Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Trauma and FABULOUS Resiliency

Maryland’s Twentieth Annual Child Abuse, Neglect and Delinquency Options (C.A.N.D.O.) Judicial Conference

Monday, October 15, 2018
9:15am – 10:30am

Keynote Presented by
Barbara Rubel, MA, BCETS, DAAETS
www.barbararubel.com
As a Thanatologist, I’m a specialist in:

- grief after a death-related crime;
- non-death related victim loss; and
- social and psychological aspects of traumatic death and bereavement
During the week of September 11th, I was a hospice bereavement coordinator; facilitated a support group; and taught crisis intervention, a master’s level course, at Brooklyn College. I felt compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma and knew that I needed self-care to replenish myself, not only the days after 911, but every day thereafter.”

– Barbara Rubel

Objectives

1. Describe compassion fatigue and its two components, burnout and secondary traumatic stress
2. Describe vicarious trauma and its symptoms
3. Identify characteristics of resilience as reflected in the FABULOUS Principle
Compassion Fatigue

State of tension and preoccupation with individual or cumulative trauma of victims as manifested in one or more ways:

- Re-experience traumatic events
- Avoidance/numbing of reminders of traumatic event
- Persistent arousal
- Combined with added effects of cumulative stress (burnout)

Compassion and Empathy

Empathy: identify with victims; understand their needs; what they are going through; and feel their emotions

Compassion: want to take action to help them

Professional Objectivity

• Attempt to protect well-being in midst of trauma and chaos in high-stress areas of law
• Attorneys and judges strive for professional objectivity so they do not become emotionally entangled in cases
• Research shows to remain objective may not be effective
• Natural empathetic responses may overpower intellectual efforts to maintain objectivity

Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program
http://louisianajlap.com/issues-concerns/compassion-fatigue/
Lost Objectivity

The Judicial profession values objectivity, and therefore feelings of compassion and empathy might be difficult to acknowledge.

Compassion Fatigue in Judges

- Excessive workloads that encroach on personal time
- Exhausted all the time
- Nightmares
- Pessimistic
- Irritable

- Losing faith in humanity
- Alienating from others
- Becoming generally unhappy, unproductive and no longer on top of your game

Judges and Lawyers Assistance Program
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CF and Vicarious Trauma in Judges

• Study of 105 judges (54% male/46% female)
• Avg. 51 years of age/10 yrs. experience
• 63%: one or more VT symptoms
• Females greater CF (73% female/54% male)
• 7+ years experience had higher levels of externalized symptoms (anger or hostility)

Symptoms of CF in Judges

- Sleeplessness
- Eating disturbances
- Depression; anxiety
- Hypervigilance
- Security consciousness
- Inability to make prompt decisions (procrastinate)
- Ambivalent and, therefore, anxious about critical decisions that were close calls
- Irritability
- Intolerance
- Fearfulness
- Difficulty focusing or concentrating

Jaffe et al.
Contributors to CF in Judges and Magistrates

• Highly complex, emotionally charged cases take toll over time
• 911 tapes; graphic medical evidence, photos and videos of injuries
• Highly emotional cases and testimony at trial and sentencing
• Statements of surviving family members/victim impact statements
• Serve as balance point and decision maker
• Expected to be neutral, impartial, not swayed by emotion, appear unaffected by disturbing information
• Isolation due to uniqueness of role
• Make weighty decisions and expected to keep own counsel

Chambers, A. *Director, Missouri Lawyers’ Assistance Program.* Judges and CF: What Is It and What to Do About It
First Part of Compassion Fatigue

Burnout

Maslach Burnout Inventory (BMI)

- Too many job stressors
- Cynical
- Reduced personal accomplishment
- Emotionally demanding job
- Depleted
- Negative attitude
Negative Feelings Accompany Burnout

• Unhappiness; hopelessness; exhaustion
• Disconnected (including from person you want to be)
• Lack of sustaining beliefs
• Overwhelmed or bogged down
• Your hard work never can make a difference

Stamm BH. The Concise ProQOL Manual. 2nd ed. Pocatello, ID: ProQOL.org; 2010
Symptoms of Burnout in Judges & Magistrates

