



MONASH University

Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

Taking Care of Ourselves

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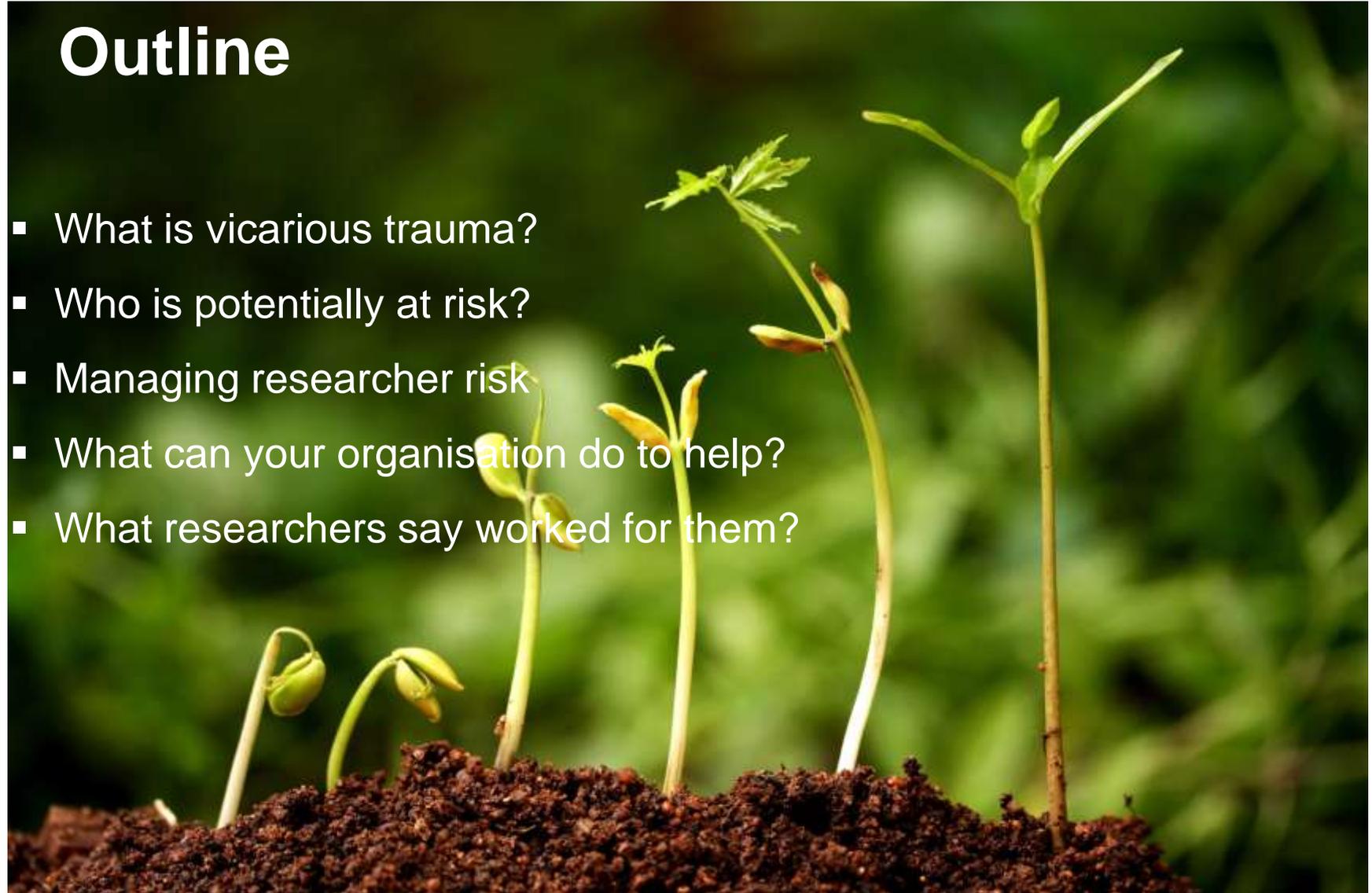
Sexual Violence Research Forum Closing Session, Cape Town, South Africa.

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Outline

- What is vicarious trauma?
- Who is potentially at risk?
- Managing researcher risk
- What can your organisation do to help?
- What researchers say worked for them?



What is vicarious trauma (VT)?

- “the transformation of the therapist’s or helper’s (**researcher’s**) inner experience as a result of empathetic engagement with survivor clients (**participants**) and their trauma material” (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)



How can VT effect you?

- Change in your world view
- Loss of sense of safety
- Loss of trust
- Sense of futility/hopelessness
- Sadness
- Anxiety and stress



Who is at risk?

