore power to our clients within the relationship through acknowledging this cycle. And we create more agency in the people with whom we work. Other gains include:

- **Vicarious resiliency allows us to develop the use of self in therapy.** It allows clients to feel empowered by the ways in which they impact us as well.
- Regaining hope, being inspired, Reflecting on human capacity to heal
- Courageous Curiosity
- Reaffirming the value of therapy/ Increased sense of efficacy in therapy
- Access to knowledge and wisdom, We gain experience
- Gratification, validation, Meaningful employment
- Gaining perspective, Reassessing dimensions of one’s own problems
- Understanding and valuing spiritual dimensions of healing & Discovering the power of community healing
- Making the professional and lay public aware of the impact and multiple dimensions of violence by writing and participating in public speaking forums
- Increasing our accountability
- Understanding timing of healing
- Listening and creating new narratives
- Personal growth & Learning about one’s blind areas
- Observing our reflexive sense of efficacy in navigating social/cultural/political contexts
- Learning to be a compassionate witness beyond the therapy room
- Learning about struggles in others parts of the world and their connection to this and other countries
- Become part of positive change
- Understanding how context shapes possibilities for healing
- We gain visibility, leadership roles, success

References