Psychological Hazmat Suits for Trauma Therapists

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Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Identify signs of trauma exposure responses and tools to monitor their own reactions
- Describe personal, professional, agency, and environmental factors that can reduce the toxic effect of trauma exposure
- Identify early intervention strategies to help providers and agencies address trauma exposure reactions proactively
Building & Maintaining your Hazmat Suit
Proactively Addressing STS

- There is no research indicating that STS is preventable
- Common sense would lead us to believe that we can mitigate some of the effects by focusing on:
  - Education
  - Awareness
  - Preparation/Early Intervention
Education

- **Organizational Level**
  - Orienting new workers
  - Training for competence and confidence
  - Research on doses of exposure and employee health and wellness

- **Personal/Professional Level**
  - Defining the Concept
  - Understanding the signs and symptoms
  - Take time to attend trainings and build competence
Trauma Exposure Reactions

* Secondary Traumatic Stress

* Vicarious Trauma

* Compassion Fatigue
Compassion Satisfaction

The pleasure you derive from being able to do your work well. For example, you may feel like it is a pleasure to help others through your work. You may feel positively about your colleagues or your ability to contribute to the work setting or even the greater good of society.

(Stamm, 2009-2012)
Vicarious Resilience

As a result of trauma exposure, professionals can be inspired and transformed by their clients’ resilience and can learn new skills to help themselves cope with stress and adversity.
## Complex Stress Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace Systemic Stress</th>
<th>Workplace Traumatic Stress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Stress</td>
<td>Primary Trauma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>Vicarious (Indirect) Trauma</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociocultural Stress</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Dr. Patricia Fisher, Fisher and Associates/TEND Academy
Awareness

- Risk Factors
- Signs and Symptoms
- Assessment
Risk Factors
Contributing Factors

- Overwhelming and seemingly unsolvable client problems
- Readiness gap between worker and clients
- Clients projecting negative feelings onto worker
- The “treadmill effect”
- “Living in an ocean of stress emotions”
- Empathy and one-way caring
- Normative failure
- Contagious nature of negativity and cynicism
- Threat of physical trauma
- Horrific abuse of children

Skovholt, 2001
“Not infrequently, actions or inaction by members of one organization may increase the stress or complicate the jobs of members of another. As a case is shared and decisions are made across different disciplines and agencies, individuals may feel a loss of control.”

(Osofsky, 2008)
**Signs** of Secondary Traumatic Stress

- Avoidance
- Preoccupation with clients/client stories
- Intrusive thoughts/nightmares/flashbacks
- Arousal symptoms
- Trouble sleeping
- Thoughts of violence/revenge
- Feeling estranged/isolated/no one to talk to
- Feeling numb or detached
- Feeling trapped, “infected” by trauma, hopeless, inadequate, depressed
- Difficulty separating work from personal life
Assessment Tools

Individual Tools

- Professional Quality of Life Scale: http://proqol.org/ProQol_Test.html
- Self-Care Assessment: http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu/students/self-care/documents/plan/Self-Care_Assessment.pdf

Organizational Tools

- Secondary Traumatic Stress Informed Organizational Assessment: http://www.uky.edu/CTAC/STSI-OA
Using your Dosimeter
Early Intervention Strategies: Personal

- Active coping skills
  - Initiating direct action
  - Seeking social support and guidance
  - Resignation/Acceptance (accepting reality)
  - Humor
  - Positive reinterpretation
- Activities that inspire and rejuvenate
- Self-Care: physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual
- Addressing personal issues and stressors – seeking support
- Social support and nurturing relationships
- Gratitude
- Optimism
Early Intervention Strategies: Professional

- Awareness (green, yellow, or red zone)
- Knowing yourself – your limits, vulnerabilities, early warning signs
- Ongoing assessment of STS and self-care
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction during workday
- Emotional regulation
- Cognitive coping skills: reframing, positive thinking, optimism
- Compassion satisfaction exercises
- Low-impact debriefing
- Peer support and connections
KEEP CALM AND WEAR YOUR HAZMAT SUIT
Early Intervention Strategies: Supervisory

- Recognizing warning signs in staff and self
- Addressing supervisors STS
- Reflective/process-oriented supervision
- Incorporating mindfulness and/or relaxation exercises in supervision
- Modeling healthy boundaries, coping skills, and self-care
- Facilitating safe and nurturing work environment
- Public recognition/sharing of successes and strengths
- Beware of COWs and sliming!
- Advocating for needs of staff
- Reminding administrators about STS and impact
Early Intervention Strategies: Organizational

- Ongoing assessment of level of exposure and impact on staff
- Ongoing training for supervisors and staff in recognizing and addressing STS
  - Crisis intervention
  - Cumulative toll
- Ongoing efforts to promote and facilitate wellness
- Optimizing opportunities for worker choice and involvement in decision making
- Providing opportunities for peer support and supervision
Living Life with Gratitude

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57ru-P7EuMw
Thank You!

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