VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION: Self-Care In a Changing World

Presented by
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Topics

1. Understanding Trauma
2. Understanding Vicarious Traumatization: STS, CF & Burnout
3. Effects of Vicarious Traumatization
4. Management of Vicarious Traumatization
5. Move beyond VT & embrace Transformation
Trauma Means Wounding

Just as the body can be traumatized, so can the psyche or the spirit. On the psychological and mental levels, trauma refers to the wounding of your emotions, your spirit, your will to live, your beliefs about yourself and the world, your dignity and your sense of security.
“Long-lasting responses to trauma result not simply from the experience of fear and helplessness but from how our bodies interpret those experiences.”

Rachel Yehuda
• After traumatization, victims often report that they are plagued and haunted by inclusive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are destructive to themselves and others. **WHY?** (Wesley Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; 2008; Herman, 1992; Marsh, 2010).

• Traumatized people often lose the meaning of life, perceive that they are hopeless and have periods of time in which they feel de-humanized.
The Heart of Trauma

• We don’t survive trauma as a result of conscious decision-making.

• At the moment of life threat, humans automatically rely upon survival instincts.

• Our five senses pick up the signs of imminent danger, causing the brain to “turn on” the adrenaline stress response system.
We Were Born to Heal

• As we prepare to fight or flee, heart rate and respiration speed oxygen to muscle tissue, and the “thinking brain,” our frontal cortex, is inhibited to increase response time. We are in “survival mode,” in our “animal brains.”

• If the events have been recurrent or we are young and vulnerable or have inadequate support, we can be left with a host of intense responses and symptoms that “tell the story” without words and without the knowledge that we are remembering events and feelings from long ago.
Survival response system may become chronically activated, resulting in long-term feelings of alarm & danger, tendencies to flee or fight under stress, debilitating feelings of vulnerability & exhaustion, or an inability to assert and protect ourselves.

To make the challenge even greater, therapeutic approaches that emphasize talking about the events often result in more, not less, activation of trauma responses and symptoms.
Trauma Defined

- Trauma often refers to experiences or events that by definition are overwhelming. Experiences of trauma are more than merely stressful—they can also be shocking, terrifying, and devastating, and can result in profound feelings of terror, shame, helplessness, and powerlessness (Courtois, 1999).

- Thus ‘trauma’ designates both events and their impact, in part because the actual experience... and the assault that experience poses to sense of self, safety, belonging, and connection are intertwined.” (Kammerer & Mazelis, 2006).
Trauma Defined

Recent studies support the conclusion that the impact of trauma is not only cumulative—the more times a traumatic event is experienced the greater the impact—but also additive—exposure to additional different types of trauma is correlated with greater impact (Levine, 2010)
DSM-IV Definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

4 Major Components

1. Experienced, witnessed or confronted with events
   - Threatened death
   - Serious injury
   - Physical integrity of self or others
   - Feeling, intense fear, helplessness and distressing

2. The trauma is re-experienced in a way that is recurrent, intrusive, distressing
   - Recalling events
   - Dreams, nightmares
   - Flashbacks
   - Upset when exposed to reminder of trauma
3. Person tries to avoid any reminders of the trauma
   - Avoidance
   - People, places, persons
   - Entrangement
   - Isolation

4. Persistent symptoms of increased arousal such as
   - Difficulty falling/staying asleep
   - Irritability or outbursts of anger
   - Difficulty concentrating
   - Hyper-vigilance
   - Exaggerated startle response
Insidious trauma, micro-Aggressions

- A group of authors have proposed models of what has been called “insidious trauma” (Root, 1992) or “micro-aggression,” (Sue, 2003; Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Totino, 2007).

- Ethnic minority psychology rather than trauma

- Insults of daily life, taken cumulatively in the lives of members of marginalized groups, constitute a traumatic stressor for those populations.
Insidious trauma, micro-Aggressions

- Name-calling, pranks, and harassment fall within this construct.