• Disillusioning experience, often feel drained
• Lack of achievement, purpose and sense of hope
• Distrust with a sense of impending failure
• Burnout may harden into a fixed element of one’s outlook and depersonalization of cases
• When burnout is advanced, the judge’s usual demeanor hardens in detachment

Judges and Compassion Fatigue. (2015)
http://www.divorcesource.com/blog/judges-and-compassion-fatigue/
Contributors to Burnout in Judges

• Poorly run courts
• Inefficient judicial administration
• Systemic glitches

Is Compassion Fatigue an Issue For Judges (2004)
http://www.judgemiketown.com/judicial-compassion-fatigue/
• Occupational stress research suggests judges who suffer from work-related burnout can experience variety of negative physical/emotional outcomes
• These suppositions lack direct empirical evidence
• Further research needed for accurate assessment of prevalence of burnout among judges

Second Part of Compassion Fatigue

Secondary Traumatic Stress

• Results from indirect exposure to trauma material
• Listening to traumatic narratives (prosecutors, public defenders, law enforcement, victims)
• Symptoms mimic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
• Preoccupied with thoughts of victims and experience their trauma
• Indirect/secondary trauma exposure
• High empathy level
• Past traumas
• Not enough training or support

Peebles-Kleiger, 2000; Bride, 2007; Stamm, 2010; Klaric, et al., 2013, Baird & Kracen, 2006; secondarytrauma.org
Secondary Traumatic Stress Symptoms

- Intrusion: (interruptions)
- Avoidance: (escape)
- Arousal: (provoked)

Secondary Traumatic Stress Symptoms

**Intrusion**
- Heart pounds when thinking about victims
- Disturbing dreams about work
- Relive victim’s trauma
- Upset with reminders about work
- Think about work with victims when you don’t intend to
  *(interruptions)*

Secondary Traumatic Stress Symptoms

Avoidance

• Emotionally numb
• Discouraged about the future
• Little interest being around others
• Less active than usual
• Avoid people, places, things that remind you of work
• Want to avoid working with certain victims
• Notice gaps in memory about victim’s sessions (*escape*)

Secondary Traumatic Stress Symptoms

Arousal

• Trouble sleeping
• Trouble concentrating
• Jumpy
• Easily annoyed
• Expect something bad to happen (*provoked*)

Contributors to STS in Judges and Magistrates

• Judges indicated trials were often emotional and traumatic for parties involved

• Judges exhibited emotional responses to victims (i.e. empathy for traumatized victims, jurors, and defendants)

• Although judges did not explicitly state they experienced stress from others’ traumas, findings suggest they may be at risk of STS given nature of work environment

Chamberlain and Miller (2009)
Vicarious Trauma is Related to Secondary Traumatic Stress
What is Vicarious Trauma?

• Long term consequence of controlled empathy while listening to and then reliving a person’s experience
• Transforms inner sense of self/cognitive changes (safety, trust) after helping/wanting to help a traumatized person
• Changes the way you see your world

Evidence, and STS and VT

• Repeated exposure to traumatic details judges face daily can lead to vicarious trauma
• Grisly photos and videos
• Frightening emails, voice mails, text messages
• People take photos/videos at crime scenes with phones, dash cameras, body-worn cameras (law enforcement)

Wood Smith, D. (2017) Secondary or VT Among Judges and Court Personnel
Vicarious Trauma Symptoms

- Preoccupied with thoughts about victims
- Overwhelmed (trapped or on edge)
- Increased forgetfulness about important matters
- Sleep disturbance
- Challenge maintaining boundaries—personal/professional life
- Avoidance symptoms to triggers of trauma (i.e., avoid particular activities that remind you of trauma)
- Changed deeply and negatively (negative sense of self)

NetCE. Course 96621. (2016).
Sense of Self: Your Uniqueness

• Personal identity (e.g., job, relationship, faith, abilities)
• Views, traits, values, beliefs, morals
• Purpose within world is constantly changing
• How you chose self-protection strategies
• Motivation for the choices you make
• Things (e.g., hobbies, people, traits) that helped you to develop into the person you are
Contributors to Vicarious Trauma

• Cumulative effect of frequently being empathetic, committed, and responsible to help while hearing trauma related narratives
• Personal history of trauma
• Professional isolation
• Unhealthy ways of coping
Features of Victim’s Narrative Influence Vicarious Trauma

