Vicarious Trauma and the Substance Use Disorder Counselor

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Trauma Review

- Trauma is the experience of an inescapable horror associated with the fear of injury or death.

- Trauma is an interaction of who you are, what happened, and the context in which it happened.

- The experience of an event perceived by an individual to be overwhelming and life threatening.

- Trauma is energy. It will perpetuate unless effective intervention is applied.
PTSD develops from traumatic experience, the result is a dysfunction of the organizational system of the right hemisphere of the brain, which affects attachment, affect regulation, and stress management. The individual with PTSD has significant barriers to maintaining a cohesive and unified sense of self. (Schore, 2002).
PTSD, cont. (Van der Kolk and McFarlane, 1996)

- A central feature of PTSD is a loss of the ability to physiologically modulate stress responses which leads to a reduced capacity to utilize bodily signals as guides to action.
- This alteration of psychological defense mechanisms is associated with an impairment of personal identity.
PTSD symptom clusters

- Re-experiencing
- Avoidance and Numbing
- Arousal
Re-experiencing

- Flashbacks
- Intrusive memories
- Dreams
- Traumatic triggers
- Abreaction – reenacting/retelling the event
- Engaging in high risk behaviour
Avoidance and Numbing

- Difficulty remembering event or denying importance of event
- Isolation
- Depression
- Avoiding anything that reminds you of trauma.
Arousal

- Startle response
- Insomnia
- Decreased concentration
- Physical Illness
- Hyper-vigilance
- Irritability and rage

- Shattering of worldview
- Inability to use people or resources in environment
- Decline in functioning and task performance
People who have experienced trauma are:

- 15 times more likely to attempt suicide
- 4 times more likely to become an alcoholic
- 4 times more likely to develop a sexually transmitted disease
Trauma Statistics, cont.

- 4 times more likely to inject drugs
- 3 times more likely to use antidepressant medication
- 3 times more likely to experience depression
Trauma Statistics, cont.

- 8% of Americans will be diagnosed with PTSD
- 8% of Americans will become addicted to illegal drugs
- 17% of Americans will become addicted to alcohol
Trauma statistics cont.

- 34% of men with PTSD will become addicted to a drug
- 27% of women with PTSD will become addicted to a drug
- 52% of men with PTSD will become addicted to alcohol
Why?

- Escape Theory
- Increased Risk Theory
- Vulnerability Theory
- Genetic Theory
What is Vicarious Traumatization?
(VT, Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue)

- It is the cumulative transformative effect on the self and worldview of those who work with the traumatized.

- Transformation in inner experience of the clinician/caseworker that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with trauma material.
What is Vicarious Traumatization?
( VT, Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue), cont.

- VT depicts the phenomena of the transmission of traumatic stress by observation and/or bearing witness to the stories of traumatic events.

- Secondary traumatic stress occurs when one is exposed to extreme events directly experienced by another and is overwhelmed by the secondary exposure to trauma.
Vicarious Traumatization

- Caregiver’s level of empathy plays a significant role in this transmission of trauma material.

- It is an inevitable effect of trauma work. How it effects us is an individualized as how a traumatic event effects any person we serve.
Vicarious Traumatization

- The degree to which you are responsible and committed to your work is the degree to which you are susceptible to vicarious trauma.

- Traumatized clients, survivor clients, or crisis oriented clients are frequently unaware of their affective responses, so we hold them for them.
Related Terms

- Empathy Fatigue
- Compassion Fatigue
- Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Emotional Exhaustion
History

- McCann and Pearlman use the term Vicarious Traumatization in 1990
- Compassion Fatigue was first introduced by Carla Joinson in 1992, as a way to describe burnout among nurses
More than 60% of helping professionals have a trauma history of their own—we enter the field to make a difference, to give back, and share from our own life experiences.
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)
Adverse Childhood Experiences Are Common…
National Survey of a typical classroom.

**Household dysfunction:**
- Substance abuse: 27%
- Parental sep/divorce: 23%
- Mental illness: 17%
- Battered mother: 13%
- Criminal behavior: 6%

**Abuse:**
- Psychological: 11%
- Physical: 28%
- Sexual: 21%

**Neglect:**
- Emotional: 15%
- Physical: 10%
Vicarious Traumatization

- The clinician must be able to identify countertransference and VT without shame.
Supervision

- Parallel process – what and how the client gives the clinician is similar and directly related to what and how the clinician gives the supervisor.

