GUIDELINES FOR THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA AMONG RESEARCHERS OF SEXUAL AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

SVRI, 2015
Overview of the Guidelines

- Defines vicarious trauma and its impacts
- Situates vicarious trauma within a Socio-Ecological framework
- Highlights risk factors and protective factors
- Outlines strategies for preventing vicarious trauma among researchers, and responding when it occurs
- Explores the topic of ethics and vicarious trauma (research protocols)
- Defines related key terms and concepts
- Provides further reading recommendations
What is vicarious trauma?
Vicarious resilience (compassion satisfaction)

This concept is described by Hernandez-Wolfe, Killian, Engstrom and Gangsei (2014) as “overcoming adversity from witnessing and participating in trauma survivors’ own recovery process.”
Risk factors

- At the organizational level
- At the project level
  - Insecurity/unsafe circumstances
  - The lack of available services
  - Working in isolation
- At the individual level
  - Empathy
  - Age and inexperience
  - Lack of training
  - Gender
  - Personal history of violence and mental health problems
In a study conducted in 2011, Choi found that 80% of those working with survivors of family and sexual violence had experienced at least one traumatic event, and 70% were survivors of family violence or sexual assault.
<table>
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<th>Vicarious trauma symptoms mentioned by Paraguayan women</th>
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<td>- Reduced satisfaction, lack of motivation</td>
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<td>- Lack of concentration, memory loss</td>
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<td>- No attention to personal life and personal needs</td>
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<td>- Irritability with family/children</td>
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<td>- Isolation</td>
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<td>- Problems sleeping</td>
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<td>- Rage</td>
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<td>- Sadness</td>
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<td>- Withdrawal</td>
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<td>- Anguish</td>
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<td>- Constipation, diarrhea, gastro-intestinal problems</td>
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<td>- Hair loss</td>
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<td>- Anxiety, stress, panic attacks</td>
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<td>- Lack of patience</td>
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<td>- Uncontrollable crying</td>
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<td>- Tension in intimate relationships</td>
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<td>- Sense of impotence, frustration</td>
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<td>- Feelings of guilt</td>
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<td>- Mistrust, and distancing from men</td>
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The ProQOL scale

- People themselves know they are suffering from the symptoms of vicarious trauma. They just may not be able to give a name to it.

- An interesting exercise: Application of the Professional Quality of Life Scale: Compassion Satisfaction and Fatigue Subscales.

- 50% of the Paraguayan women working with IPV survivors showed significant levels of vicarious trauma and/or burnout.
How can vicarious trauma be prevented and managed?
Protective factors

- **Self-care practices**: psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual.
- Recognize and manage vicarious trauma at the **project level**.
- Adopt **institutional best practices** to minimize vicarious trauma and manage it when it occurs.
Self-care
How trauma is processed in the brain
Self-care: the body-mind relationship
Lack of institutional care: a key impediment to self-care
Institutional/project level care

- Create a culture that “normalizes” vicarious trauma as a real risk among SV researchers and offer ways to address it.
- Coordinators/supervisors should be aware of the signs of vicarious trauma and burnout, and know what to do.
- Create an environment that fosters team interaction and spaces for debriefing.
- Incorporate researcher safety into project designs, and allocate resources within research protocols to minimize the risk of vicarious trauma, and to respond when it occurs.
- Vary and balance the workload; rotate job responsibilities; reduce time hearing victim stories; cap the number of interviews conducted.
- Devise strategies for returning to balance.
- Promote self-care and allow flexible schedules.
Secondary traumatic stress and self-care inextricably linked

Allessia P. Owens-King

THE COMPASSION FATIGUE WORKBOOK

A Gecko’s Guide to Building Resiliency in Child Abuse Staff & Volunteers

Vicarious Trauma Coping and Self-Care Practices Among Trauma Therapists.

Annette Zaccari
Walden University