• Crime (e.g., sexual assault, domestic violence)
• Manner of death: natural, accidental, suicide, homicide, undetermined
• Type of death: nature of death/caused person to die
• Sudden death
• Preventable/avoidable death
• Traumatic death
Features of Victim’s Narrative Influence
Vicarious Trauma

• Age of crime victim
• Primary injuries: physical, emotional, financial
• Psychological proximity/attachment
• Stability of life
• Psychiatric issues (mental illness, PTSD)
• Individual coping style: positive/avoidance
• Death notification
The Impact of a Victim’s Pain and Suffering on Vicarious Trauma

• Viewing the body
• Amount of suffering deceased endured
• Where the homicide took place
• Secondary losses
• Concurrent stressors
• Age of deceased
• Untimeliness
The Impact of a Victim’s Pain and Suffering on Vicarious Trauma

• Multiple deaths
• Historical background
• Grief style (patterns): intuitive/instrumental
• Relationship to the assailant
• Responsibility/accountability
Features of Victim’s Narrative Influence Vicarious Trauma

• Perceived social support/disenfranchised grief
• Ambiguous loss
• Rituals and memorialization
• Religion and spirituality
• Media and social media
• Vicarious trauma reactions are found in legal and emergency service professionals and others who are exposed to significant trauma
• These reactions are similar to those experienced by health and mental health professionals

NetCE. Course 96621. (2016)
Vicarious Resilience and Vicarious Transformation

• Newer concepts reflect **positive** effects of work
• Draw inspiration from a victim’s resilience that strengthens your mental and emotional fortitude
• Just as victims can be transformed in positive ways by trauma, so can victim service providers and first responders

Office for Victims of Crime https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/what-is-vicarious-trauma
Vicarious Resilience

• Process of learning about overcoming adversity from trauma survivor and resulting positive transformation and empowerment through empathy and interaction
• Hopeful and greater optimism
• Better perspective of one’s own problems
• Belief in possibility of recovery from trauma
• Profound sense of commitment to, and finding meaning from work

Hernandez, Gangsei, and Engstrom, 2007
The FABULOUS Principle

• Framework to help identify eight characteristics of resilience for managing compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma

Rubel, B (2016) Death, Dying, and Bereavement: Providing compassion during a time of need. MA: Western Schools
Flexibility: build a resilient mind-set by being less rigid to adapting to work-life challenges

Attitude: evaluate stressors and behave positively as a result of being engaged and a good fit for the job

Boundaries: balance, monitor, maintain limits of acceptable workplace behavior

Understanding of job satisfaction: gratification & pleasure from job

Laughter: a sense of humor to and manage a stressful workplace

Optimism: think positively & realistically to anticipate best possible outcome

United: cultivate personal/professional relationships that increase well-being

Self-compassion: express loving kindness to oneself every day
Flexibility

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Growth Mindset

• **Fixed Mindset:** Believe basic qualities (initial talents, aptitudes, interests, temperaments, intelligence, abilities) are just fixed traits; have a certain amount, and that’s that

• **Growth Mindset:** Basic qualities – things you cultivate through efforts and although we may differ everyone can change and grow through application and experience (Dweck, 2016)
Although Spread Way Too Thin . . .

All of the judges HuffPost talked to emphasized how much they enjoy the actual work they do.

- There are certainly perks to the job
- It’s a lifetime gig
- It pays well
- People respect them

Make decisions that can affect thousands or even millions of lives

Choose a strength that helps you to be **flexible**. How do you express strength?

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Attitude

- Set of beliefs about something in a negative, positive, neutral, or mixed way
- Based on life circumstances, parents, past trauma
- Guides state of mind about people/issues
- Influences way you feel, think, and behave
- Attitude is how you think about your job and victims which influences your behaviors
Choose a strength that helps you have a positive **attitude**. How do you express strength?

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Boundaries

- Limit of acceptable behavior
- Avoid legal liabilities
Have you created a ritual at the end of the day that helps you to leave your work inside the courtroom?

When do you stop judging for the day? When you:

• Hang up your robe
• Treat your commute as a time to wind down
• Turn off your cell phone
Choose a strength that helps you maintain **boundaries**. How do you express strength?