- The supervisor/leader is the Container for the clinical relationship

- Name abreactions/somatic manifestations safely.
VT signs

- Increased sensitivity to violence
- Grief/despair
- Transformation of identity, work, view, and spirituality
- Difficulty being alone (fear?)
- Difficulty tolerating emotions
- Over eating/drinking/spending, TV
- “me vs. them” or “us vs. them”
Small Group Exercise #1

- Discuss a case that caused you to take it home with you- or caused some symptoms of compassion fatigue

- Identify what factors caused you to identify with the person/victim/family/event

- Note commonalities and choose a person to share these findings with the larger group
Risk Factors in VT Acquisition

- Length, duration, intensity, type of exposure
- Suicidal or child clients
- Trauma history
- Organization factors (organizational denial of impact of VT or nature of work)
- Inadequate self care
- Insufficient supervision/direction.
VT or Job Related Stress

- Job Related stress is stress, anxiety related to job and performance functions. I.E., productivity, deadlines, documentation, can apply to various jobs.
- VT is a secondary effect that occurs to those who work with traumatized individuals.
- Differentiate VT from job related stress
Those Most Susceptible to VT

- work in emergency and crisis settings
- New to the field
- New to trauma work
- Work in agency settings
- Have more than 50% of clients who have experienced trauma within their caseload
- Work with children or in situations involving suicide.
Effective Stress Reduction?

Stress Reduction Kit

Bang Head Here

Directions:
1. Place kit on FIRM surface.
2. Follow directions in circle of kit.
3. Repeat step 2 as necessary, or until unconscious.
Allostasis

- Allostatic controls – help to maintain sense of normalcy based on activation/stimulation.
- Adjusts over time with activation levels.
- Body and brain assimilate and accommodate the heightened stimulation/activation over time and define what is felt as normal.
**ALLOSTATIC LOAD**

Psychosocial stress, improper nutrition, adversity

**DISEASE?**

BIO

Metabolic variables

**DEPRESSION?**

PSYCHO

Inflammatory factors

**ALLOSTASIS**


Without intervention, VT leads to…

- Burnout
- Exhaustion
- Depersonalization
- Lack of efficiency
- Substance Abuse
- Relationship Disruption
- Judgement errors
Protective Strategies

Theory

Commitment to Self

Ethics
Theory

- Combination of therapeutic stance, training, and knowledge of best practices
- Know the treatment you’re providing and why you’re providing it
- Know your Evidenced Based Practice
- Know that VT exists and your vulnerabilities.
Ethics

- Reflective of appropriate boundaries
- Protecting best interests of person being served.
- Duty is to help people heal and recovery from injury and harm.
- When we fail to do adequate self care, are we not compromising our own health, wellness, and safety?
Commitment to Self

- Acknowledging helping profession view
- Commitment to remaining embodied
- Disciplined self care
- Equally important personal life
- Refusal to abuse, self-abuse or be abused
- Resiliency training
- Community building
Resilience

- What is it?
- How do we cultivate it?
VT, What to do

- Trauma is energy that will perpetuate and continue an unhealthy cycle unless intervention is applied.

- Energy requires appropriate discharge

- Physical and Emotional discharge.
The ABC’s of VT Prevention

- A = Awareness
- B = Balance
- C = Connections
A= Awareness
Issues and Contributing Factors

What types of cases contribute to your stress level increasing your vulnerability to VT?
What events or cases can cause VT?

- Events or situation that causes one to experience an unusually strong reaction
- Often overpowers one’s usual coping mechanisms
A= Awareness, continued

- Ability to function is interfered with or altered.
- Situation or incident does not seem “typical or ordinary”, it feels traumatic.
- “Compassion stress” impinges upon or breaks through normal boundaries
Awareness, continued

- Regularly waking up tired in the morning and struggling to get to work?
- Feeling as if you are working harder but accomplishing less?
- Becoming frustrated/irritated easily?
- Losing compassion for some people while becoming over involved in others?
Awareness

- Routinely feeling bored or disgusted?
- Experiencing illness, aches and pains?
Even Mother Teresa Understood Compassion Fatigue

- Recognized the effects
- Wrote in her plan to her superiors that it was MANDATORY for her nuns to take an entire year off from their duties every 4-5 years to allow them to heal from the effects of their care-giving work.
Small Group Exercise #2

A. Discuss causal factors of Compassion Fatigue:
   Each helper’s empathic engagement with each client’s unique experience; Helper’s unique personal response based on personal history, style, current life circumstances, as well as proximity and personal connection to the events and people involved in the trauma/tragedy

B. Discuss potential consequences for undiagnosed and untreated compassion fatigue.

C. Report findings to large group
Self-Awareness Exercises

- Compassion Fatigue Test
- Life Balance scale
Here is a tool you can use to assess the level of your satisfaction with all of the aspects of your life.

