Managing Vicarious Trauma

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INTRODUCTION
Managing Vicarious Trauma

In this webinar, we will discuss the effects of secondary traumatic stress, compassion fatigue, and burnout on behavioral health professionals and those they supervise.
Managing Vicarious Trauma

Many of the implications of working with individuals who have experience with trauma will be reviewed.
Managing Vicarious Trauma

Elements of training will be presented for future behavioral health professionals who work with individuals and families with high levels of trauma exposure.
Learning Objectives

By the end of this presentation, attendees will be able to:

- Describe the elements of shared trauma
- Explain the factors supervisors can use to help their supervisees obtain compassion satisfaction
- Understand the complexity of moral injury and inner conflict in traumatic experiences that may be shared by the individuals they serve
Poll

How many of you provide care for individuals, or supervise those who provide care for individuals, who have experienced trauma?
Case Study

The Cost of Caring
Providers as casualties

- Empathy and exposure
- Four reasons trauma workers experience vicarious trauma
  (Figley, 1999)
Providers as casualties

Empathy is very important in the treatment of trauma – and empathy is the primary reason for secondary trauma.
Providers as casualties

Many people who treat trauma have experienced some sort of trauma themselves
Providers as casualties

Unresolved trauma in the clinician will be activated by the stories he or she hears.
Providers as casualties

Childrens’ trauma is especially difficult for clinicians to cope with.
Burnout in Behavioral Health Clinicians

- Emotional and mental exhaustion in emotionally demanding situations
  - A process rather than a fixed condition
  - Begins gradually and gets worse
  - Void of achievement
Burnout in Behavioral Health Clinicians

- Cumulative and predictable

- Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Depersonalization
  - Reduced personal accomplishment
Compassion Stress

The cost of caring

Figley (1995):

“The natural, preventable and treatable consequence of working with suffering people”

Perceived demands of experiencing the suffering of others

The desire to help relieve that suffering in some way
Vicarious trauma

- Exhaustion and traumatic stress associated with the suffering of the individuals in your care
- Providers absorb the trauma of those for whom they care
- Can emerge suddenly and without warning
Vicarious trauma

- Helplessness and confusion
- Isolation from supporters

Also called:
- Secondary traumatic stress (STS)
- Compassion Fatigue
Trauma

DSM-5 criteria review

- Real or perceived personal threat
  - Life, injury, sexual violation
- Witnessing this in someone else
Trauma

- Learning about this happening to someone you care about
- Hearing about it secondarily
  - As in behavioral health providers
Trauma is complicated

- Impact injury
- Fatigue or exhaustion
- Grief and loss
- Inner conflict/moral injury*
Moral injury (inner conflict)

- Truths we have held onto don’t protect us anymore
- Chaos and confusion
- Shame and painful guilt
- Betrayal
- Shattered faith
- Horrific acts
- No right answer
- The “gray area”
Moral injury (Inner conflict) case study

Inner Conflict and Survivor’s Guilt
Treating trauma in individuals who come to us for care

- Evidence based treatment of trauma includes exposure to the traumatic event as part of the narrative.
- The clinician is exposed.
- Compassion fatigue can result from cumulative exposure and no “treatment” of the vicarious trauma.
Treating vicarious trauma

- Stress First Aid – it works for us too
- Steps for compassion satisfaction
  - Steps to becoming resilient providers
- Provider support / consultation groups
Stress First Aid

- Steps that matter to us:
  - Connection
  - Confidence
  - Competence
Stress First Aid

Case Example

“Woman’s Best Friend”

(pages 188-192)

Resilient Providers (Compassion satisfaction)

- Figley (1995)
  - Positive affect
  - Self-care resources
  - Social support
Positive Affect (Competence)

- Focus on the difference we are making
- Notice the small victories
- Pause to pay attention
Self-Care Resources (Confidence)

- Intellectual
- Physical exercise
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Stress Management
- Joy
Social Support (Connection)

- Family and friends
- Those who understand
- Provider support groups / consultation / supervision
Provider Support Groups for Vicarious Trauma

- Weekly meetings, outside facilitators
- Institutional rituals to help providers understand the world is not a bad place despite the trauma they have heard about
- Promote optimism and support
Provider Support Groups for Vicarious Trauma

- Storytelling at the beginning and end of each meeting - stories of small successes of those they help
- Healthy venting
- Sharing inspiration
- Cultural humility
Poll

- Do you believe you need to understand what an individual has gone through in order to most effectively help him or her?
- Do you believe sharing a traumatic experience could make you less effective?
Shared Trauma

You can’t describe it unless you’ve seen it.
You can’t explain it unless you’ve done it.
You can’t imagine it unless you’ve been there.
Then it never goes away.

-- Bill Blessington (2011)
Shared Trauma

- The provider and the individual seeking care have similar experiences
- Figley first coined this term after Hurricane Katrina
- Providers experienced unique reactions to caring for those living through the trauma
  - Providers from the same communities
  - Examples
Shared Trauma in a Providers Support Group

Case Study

- “The House of God”
Photo References

- Heidi Kraft personal pictures (Iraq 2004)
- Navy.mil
- Marines.mil
- AF.mil
- Army.mil
- USCG.mil
- Nationalguard.mil
- Storyblocks.com
References


References


Additional Resources

(Click and go to the link)

- Inner Conflict and Survivor’s Guilt
- The Cost of Caring
- The National Resource Directory
- Stress First Aid
- Trauma Recovery Center, Vicarious Trauma and Staff Support
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), Resources for vicarious trauma
- International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS), Vicarious Trauma Toolkit
THANK YOU

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