- Insidious trauma is not overt. Sue and his colleagues have found that insidious traumata can include being repeatedly asked “where are you from,” requests to touch one’s hair, commentary on the exoticism of one’s looks, and jokes containing stereotypes about one’s group.
Complex Psychological Trauma

• Repetitive or prolonged

• Involve direct harm and/or neglect and abandonment by caregivers or ostensibly responsible adults

• Occur at developmentally vulnerable times in the victim’s life, such as early childhood:

• Have great potential to compromise severely a child’s development.
Complex Psychological Trauma

- Severe and complex, with problems of attachment and relationship, emotion regulation, self, dissociation, somatic difficulties, and spiritual/existential confusion.

- When a clinician is not trauma-informed, the client’s problems may be seen through the lens of the presenting symptom: chronic pain, compulsive behaviors, a pattern of failed or violent relationships, self-inflicted violence, emotional labiality, or Axis II presentations.
The biological basis of post-traumatic phenomena
The biological basis of post-traumatic phenomena
The biological basis of post-traumatic phenomena

Brain Structures Involved in Dealing with Fear and Stress

- Prefrontal cortex
- Medial prefrontal cortex
- Ventromedial prefrontal cortex
- Amygdala
Central Nervous System

Brain & Spinal Cord

Peripheral Nervous System

Sensory Division
- Exteroceptive
  - Five Senses
- Interioceptive
  - Proprioceptors
  - Vestibular Sense

Motor Division
- Somatic Nervous System
  - Voluntary Control
  - Striated Muscles
- Autonomic Nervous System
  - Involuntary
    - Smooth Muscle, Viscera

Sympathetic
- Parasympathetic
Normal Response to Threat

Perception of Threat

Limbic System

Amygdala Signals Alarm

Hypothalamus

Sympathetic Nervous System

Adrenal Glands

Epinephrine/Norepinephrine

Mobilization Fight/Flight

Corticotrophin Releasing Factor

Pituitary

Adrenocorticotropic Hormone (ACTH)

Cortisol
Trauma Response

Perception of Threat → Limbic System → Amygdala Signals Alarm → Hypothalamus

Sympathetic Nervous System
- Adrenal Glands
  - Epinephrine/Norepinephrine
  - Mobilization Fight/Flight
  - Mobilization Persists

Corticotropic Releasing Factor
- Pituitary
  - Adrenocorticotropic (ACTH)
  - Cortisol
  - No Halting Alarm
Historical Trauma Defined (HT)

- The collective emotional & psychological injury both over a life span and across generations, resulting from a cataclysmic history of genocide.
- Intergenerational Trauma / Soul wound

- Dr. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart
Question

Time
Vicarious Traumatization
The Heart of it all
Introduction

- Care of the soul is not solving the puzzle of life; quite the opposite, it is the appreciation of the paradoxical mysteries that blend light & darkness into the grandeur of what human life & culture can be.

- Thomas Moore: Care of the Soul
LIFE

• Peck Scott in the Road Less travelled; “Life is Difficult”

• Buddha in his Teachings says; “Life is Suffering………..
Any of These Four Areas Can Be Impacted by Trauma

• Emotional – the four basic emotions include anger, fear, sadness, and happiness
• Mental – those things that take place in our heads such as concentration, decision making, thought process
• Beliefs/spirituality – what one believes about themselves and the world that they live in
• Physical – the physical body we live in
Related Concepts
Burnout

"Burnout occurs when you have more energy going out than you have coming in. Burnout does not occur overnight...it is a cumulative process of gradual wearing down of your reserves, with little recharging of your energies."

Tavis Halliwell, Training and Development Journal, October 1981
Empathy & Burnout

- Studies: (Gross, 1994; Williams, 1989)
- Empathy a significant predictor for personal accomplishment and depersonalization associated with BURNOUT
- Depletion & Satisfaction
Countertransference

- The emotional reaction a therapist has toward their client’s positive or negative feelings

- A very useful tool for workers, providing them with important information about their clients.
Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Secondary trauma, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue are not “burn-out”
- Damaging effects on people who bear witness to the experience of another person’s trauma, but are not themselves direct targets of that trauma
Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Comprised of compassion fatigue (physical effects) & vicarious trauma (shifts in inner world)
- A syndrome of symptoms identical to those of PTSD
- Intrusion-Avoidance-Arousal
- Occupational Hazard
- Emotional disruption
COMPASSION FATIGUE

- Experienced by those who help others in distress. These helpers may be subsequently traumatized through their efforts to empathize and show compassion.

