



FOSTERING RESILIENCE IN TRAUMA WORK

Wesley Theological Seminary
Moving Toward Wholeness: Traumatized Texts & Bodies
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Research shows that there are expected and normal reactions to working with individuals, families, and communities who have experienced trauma.

There are clear bio-psycho-social-spiritual costs of the work, as well as real interpersonal consequences on the worker, if left unaddressed.

All professionals responsible for the ethical treatment of those who seek help have a responsibility to address the impact of our work so that we may continue to stay empathically attuned to them.

The goal of this workshop is to raise awareness of the impact of work on professionals.

We will address the effects of the work personally and professionally, and create strategies to maintain resilience for optimal effectiveness in their work.

Secondary Traumatic Stress Definition

- Figley (1999) used the term secondary traumatic stress to refer to “the natural, consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowledge about a traumatizing event experience by a significant other. It is the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.”

Other Relevant Definitions

- Compassion fatigue – inability to sustain connection with and empathy for clients with trauma histories.
- Compassion satisfaction – positive emotional boost from caring for others; balances out compassion fatigue (see Beth Hundall Stamm’s research).
- Burn-out - state of exhaustion (mental, emotional, physical) caused by excessive and prolonged exposure to stress at work.

- Moral Injury – intrapsychic damage done to one's conscience or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one's own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct (see Dombo, Gray, & Early).
- Shared trauma – when the clinician and client experience the same traumatic events (see Carol Tosone's research).

Vicarious Trauma Definition

- Vicarious trauma is a process of transformation; one's inner experience changes over time due to empathic engagement with the client's or group's history of trauma and oppression (see Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)
- It is the cumulative effect of our work. We soak up the experience of others like a sponge!

The Statistics

- Bride (2007) found that 70% of social workers surveyed had experienced secondary trauma symptoms in the previous week; 15% met the criteria for PTSD.
- Religious leaders tend to experience similar rates of vicarious trauma and burnout, as many people seek their support when experiencing personal problems (Hendron, Irving & Taylor, 2012) and they tend not to make self-care a priority (Jackson-Jordan, 2013).

COVID-19 Impact

- COVID measures have made it difficult for many clergy to engage in work to care for others and carry out significant rituals and practices of their faith traditions.
- Religious leaders may experience moral injuries as they are unable to carry out these tasks, and are also more vulnerable to vicarious trauma as they work with those impacted by trauma (COVID and otherwise) (see Greene, Bloomfield, & Billings).

Signs and Symptoms

- Vicarious trauma has personal and professional consequences.
- Personally, we experience VT on cognitive, emotional, behavioral, spiritual, interpersonal and physical levels.
- Professionally, VT impacts job performance, morale, relationships with colleagues and professional behavior.

Cognitive Impact

- Diminished concentration
- Confusion
- “Spacey-ness”
- Loss of meaning
- Decrease in self-esteem
- Preoccupation with trauma
- Trauma imagery
- Apathy

Emotional Impact

- Powerlessness/overwhelmed
- Anxiety
- Guilt/survivor's guilt
- Shutdown/numbness/depleted
- Fear/helplessness
- Sadness/depression
- Hypersensitivity
- Emotional rollercoaster

Behavioral Impact

- Maladaptive coping behaviors; harmful behaviors
- Impatient/irritable
- Withdrawn/moody
- Regression
- Sleep disturbances/nightmares
- Appetite changes/changes in eating habits
- Hypervigilance
- Elevated startle response

Spiritual Impact

- Questioning the meaning of life
- Loss of purpose
- Lack of self-satisfaction
- Pervasive hopelessness
- No sense of agency
- Anger at higher power
- Questioning prior religious beliefs

Interpersonal Impact

- Withdrawn/isolation from friends
- Decreased interest in intimacy
- Mistrust
- Projection of anger/blame
- Intolerance
- Loneliness
- Agitation

Physical Impact

- Shock
- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Difficulty breathing
- Somatic reactions
- Aches and pains
- Dizziness
- Impaired immune functioning

