

Secondary Trauma and the Refugee Population

Strategies for Self-Care

Reflection

- What are the signs that you are feeling stressed by work?

What is secondary trauma?

- Also called
 - Compassion fatigue
 - Vicarious traumatization

Principle of “exposure”

- To narratives of trauma
- To clients’ reactions to trauma
- To cumulative stories of trauma

Rates of secondary traumatization

- Like direct trauma survivors, *most* individuals who are exposed to a trauma narrative do not develop the full syndrome of PTSD.
- BUT, a small percentage of individuals who listen to trauma narratives will develop actual clinical level PTSD.

Vicarious traumatization

- Symptoms
 - Nightmares
 - Irritability
 - Anger
 - Intrusive imagery
 - Fatigue
 - Concentration problems

Changed meanings

- Demoralization
- “The world is bad”
- “People are bad”
- Nothing makes a difference

Other dynamics

- Can feel like you are a perpetrator
- Can feel like a repetition of abuse/control
- Shame

Risk Factors

- Personal history of trauma
- A particular identification with a story or a person
- Lack of social support

Reflection

- What are ways that you can address stress and compassion fatigue in your work?

Strategy: Recognizing that it is part of your professional responsibility to not become burned out.

- Burn out decreases creativity.
- Burn out decreases effectiveness.
- Burn out can hurt clients.

Strategy: managing boundaries

- Clarifying the limits of your role with your clients
- Clarifying what you CAN do for your client
- Tolerating feelings of guilt and helplessness
- Recognizing fantasies of rescue and omnipotence

Strategy: Attending to and processing team dynamics

- Recognizing team members' different ways of coping with the stress (e.g.-the staff member who “gives extra”, the staff member who withdraws, the staff member who rants).
- Building time for team to process experiences together.

Strategy: Assess where you do and don't have control

- Active assessment of control is not always something we naturally do
- Pause and assess the situation—Where do I have actual control and agency here?
- What is beyond my control?
- Acceptance

Strategy: Mindfulness

- Proven technique for stress reduction, decrease in almost all mental health consequences of stress
- GOAL: Intentional acceptance of present state of emotions, thoughts, and sensations
- Non-judgemental
- Dialectical: Acceptance vs. Change
- Find your technique
 - Breathing
 - Imagery
 - Muscle relaxation
 - Yoga
 - Prayer/meditation

Strategy: Celebrating achievements and victories

- Actively taking stock of your successes
- Sharing this with colleagues/friends
- Tell people when you need support—don't assume they know

References

- Figley, C.R. (Ed.) (1995). Compassion Fatigue: Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorders from Treating the Traumatized. New York: Brunner/Mazel, p.7.