Shaping Vicarious Trauma-Informed Sexual and Domestic Violence Organizations

Sexual Violence Research Institute Forum 2017
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Voices from the Field
What is Vicarious Trauma?

• Work-related exposure to trauma
• Inevitable occupational challenge
• Single and cumulative events
Vicarious Trauma

- Change in World View
- Spectrum of Affective and Behavioral Responses
  - NEGATIVE
    - Vicarious Traumatization
    - Secondary Traumatic Stress
    - Burnout
    - PTSD
    - Unhealthy Behaviors
    - Compassion Fatigue
  - NEUTRAL
    - Resilient, Healthy Workers
  - POSITIVE
    - Vicarious Resilience
    - Post-Traumatic Growth
    - Vicarious Transformation
    - Compassion Satisfaction

Molnar, Sprang, Killian, Gottfried, Emery, Bride, Traumatology 2017
Sample Research on Prevalence: Victim Services

- 50% Colorado child protection workers had traumatic stress symptoms in severe range
  
  *Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006*

- 34% licensed clinical social workers met PTSD diagnostic criteria from secondary exposure to trauma
  
  *Bride, 2007*
Descriptions of Critical Incidents
(N=745 urban police officers)

### Most Common Exposures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body of someone recently dead</td>
<td>98.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badly beaten adult</td>
<td>95.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decaying corpse</td>
<td>91.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexually assaulted adult</td>
<td>88.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing someone dying</td>
<td>87.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Officers’ Ranking by Severity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incident</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mistake that injures/kills colleague</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague killed intentionally</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistake that injures/kills bystander</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleague killed accidentally</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being taken hostage</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Weiss et al, 2010)
Who Else is At Risk

- Administrative staff
- Receptionists and dispatchers
- Child sexual exploitation investigators
- Researchers
- Judges
- Jurors
- Many others
Examples of Vicarious Traumatization: Personal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Symptoms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Rapid pulse/breathing, headaches, impaired immune system, fatigue, aches</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Feelings of powerlessness, numbness, anxiety, guilt, fear, anger, depletion, hypersensitivity, sadness, helplessness, severe emotional distress or physical reactions to reminders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Irritability, sleep and appetite changes, isolate from friends and family, self destructive behavior, impatience, nightmares, hypervigilance, moody, easily startled or frightened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Loss of purpose, loss of meaning, questioning goodness versus evil, disillusionment, questioning prior religious beliefs, pervasive hopelessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Diminished concentration, cynicism, pessimism, preoccupation with clients, traumatic imagery, inattention, self doubt, racing thoughts, recurrent and unwanted distressing thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Withdrawn, decreased interest in intimacy or sex, isolation from friends or family, minimization of others' concerns, projection of anger or blame, intolerance, mistrust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)
Examples of Vicarious Traumatization:
Professional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Decrease in quality/quantity of work, low motivation, task avoidance or obsession with detail, working too hard, setting perfectionist standards, difficulty with inattention, forgetfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale</td>
<td>Decrease in confidence, decrease in interest, negative attitude, apathy, dissatisfaction, demoralization, feeling undervalued and unappreciated, disconnected, reduced compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Detached/withdrawn from co-workers, poor communication, conflict, impatience, intolerance of others, sense of being the “only one who can do the job”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Calling out, arriving late, overwork, exhaustion, irresponsibility, poor follow-through</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995)
Risk Factors for Negative Impacts

Personal
- Trauma history
- Pre-existing psychological disorder
- Young age
- Isolation, inadequate support system
- Loss in last 12 months

Professional
- Lack of quality supervision
- High percentage of trauma survivors in caseload
- Little experience
- Worker/organization mismatch
- Lack of professional support system
- Inadequate orientation and training for role

(Bonach and Heckert, 2012; Slattery and Goodman, 2009; Bell, Kulkarni, et al, 2003; Cornille and Meyers, 1999)
What can happen when organizations don’t address Vicarious Trauma?

Research suggests…
Lost Productivity
Decreased morale, cohesion, communication, collaboration and quality of services

Poor Organizational Health
Erosion of concentration, focus, decision making, motivation and performance

Staff Turnover
Time, resources needed to hire train drains remaining staff
A RESOURCE FOR EMS, FIRE, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND VICTIM SERVICES AGENCIES TO BECOME VICARIOUS TRAUMA-INFORMED

https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov
Built by the Field for the Field
Built by the Field for the Field

Victim Services, EMS, Fire, Law Enforcement
- National Survey: 8,140 participants
- Summits with stakeholders
- IACP Fellowship
- Pilot Test
The VTT Compendium of Resources

State of the Field, Evidence-Informed

1. Resources from the Field (114)
   Policies, procedures, practices, program info
2. Research literature (281)
3. Websites, podcasts and videos (102)
4. New Tools to fill gaps (16)
The Vicarious Trauma Informed Organization …

1. Recognizes potential negative consequences of the work being performed
2. Proactively addresses impact through policies, procedures, practices and programs
Five Pillars of Healthy, Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organizations

1. Leadership and Mission
2. Management and Supervision
3. Employee Empowerment and Work Environment
4. Training and Professional Development
5. Staff Health and Wellness

Vicarious Trauma-Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG), Created by the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Project, 2016
Based on Organizational and Relational Psychology Theories
New Tool: Vicarious Trauma Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG)

The VT-ORG can:

– Assess agency’s current capacity: strengths & gaps
– Prioritize needs
– Identify resources
– Help navigate the VTT
Leadership and Mission

To address the impact of vicarious trauma, leaders in vicarious trauma-informed organizations proactively integrate strategies into workplace values, operations, and practices; maintain a clear vision that supports and articulates the agency’s mission; and regularly model and promote open and respectful communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Possible Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leadership demonstrates a clear and decisive vision that supports and articulates the mission of the organization.</td>
<td>1 = Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Leadership models, values, and promotes open and respectful communication among staff.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. Leadership communicates clear and specific information on decision-making throughout the organization (e.g., resource allocation, scheduling, deadlines, implementation of policies and procedures).</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Leadership proactively addresses vicarious trauma in the organization’s long-term vision and strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Leadership recognizes and values my role within the organization.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Leadership communicates and enforces a no-tolerance policy concerning—</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a. sexual harassment;</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. workplace violence, including bullying/hazing;</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. intimate partner violence within or outside of the workplace;</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. discrimination based on age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, religion, ability, etc.</td>
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</table>

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Additional tools created by the VTT team

- EAP
- Family Support
- Human Resources
- Leadership Communications
- Peer Support
- Supervision
- Making the Business Case
- Training presentations (in PPT)
How does an organization do this?

1. Get leaders on board
2. Form a work group
3. Administer the VT-ORG
4. Share Findings
5. Develop Action Plan
6. Identify Resources/Tools
7. Take Actions
8. Evaluate
9. Re-assess

"Blueprint" coming on NEU website: www.northeastern.edu/IUHRP/VTT
Setting a Research Agenda
(Molnar, Sprang, Killian, Gottfried, Emery, Bride – Traumatology, 2017)

1. Better Assessment Tools
2. More scientific rigor, e.g. representative samples
3. More studies of risk and protective factors
4. Additional intervention research, especially focused on indirect trauma
5. Longitudinal studies needed both for long term impact and to show efficacy of interventions
“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

(Remen, 2006)
Reaching the VTT Project

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Explore the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit!
https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION AND PARTICIPATION!