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