Researcher welfare: researching sexual violence against children

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Context

- Working in this field is a privilege, but can come at personal cost
- All bring different biographies and experience to this
- Unlike requirement for clinical supervision in counselling, no such equivalent for researchers
- Can transfer learning from these fields but unique challenges of research role including:
  - difficulty of hearing but not actioning/challenging
  - often limited engagement
  - not knowing what happens afterwards
Context

• Many (brief) references to need to consider researcher welfare in existing documents, but little practical advice on how to do this

• Important for researchers
• Important for our participants
• Important for managers/employers/commissioners

• Many ways in which our wellbeing can be negatively impacted – identifying these is an important first step

• Owning our vulnerability and humanity, and working with this rather than trying to deny it.
Some potential concerns/difficulties

• Worrying about the ‘what ifs’:
  - What if I say something insensitive
  - What if they get upset
  - What if I have to break confidentiality

• Worrying you didn’t ‘do well’

• Impact of hearing difficult or traumatic narratives

• Feeling powerless to change anything

• Guilt at ‘triggering’ a participant

• Being triggered yourself

• Being unable to ‘move on’
What we have found helps

- Manage responsibility placed on staff in line with experience and capacity
- Project specific training and preparation/practicing scenarios
- Recognising our own limitations and needs
- Normalising emotional responses – no ‘one size fits all’
- Recognising range of potential triggers & times this might happen
- Identify ‘what works’ for you; how we can support this – permission for us to look out for you
- Ensure appropriate support structures are in place for participants – someone else is ‘holding’ them
What we have found helps

- Managing schedule/intensity of fieldwork engagements
- Senior member of staff always on call
- ‘Checking in’ not just reporting in
- Balancing participant confidentiality with need to process/download – how to process what you hear respectfully
- Peer support within team; support outside of work
- Scheduled ‘processing time’/lighter workload around engagements
- Access to additional support (where funding permits)
- Recognition of post engagement risks (transcription, analysis)
For more information and resources visit our website www.beds.ac.uk/ic

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