Reducing the Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout in Professionals working in the Family Court System

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“Vicarious Traumatization, Compassion Fatigue, or Secondary Traumatic Stress refers to the cumulative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events or perpetrators as part of everyday work.

Joy Osofsky, Ph.D.
Frank Putnam, M.D.
Judge Cindy Lederman

Rookies, Mentors, and Elders…

Who am I?
Who are you?
How long have you been doing this kind of work?
Why are we here together today?
Within the Judiciary and Legal profession, the issue of Vicarious Trauma or Compassion Fatigue is rarely discussed. Prevention or Intervention Strategies related to “Negative Psychological Reactions” are not considered to be a part of the culture. If we look at this through a professional culture lens, there can be a perception that acknowledgement of these issues is a sign of weakness.

The Elephant In The Room

“I’m right there in the room, and no one even acknowledges me.”

“...the expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Rachel Naomi Remen, Kitchen Table Wisdom 1996
Factors That Increase Risk

- Measuring self-work by how much you help others
- Unrealistic expectations of yourself and the system
- Self-criticism, Perfectionism
- Fear of being seen or criticized by others if you show weakness by seeking help for burnout, compassion or decision fatigue
- Reduced ability to give or receive emotional support
- Overextending yourself, Overachieving
- Letting work bleed over into your personal life

Secondary Traumatic Stress

STS results from exposure to trauma experienced by others, often in the workplace with no real threat of personal harm. Secondary trauma symptoms are often indistinguishable from those of direct exposure.

- Nightmares, triggers
- Avoiding reminders
- Numbing, withdrawal
- Hyper-vigilance
- Trouble concentrating
- Quick to anger

Burnout / Compassion Fatigue

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical Exhaustion... Often with feelings of Hopelessness and difficulty in dealing with decision making or doing your job effectively

- Feels like my efforts don't make a difference
- This job is changing me into a different person
- I have a reduced feeling of personal accomplishments
- Often related to high workload or a non-supportive work environment
**Moral Distress**

“[… ] happens when there are inconsistencies between a [professionals] beliefs and his or her actions in practice” (Baylis 2000)

“when policies or routines conflict with […] beliefs about […] professional practice” (Mitchell 2000)

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**Multiple Exposure: Increased Risk**

- Moral Distress
- Burnout
- Traumatic Grief/Loss
- Systems Failure
- Direct Exposure
- Compassion Fatigue
- Secondary Trauma

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**Participant Activity**

The Dance of Balance
Psychological signs and symptoms

- Distancing
- Negative self-image
- Depression/Anxiety
- Reduced ability to feel sympathy and empathy
- Cynicism & resentment
- Dread of working with certain cases
- Feeling professional helplessness
- Depersonalization
- Anger, Mood swings

Physical Symptoms of Chronic Stress

- problems sleeping
- lower immune function
- headaches
- abdominal pain/GERD/IBS
- back pain
- eye twitch
- bruxing (teeth grinding)
- rashes
- poor concentration, forgetfulness
- hypertension
- cardiovascular disease

Knowing... Engaging... Vulnerability...

- Secondary Traumatic Stress
  "The natural and consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatized event from another person, the stress from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or stressed person." (Charles Figley, 1995)

- Vicarious Traumatization:
  "...refers to the cumulative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events. Anyone who engages empathically with victims or survivors is vulnerable." (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)
Cumulative Impact

Think about how your work over time may impact your beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beliefs About the World/Social Contract</th>
<th>Spiritual Beliefs</th>
<th>Sense of Self/Groundedness/Emotional Stability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Personal and Family Safety</td>
<td>Trust of Yourself and/or Others</td>
<td>Judgment/Decision-Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Control</td>
<td>Ability to be Alone, or with Others</td>
<td>Cultural or Implicit Bias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

That's the racist bone in your body you claimed you didn't have.

The New Yorker

Breakout

• What are your risk factors?
• What are your strategies?
• Share a practice that works for you...
Addressing CF, STS, and Burnout: Key Strategies

Mind Full, or Mindful?

Wellness Wheel: Work/Life Balance?
Self Awareness

Using Mindfulness to Support Well-Being

Practices and Rituals:
➢ Relaxation breathing
➢ Grounding skills (using the five senses)
➢ Walking meditation or mindful movement
➢ Mindfulness Apps: Stop, Breathe, & Think; Virtual Hopebox, Insight Timer, Happify, Headspace…
➢ Orienting thoughts (Who I AM. These are my values.)

“The key to mindfulness is to stay in the present. Don’t get caught up in the hopes of what you’ll achieve or how good your situation will be someday in the future. What you do right now is what matters.” – Pema Chödrön

Grounding
Brain Gym® International is committed to the principle that moving with intention leads to optimal learning. Through our outstanding instructors and movement-based programs, we empower all ages to reclaim the joy of living.

Promoting Protective Factors

Supportive Work Environment
Compassion Satisfaction
Training/Risk Reduction
Wellness Practices
Reflective Supervision
Experience: Time on the Job

Organizational Recommendations to Reduce Secondary Traumatic Stress, Compassion Fatigue, and Burnout

- Reduce Caseloads
- Adequate opportunities to process and debrief cases
- Explicitly acknowledge job stress, compassion fatigue and burnout
- Provide resources to reduce the impact i.e. mental health services, peer support, etc.
- Provide training and organizational support of wellness practices
- Open communication with organizational leaders about the importance of reducing the risk

Building Resilience
Reducing Risk
What’s Next?
What strategies are you taking away today that will help you know…

1. What to do in the moment?
2. What to do in the workplace?
3. What daily practice you can commit to in order to increase wellness and reduce stress?

Thank You!

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