

# Vicarious Trauma

*Presented by:*

*Katherine Baptist*

*PAVe Centre*

# Outline

- ❖ What is Vicarious Traumatization (VT)
- ❖ Effects of VT
- ❖ Strategies to Cope

# What is Vicarious Trauma (VT)

- ⌘ “VT is a process through which the therapist’s inner experience is negatively transformed through empathic engagement with the clients’ trauma material including graphic descriptions of traumatic events, descriptions of people’s intentional cruelty to one another, and traumatic re-enactments.” (McCann & Pearlman, 1990)
- ⌘ VT is a process which takes place over time, and across clients and therapeutic relationships.

# What is Vicarious Traumatization (VT)

- ↪ VT can lead to changes in self & professional's:
  - ◆ Frame of reference (which incorporates their world view, identity, and spirituality)
  - ◆ Self Capacities
  - ◆ Ego Resources
- ↪ Psychological needs and beliefs relating to safety, esteem, trust, control & intimacy
- ↪ Changes may be subtle or shocking and will depend upon "... the degree of discrepancy between the client's traumatic memories and the therapist's existing schemas" (McCann & Pearlman, 1990)

## ☞ **Compassion Fatigue**

- ❖ Synonymous with secondary traumatic stress disorder (STS).
- ❖ Reactions from exposure to traumatised patients' terrifying, shocking images, intrusive traumatic events
- ❖ Defined as "... the natural consequent behaviors and emotion resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other – the stress of resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1995)

## ☞ **Counter transference**

- ❖ Specific to one client or therapeutic relationship.
- ❖ Related to personal conflicts and psychological needs within the helper.

## ☞ **Stress**

- ❖ Refer to “provocative relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

## ☞ **Burnout**

- ❖ Refers to a condition caused by chronic emotional and interpersonal work stressors (Maslach et al., 2001)

# Burnout, stress, VT, Counter-transference, STS

- ∞ VT vs Counter Transference -- VT is permanently transformative while counter transference is temporarily linked to a particular period, event, or issue in the helper or in the helper's inner or external life.
- ∞ Burnout and stress are related to chronic tedium in the workplace rather than exposure to specific kinds of patient problems such as trauma (Schauben & Frazier, 1995)

# Burnout, stress, VT, Counter-transference, STS

- ∞ VT vs STS – VT results from the cumulative exposure to traumatised patients over time and is manifested in emotional expressions and interpersonal contact as well as covert changes in thinking.
- ∞ VT & STS refer to reactions to the emotional demands made on workers from exposure to traumatised patients' terrifying, and shocking images; strong, chaotic affect, and intrusive traumatic memories.
- ∞ Burnout, STS, VT and stress are similar in that they result from exposure to emotionally engaging patients via interpersonally demanding jobs

# Effects of VT

(Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)

- Frame of reference
  - Identity (questioning identity, gender, etc)
  - World view (questioning perception of the world, how and why things happen, suspicious of people )
  - Spirituality (components include beliefs about meaning & hope, connection with something beyond oneself)
- Self capacities
- Ego resources
- 5 psychological needs disrupted (i.e. safety, trust, esteem, intimacy and control)
- Sensory System disrupted (i.e. imagery, bodily experiences and other sensory experiences such as smell and sounds)

# Sharing of strategies to cope with VT

# Strategies

(Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995)

## 👉 Professional Strategies

- 👉 Recognise and accept vicarious trauma
- 👉 Limit exposure
- 👉 Attend to empathy
- 👉 Set limits (boundaries)
- 👉 Maintain professional connection
  - 👉 Professional education
  - 👉 Support groups
  - 👉 Supervision and consultation
  - 👉 VT consultations

# Strategies

- ☛ **Create balance** (balancing clinical work with other types of work, caseloads)
- ☛ **Seek spiritual renewal**
- ☛ **Organisational strategies**
  - ☛ Safe, private, comfortable working area
  - ☛ Adequate pay and time off/vacations
  - ☛ Developing community support network for referrals to adjunctive services

# Strategies

## 👍 Personal Strategies

- 👉 General self care (i.e. personal psychotherapy, rest and relax)
- 👉 Frame of reference
  - 👉 Identity
  - 👉 Spirituality (through finding connection, meaning and hope to oneself, self-awareness)
  - 👉 World view

**There is no grief that time does  
not lessen and soften.**

**Cicero**

The end....