- Result: Inadequate self-care behaviors and increased self sacrifice in the helper role.

(Figley, 1995)
Empathy Defined

- Empathy: ability to understand a patient’s feelings, understand the situation from patient’s perspective, and communicate this understanding to the patient.
- Responding affectively and cognitively with objectivity
Empathy Defined

- Empathy the channel of vulnerability in STS
- Centrality to empathy is THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCE
- Empathy: risk for STS & CF
- Emotional separation or differentiation and being empathic protect against STS

- Figley, 1999; Figley 2002; Williams, 1989; Wilson and Lindy, 1999).
Vicarious Traumatization

A transformation in the self of a worker/professional that results from empathic engagement with traumatized clients & their reports of traumatic experiences. Its hallmark is disrupted spirituality, or meaning or hope. (Mc Cann & Pearlman 1990a)

Saakvitne, Gamble, Pearlman, & Lev 2000 Expanded Def to ALL
Vicarious Traumatization

- Is unavoidable to those who work with trauma
- Exposure to harsh realities of life is one of the causes
- Witnessing others' sense of helplessness make the therapist question their own competence

- Graphic trauma + exposure to cruelty of humans + observation of victims’ reaction = vicarious trauma
Contributing Factors

- Conceptually based in constructivist-development theory (McCann & Pearlman, 1990b; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Saakvitne et al., 2000).
- Interaction between individuals & their situations.
- Personal history, coping strategies, support network, work setting, nature of work.
- Individual responses to VT & coping & adapting.
Demands of Workplace

- Anything that interferes with the helper’s ability to fulfill his/her responsibility to assist traumatized clients can contribute to VT.
- The demands of agencies reported as greatest impediment (Pryce et al., 2007)
Empathy

- Different forms of empathy - different effects (Rothschild, 2006; Wilson & Thomas, 2004).
- Identify - immerse self - what it would be like if this happened to us ........ distress, worry, pain
- Imagine what it must be like for the client? .... compassion & support (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987, 2007).
General Changes - Vicarious Traumatization

- No time or energy for yourself
- Social withdrawal
- Increased sensitivity to violence
- Cynicism
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome
Specific Changes - Vicarious Traumatization

- Disrupted frame of reference
- World view
- Identity
- Difficulty in decision making and concentration
- Begin to question your abilities
- Disrupted psychological needs and cognitive schema
- Alteration in sensory experience
- Feeling that no one would understand you
Identity

- Alienation self, numb
- Distant from others
- Callous/cynical
- Dreams may reflect sadistic behaviour
- May affect sexual identity
- Question competence, career choice, "who am I?"
- Preoccupation with victims
World View

- Loss of belief in healing process
- Loss of belief in people in general
- Become suspicious
- Agitation increases
Spirituality

- Struggle to find hope
- Feel despair
- Helpless
- Confusion
- Emotional numbing
Self Capacities

- Self criticism
- Anxiety
- When alone, feel depressed, lonely
- Sorrow, grief
- Anger, rage
- Difficulty in soothing self
Ego Resources

• Loss of ability to introspect
• Cannot maintain boundaries
• Cognitive processing becomes cloudy
• Poor decision making skills
• Do not take care of self
• Not interested in others
Sensory System

Imagery
- Intrusion of victim imagery in own life
- Nightmares of victims' fear

Bodily
- Experience sensations that clients experience
- Pains in different areas of own body
Vicarious post-traumatic growth

(Arnold, Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Cann, 2005).