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Understanding Job Satisfaction
Understanding Job Satisfaction

Fit between:

1. Job description (responsibilities)
2. Needs (trusted leader, working conditions, culture, paid well)
3. Accomplish goals (decision-making, ongoing education, use skills, make a difference)

Job Satisfaction in Judges

• Study: overall job satisfaction of Mass. judges
• Highly satisfied with their jobs
• Viewed increased pay as the most important contributor to increased job satisfaction
• Improvements in professional support staff

Choose a strength that helps you **understand job satisfaction**. How do you express strength?

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Laughter

• Improves communication
• Encourages group cohesion
• Enhances problem-solving
What Do You Find Humorous?

Stand-up: comics, jokes, stories
Slapstick: physical comedy
Sarcastic: dark comedy
Gallows: grim/misfortune
Observational: not planned
Self-deprecating: poke fun at yourself
“I’m Good Enough, I’m Smart Enough, And Doggone It, People Like Me.”

- Stuart Smalley
Choose a strength that keeps you **laughing**. How do you express strength?

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• Do you describe your role as a judge as an optimist or as a pessimist?

• **Optimist**: Rewarding, fulfilling, gratifying

• **Pessimist**: Wounding, exhausting, draining
Choose a strength that helps you be **optimistic**. How do you express strength?

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United States

- Internal sense of connection
- Relationships: Faith, family, friends, co-workers, supervisors, and leaders
- Strong social network for self-disclosure and narrative
- Value of companionship/community
Choose a strength that helps you be **united**. How do you express strength?

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*Approachable*
Self-Compassion
Three Elements of Self-Compassion

1. Unconditional kindness and understanding rather than harsh self-criticism and judgment.
2. Experiences with non-biased awareness part of larger experience rather than separating/isolating.
3. Painful thoughts/feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them (see situation in larger perspective of victims who suffer).

Neff, K. D. (2016). The Self-Compassion Scale is a valid and theoretically coherent measure of self-compassion. Mindfulness, 7, 264 – 274
Strengths can be perceived as weakness when misused and can contribute to VT.

- Agreeable
- Daring
- Trusting
- Tolerant
- Hard-working
- Helpful
- Empathetic
Choose a strength that helps you be **self-compassionate**. How do you express strength?

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Suggestions from Judges

• Pre-trial interventions designed to prepare judges for stress they might encounter during trial process (Miller & Bornstein, 2004)
• Post trial debriefings (CISM)
• Mentoring Programs for new judges (Chamberlain & Miller, 2009)
• Regular refresher course on stress mgmt. (Miller & Flores, 2007)
• Coping Mechanisms (e.g., bike home from work, yoga, reading, mindfulness)

The National Judicial College (2015)
Suggestions from Judges

• Focus on facts and legal issues instead of gruesome details
• When typing notes during testimony, focus on grammar and words, not meaning and pain behind those words
• Avoid reading deeper into petitions for protections from child abuse than necessary for allegations to meet requirements for protection

The National Judicial College (2015)
• Question asked on a survey of nearly 800 judges (NJC alumni) “Have you suffered STS from being a judge?”
• Nearly half (45%) NJC alumni answered yes to suffering from STS

Some judges were dismissive of malady:
• “Judges need to toughen up”
• “Judges are in wrong profession if they experience STS”
• “STS is a product of society’s victim mentality”

Secondary or Vicarious Trauma Among Judges and Court Personnel

• Judges and court staff are susceptible to vicarious or secondary trauma due to the combination of working in a busy court, hearing repeated accounts of harrowing or traumatic events, and worrying about safety issues that may arise around volatile or emotionally charged cases

Meeting Our Objectives

1. Participants have an awareness of compassion fatigue and its two components, burnout and secondary traumatic stress
2. Participants have an awareness of vicarious trauma and its symptoms
3. Participants can now balance their symptoms of CF and VT by focusing on characteristics of resilience as reflected in the FABULOUS Principle
With increased self-awareness of character strengths judges and magistrates are better equipped to recognize and manage compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma.
Thank you for attending today’s program

Barbara Rubel’s website: barbararubel.com
Email: griefwork@aol.com