- Interviewing Researchers
- Text-based Researchers (e.g. coroners records)
- Transcribers
- Research Assistants
- Managers and supervisors



Managing risk

- Reflection “Can I do this work?”
- Preparing for your work
- Consider the potential for trauma (for you, as well as your participants)
- Support Structures

SVRI Researcher Trauma Briefing Paper
Social Research Association. (2006).
Watts, C., Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., et al (1999).



Managing researcher risk - organisations

- Consider researcher risk in the planning phase
- Encourage researchers to reflect on their capacity to do sexual violence research (offer alternative paths)
- Ongoing supervision & support
- Outside support
- Formal counselling



Managing risk – organisations 2

- Peer/researcher support groups
- Supervisor/manager training
- Organisational values and structures (organisations which valued mutuality, respect and shared decision making, provided the greatest protection)* Slattery et al 2009



What Works for SV Researchers-Preparation

- *Finally as an organization supporting/ working with survivors, we need to provide [researchers and workers] with resources in form of booklets which advise where they can refer difficult cases for specialized or for ongoing management (SVRI discussion board 2009, male researcher 1, Africa).*
- *I spent many hours preparing for my research by reading various pieces on war and its consequences. I tried to understand what was happening within this context by extensively studying literature on disappearances, death squads and reading personal testimonies from women ... I had already experienced trauma through reading the testimonies. I often asked myself “Can I do this?” (SVRI interview Cuba 2009, female researcher 2, Latin America and the Caribbean).*



What works for researchers - timing

- *To help cope with the emotional stress, I divided data collection into segments say 10 questionnaires a day. This way, I could rest and interact with the victims and chat about other campus issues not related to sexual violence. These chats were refreshing and helped open more ideas and avenues to improve my work (SVRI discussion board 2009, female researcher 1, Africa).*
- *We need to make sure we have time to do the research and to allow time for researchers to recover in between interviews [...] Yes, we need to space our interviews and have researchers who are able to deal with the high emotions involved in this research (SVRI interview Cuba 2009, female researcher 3, Latin America and the Caribbean)*



What works for Researchers-Support

- *At the time, I did not realise how vitally important it was to protect myself. The organisation I worked for did not provide an embedded support system for its staff. Our support came from each other as colleagues and friends, and to an extent this enabled me to survive mentally but it did not help me eradicate the root causes. I became adept at burying the emotional stress but, of course, it continues to surface in a number of guises ... Personally, the most powerful tool I can use to address vicarious trauma is through counselling/therapy. Everything else is a temporary distraction and does not provide a lasting solution (SVRI discussion board, female researcher 1, Europe).*
- *Daily meetings with a colleague and talking with him over a drink [helped] (SVRI interview Cuba 2009, male researcher 1, Latin America and the Caribbean).*

What worked for Researchers-Creativity

- *I held a photo exhibit with a colleague where together we presented readings of women's testimonies as if it was the women themselves telling their stories. This was the single most powerful experience of my life in terms of dealing with trauma from the field and my own healing. I felt an intense connection with the women and, for that moment, felt that I did justice to them. (SVRI interview Cuba 2009, female researcher 2, Latin America and the Caribbean).*
- *Most important was going to church for prayer. My faith kept me on the go through thick and thin and the knowledge that the outcome of the research would make a difference to the lives of victims of abuse ... On a practical note, I closed my office door over lunchtimes (forced myself to take a break) and painted. I brought my paint and materials to the office and stored it there for use for a couple of months - when I was in the throes of the most intense research - I purposefully used bright happy colours (SVRI discussion board, female researcher 2, Africa).*

What worked for Researchers - Self care

- *I watched lots of movies and documentaries. I went for long walks, dreamed about better days, slept in on Saturday mornings, had wonderful reality talks with my young children at the time, cooked healthy homemade food and looked for beauty in the everyday things (SVRI discussion board, female researcher 2, North America).*
- *Exercise*
- *Massage*
- *Gardening*
- *Cooking*
- *Writing and reading*



Make a difference



But you can be safer too

*We thank and acknowledge the researchers who participated in the discussion board and workshop

References

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- Watts, C., Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Garcia-Moreno, C. (1999). *Putting women first: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women (No. WHO/EIP/GPE/99.2)*. Geneva: World Health Organization.
- Slattery, S., & Goodman, L. (2009). Secondary traumatic stress among domestic violence advocates: Workplace risk and protective factors. *Violence against Women, 15(11)*, 1358-1379, 15(11), 1358-1379.

SVRI Researcher Survey Link

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/XZ28P9K>