• Research asking workers about the effects of their work;
• VPG- not a theory based construct, based on self reported signs.
Vicarious Transformation

- Transforming VT
- Spiritual growth
- Active engagement with negative changes
- Deeper sense of connection with humanity
- Broader sense of moral inclusion
- Greater appreciation GIFTS in life
- Meaning and hope
- A reciprocal process
- Respect / we learn from our clients
Compassion & Loving Kindness

- Health Care Professionals Who Find They Are Carrying This Burden Should 'Know That You Are Normal, Recognize That You Have Been Traumatized, and Treat Yourself Like You Would Treat Your Patients,' Figley, 1995
Spirituality & Change

• An inner path enabling a person to discover the essence of their being
• The deepest values & meanings by which people live
• The ultimate immaterial reality
• Often experienced as a source of inspiration in life
• We begin to heal & transform when we recognize that we are more than that voice that chat & chat

• We are not our thoughts but the creator of thoughts that flow through

• We are not our moods ........
Truth & Inner Transformation

• Truth is within us, not outward things
• There is an inmost centre in us all where truth abide in fullness
• The (YOGI) sees himself in all beings & sees all beings in his HEART (Bhagavad-Gita)
• I seek to find a common bond that can bring me & others together, I do not dwell on our differences (Marsh 2010)
The Chinese Characters for Change are interpreted in two thoughts:

DANGER and OPPORTUNITY
Danger = burnout
Opportunity = self care
Recognizing, realizing, rebuilding and strength
• In Order to Give, You Must Have Something Inside of You to Give

• In Order to Share Your Strength, You Must Have Ways to Manifest That Strength

• In Order to Offer Something Fresh to That Person Who So Needs It, You Must Find Ways to Be Refreshed Yourself
Self Soothing Behaviour
~ By Clients

Hope
A candle inside of me
Spirituality
Talk and pray for help
Hope is strength
Honesty
Truth...only the truth
Courage
To be real to self
Individuality...whole
Medication...antidepressants
Self Soothing Behaviour
~ By Clients

Parenting the self...that little child
Confidence...self love
To make own choices
Leaving my blanket
"Little kid"...grow up
E-mail self
Journaling
Share feelings
Patience
TAKING CARE OF SELF
~ By Clients

• Reading...very soothing
• Imagery
• Creative imagination
• Cleaning
• Diversional therapy
• Getting support
TAKING CARE OF SELF
~ By Clients

• Cognitive Behavioural therapy
• Writing your thoughts
• Accepting self
• Take one day at a time
• Talk to people more
• Reach out for help
The ABC's of Vicarious Trauma

Awareness

Be aware of the impact your work has on you

Be aware of the impact and the process of change

Admit - at least to yourself - how you may act or feel differently as a result

Remember that there is no way of avoiding it if you work with trauma on a regular basis
The ABC’s of Vicarious Trauma

Balance

Find a balance between the personal and the professional

Recognize your own limits both personally and professionally

Balance your expectations of yourself
The ABC's of Vicarious Trauma

Connection

Have support systems, personally and professionally

Have someone to listen to you and your experiences

Make sure your emotional, spiritual, mental and physical responses match
You come away with the humble knowledge that however much the other person has gained, you have gained just as much and all you have to do is acknowledge your gratitude.
In the act of accepting, you will accept what you have not before.

In the act of comforting another, you will unexpectedly be comforted.

In the act of dying with another, you will be reborn.
THE WORK WE DO IS A PRIVILEGE

- You will experience, first hand, what it means to really love and you will know that it has to do less with spoken words and more to do with hearts being open and souls being shared.
Where Do We Find These Insights?

- Prayer, meditation
- Visualization, relaxation, yoga
- Books, libraries
- A single flower
- A smile from a child
- In your heart
- Stillness

- Willingness
- Openness
- Loving someone
- Giving
- Sharing
- Caring
- A true friend
Courage is the primary virtue because without courage no other quality can emerge

Sir Winston Churchill
• Those who are truly wise will remain unmoved by feelings of happiness & suffering, fame & disgrace, praise & blame & GAIN & LOSS (Buddha)
• If the causes we create arise from wisdom, so then will the results
• If the causes we create arise from ignorance, so then will the results (Buddha)
Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our Light, not our Darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you NOT to be?

You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World.
Excerpt from Nelson Mandela's 1994 Speech

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own Light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.
Questions & Experiential Exercise
Group Exercise

• Break up in groups of 3: You have 15 minutes.
• Each member share with the group one new thing that they learned today about being trauma informed and vicarious trauma.
• How will this impact your work and self in the future?
• One member in the group put this in point form on a flip chart and one member present to the entire group.