Place each aspect of your life in the space in each segment. Some suggestions follow. Modify these to represent those that are meaningful to you.

• Self Care
• Work
• Intimate Partner/Family
• Friends/Social Life
• Financial Aspects
• Health & Wellness/Body Image
• Spiritual Aspects
• Community/Service

Now rate your satisfaction with each aspect, using a scale from zero to ten, with ten being very satisfied and zero being completely unsatisfied. Place a mark indicating your choice in each segment of the circle, with zero at the center and ten at the rim. Connect all of the marks around the circle to see how balanced your wheel is.
B= Balance
Keeping Your Life in Balance

☐ Practice excellent self-care
☐ Nurture yourself by putting activities in your schedule that are sources of pleasure, joy and diversion
☐ Allow yourself to take mini-escapes—these relieve the intensity of your work
☐ Transform the negative impact of your work (find meaning, challenge negativity, find gratitude)
Small Group Exercise #3

☐ List one mini-escape or diversion that worked well to restore and renew you
☐ List one thing that brings you joy
☐ Report back to larger group your unique ideas
Get medical treatment if needed to relieve symptoms that interfere with daily functioning - don’t use alcohol or drugs to self-medicate

Get professional help when needed to get back on track - we all need coaches and consultants at times
Balance for our Emotional Needs

- Emotions are a signal that can tell us when something is wrong or we are out of balance.
- We all need meaning and purpose in our life.
- We all need autonomy and freedom to make choices that bring us balance and happiness.
The student asked the wise man...

When one is fatigued, doesn’t one need rest from their duties?

and the wise man said....

“Sometimes yes, but sometimes all you need is to do your work more whole-heartedly.”
Whole-hearted people have:

☐ A strong sense of worthiness and belonging
☐ The courage to be imperfect
☐ Compassion for themselves as well as others
☐ The ability to connect deeply which requires being authentic and real
☐ Vulnerability, an openness to what life offers without guarantee

Dr. Brene Brown
Find Hidden Passion

- We all have hidden sources of energy and healing power.
- When you identify the things that fuel you, the things that you have true passion for, your fatigue will disappear.
- Balancing your life involves putting the things that we value and have passion for in our schedule.
Patanjali – the author of Yoga Sutra

“When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bonds: Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction, and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be.”
Balance for Your Soul

- Have quiet alone time in a calm, beautiful place—a safe retreat where you feel renewed
- Have an awareness of what restores and replenishes you.
- Find ways to acknowledge loss and grief
- Stay clear with commitment to career goals or your personal mission
- Know how to focus on what you can control
- Look at situations as entertaining challenges and opportunities, not problems or stresses
“Vocation is where your great passion meets the world’s great need”

Frederick Buechner
Chinese Proverb

- Equation for the value of your life
  - Your Health = 1
  - Everything else in your life = 0
  - Put a one first, in front of all the zeros and you will have the value of your life

- Without your health, you have nothing.
Keep Yourself Physically Strong

- Exercise
- Relax-Breathe
- Get adequate sleep
- Good nutrition and water
- Good medical and preventative care
Compassion satisfaction is the ability for clinicians to derive a great sense of meaning & purpose from their work. It may be an important buffer in managing and transcending alterations in belief systems, and physiological or emotional reactions seen in compassion fatigue.

C = Connections

- Talk out your stress - process your thoughts and reactions with someone else (coworker, therapist, clergy, friend, family, supervisor)

- Build a positive support system that supports you, not fuels your stress

- Pets accept whatever affection you are able to give them without asking for more---Pets are basically invulnerable to “provider burnout”---Blood pressure and heart rate decrease when interacting with animals
Accepting the presence of compassion fatigue in your life only serves to validate the fact that you are a deeply caring individual. Somewhere along your healing path, the truth will present itself: You don't have to make a choice. It is possible to practice healthy, ongoing self-care while successfully continuing to care for others.

-compassionfatigue.org
Resources

- **Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project/Healthy Care giving, LLC**
  The Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project ([www.compassionfatigue.org](http://www.compassionfatigue.org)) promotes an awareness and understanding of Compassion Fatigue and its effect on caregivers.

- **Beth Hudnall Stamm ProQOL Institute**

- **The Green Cross** ([www.greencross.org](http://www.greencross.org))

- **The Trauma Center** ([www.traumacenter.org](http://www.traumacenter.org))
References

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