Impact on Job Performance

- Decrease in quality & quantity of work
- Low motivation
- Avoidance of job tasks
- Obsession over details
- Increase in mistakes
- Setting perfectionist standards

Impact on Morale

- Decrease in confidence
- Loss of interest
- Dissatisfaction
- Negative attitude
- Apathy
- Demoralization
- Detachment

Relationship with Colleagues

- Avoiding casual contact
- Impatience with colleagues
- Decrease in quality of relationships
- Poor communication
- Increase conflicts among colleagues
- Subsume own needs

Individual Solutions

- Assess self-care practices and revise frequently
- Develop personal self-care plan
- Seek supports in supervision and/or with peers
- Set aside time to focus on own spiritual practices
- Engage in social connections and minimize isolation
- Acknowledge the limits to what you can do, and the moral injuries encountered in the work
- Seek your own therapy
- Exercise
- Take time away from work

Self-Care Assessment

Assessing Your Self-Care

(Richardson, 2001)

This self-care assessment is designed to measure how well you are balancing your own needs with the needs of those you serve. It is recommended you re-assess yourself on a regular basis and use the results to adapt your Self-Care Plan as needed. It is designed to be used as a tool to help you gain **AWARENESS** about your own needs and limitations, maintain **BALANCE** between your work self and personal self, and deepen your **CONNECTION** to this work. Use the following scale to rate the frequency with which you engage in these self-care activities:

5 = Frequently	3 = Rarely	1 = It never occurred to me
4 = Occasionally	2 = Never	to do this!!!

A. Physical Self-Care

- ___ Eat regular meals
- ___ Eat healthy foods
- ___ Exercise
- ___ Get regular medical care
- ___ Take time off when sick
- ___ Get massages
- ___ Do fun physical activities
- ___ Take time to be sexual
- ___ Get enough sleep
- ___ Wear clothes you like
- ___ Take vacations or day trips
- ___ Get away from telephones
- ___ Other: _____

B. Psychological Self-Care

- ___ Make time for self-reflection
- ___ Engage in your own therapy
- ___ Journal
- ___ Read about topics unrelated to work
- ___ Try not to be in charge
- ___ Decrease stressful experiences
- ___ Listen to your inner experiences
- ___ Let others see different aspects of you
- ___ Practice receiving from others
- ___ Be curious
- ___ Say no to extra responsibilities
- ___ Other: _____

C. Emotional Self-Care

- ___ Spend time with those whose company you enjoy
- ___ Stay in touch with old friends
- ___ Give yourself affirmations and praise
- ___ Love yourself
- ___ Re-visit favorite books and movies

- ___ Identify comforting things
- ___ Allow yourself to cry
- ___ Find things to make you laugh
- ___ Express your outrage via social action
- ___ Play with children
- ___ Other: _____

D. Spiritual Self-Care

- ___ Spend time in nature
- ___ Connect with a spiritual community
- ___ Be open to inspiration and hope
- ___ Connect to the non-material
- ___ Be present, not the presenter
- ___ Identify what has meaning for you
- ___ Meditate/pray/sing
- ___ Spend time with children or animals
- ___ Have experiences of awe
- ___ Contribute to causes you believe in
- ___ Read literature that inspires you
- ___ Other: _____

E. Workplace and Professional Self-Care

- ___ Schedule breaks in your workday
- ___ Take time to chat with colleagues
- ___ Make quiet time to complete work
- ___ Identify projects that are rewarding
- ___ Set limits with clients and colleagues
- ___ Balance work/caseload
- ___ Arrange a comforting work space
- ___ Get regular supervision
- ___ Negotiate your needs
- ___ Have a peer support group
- ___ Develop non-trauma areas of professional interest
- ___ Other: _____

Self-care Plan

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Personal Care Plan

I, _____ understand that vicarious trauma is a process of transformation that I am likely to experience due to the nature of the work I do. All professionals working with people who have experienced pain have feelings about the work. In order to better cope with my feelings about the work, and address the environmental factors that contribute to vicarious trauma, I commit to do the following:

I. As a Professional:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

II. In my Environment:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

III. In Supervision:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

IV. In my Personal Life:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Questions?

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