Identifying Impacts and Developing Coping Strategies for Judicial Vicarious Trauma

SHIFT
Supporting Heroes in mental health Foundational Training
Helping Those Exposed to Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

Part I
funded by
Department of Justice, OJJDP
ICAC Training & Technical Assistance

Course developed by
The Innocent Justice Foundation
in partnership with
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Objectives: Part I

- Understand the psychological and physiological impact of stress and trauma.
- Understand the psychological impact of child sexual exploitation and other serious cases.

Types of Stress

- Normal
- Situational
- Traumatic

What are we talking about?

Burnout
Compassion Fatigue
Secondary Trauma
Vicarious Trauma
Safety Concerns

Reasonable responses to difficult realities
“Cases of horrible, sexual, predatory exploitation of children haunt me. I keep my balance and my job as a judge by profoundly guarding myself against being swept away by the gruesome evidence I have to confront.”

Makin, 2002

Child Sexual Exploitation Impacts

Increasing Cases – and Exposure
- Graphic images and videos
- Production/Self-production
- P2P Networks

Victims: Younger
Abuse: more violent and sadistic
Offenders have multiple victims

Additional Impacts for Judges

Changing nature of cases:
- Numbers increasing
- Resources decreasing
- More egregious cases

The nature of evidence:
- Graphic medical evidence
- 911 tapes
- Photos and videos of injuries
- Victim testimony at trial
- Victim impact statements

Town, 2003
Physiology of Stress

Hypothalamus
- Adrenaline
- Cortisol
- Noradrenaline

Stressors
- Acute
- Chronic

Responses are dependent upon the severity of the stressor and the duration of the stress.

Normal Responses During Exposure

Physiological:
- Stress chemicals released
- Primitive brain in charge
- Fight, Flight or Freeze

Psychological:
- Anxiety
- Dissociation

Traumatic Information Storage

Sensory in Nature
- Images
- Physical sensations
- Emotions
- Behaviors

Not subject to voluntary recall and dismissal

Triggered by environmental cues
Identify challenges or impacts you have seen in yourself or your staff.

PARTICIPANT EXERCISE

Signs and Symptoms

Physical
- Fatigue
- Digestive Problems
- Headaches
- Sleeping Difficulties
- High Blood Pressure
- Eating Habits – Weight loss or gain
- Loss/Decrease Libido

Intellectual/Cognitive
- Indecision
- Loss of concentration
- Confusion/Forgetfulness
- Low productivity
- Negative attitude/Cynicism
- Loss of sense of humor
**Signs and Symptoms**

**Emotional**
- Excessive emotion
- Mood swings
- Increased irritability
- Anger and sadness
- Fear and worry
- Loneliness/Isolation
- Crying spells

**Behavioral**
- Numbing
- Shutting down
- Risk-taking
- Excessive drinking
- Substance abuse
- Driving fast and/or angry
- Extramarital affairs

**Spiritual**
- Extreme religiosity
- Blaming God
- Feeling abandoned by God
- Difficulty praying or obsessing on fate
- A change in views of God, your life or your world
Factors Contributing to Trauma

Death penalty cases
Crimes against children & violent crimes
Graphic, disturbing and horrific evidence
Responsibility of deliberating & rendering verdicts
The intrusiveness of the jury selection process

Factors Contributing to Trauma

Safety concerns
Life disruption
Negative fiscal impact
Extended exposure to traumatic evidence
Little training or preparation regarding the nature of the material.

Factors Contributing to Judicial VT

Isolation
The requirement of impartiality
The requirement of confidentiality
Unprepared counsel or experts
Concern for impacts on jurors and court staff
Factors Contributing to Judicial VT

Level of trauma in the cases
High profile cases
Magnitude of needs & lack of resources
Lack of training about case content issues
Prohibitions about admitting vulnerability, need or weakness

Judges’ Experience of VT

Study of 105 judges:
- Average experience of 10 years
- 63% reported experiencing one or more symptoms
  - 73% of females
  - 54% of males
- Judges with 6+ years of experience reported significantly more symptoms.

Most Identified Symptoms

Short term:
- Sleep disturbance
- Intolerance of others
- Physical complaints

Long Term:
- Sleep disturbance
- Depression
- Sense of isolation

Jaffe et al, 2003
Utah Judges Brief Survey

- Number responding: 49
- Sleep disturbance: 82%
- Irritation or anger: 47%
- Intrusive thoughts or feelings: 43%
- Hopelessness or intense sadness: 35%
- Numb or emotionally unresponsive: 20%

Jurors' & Court Staff Experience

Survey of 280 jurors & 38 court employees:
Expressed concerns about viewing disturbing evidence
- 42% of jurors
- 59% of employees
Court staff reported higher levels of stress than jurors after high profile trials

Woolf, 2011

Jurors' & Court Staff Experience

Multiple studies show high rates of anxiety, depression and PTSD in trials related to:
- Capital murder
- Aggravated kidnapping
- Aggravated sexual assault
- Aggravated assault
- Child abuse

Miller 2008
Compounding Personal Factors
- Personal or family history
- Family Stressors
- Marital Conflict
- Current or recent loss
- Illness
- Losing support/friends

Symptoms of Chronic Exposure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Warning Signs</th>
<th>Trouble Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>non-persistent</td>
<td>mildly intrusive</td>
<td>intrusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-intrusive</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Building Resilience

The Good News:
People who experience trauma and successfully integrate it, or recover, are stronger and more resilient than people in the general population.
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Part II

Objectives: Part II
- Develop coping mechanisms and self care strategies to build resilience
- Understand the importance of coping strategies and training for staff members and jurors

Factors That Build Resilience
- Presence and use of social support
- Ability to plan and take action
- Positive self assessment
- Communication and problem solving skills
- Tolerance and management of strong feelings and impulses
PARTICIPANT EXERCISE

What are you doing that builds resilience for you? For your staff & jurors?

Coping Skills Prior to Exposure

Prepare for exposure:
- Protect yourself
- Identify your task
- Notice your responses

Coping Skills During Exposure

De-escalate physiological responses
- Tension
- Posture
- Breath
- Movement
Coping Skills After Exposure

- Take regular breaks
- Leave the trauma behind
- Rituals
- Physical movement
- Plan for next activity

Coping Skills After Exposure

- Write down your worries
- Work to home transitions
- No exposure prior to end of work day
- Laughter is the best medicine

Work Environment

- Location of family photos
- Tailoring your personal space
- Comfort - Ergonomics
- Inspirational images
- Educating colleagues
- Ongoing training and education
Video
10 minutes
Exercise
Healthy diet and water
Sleep
Time
Rituals
Plans for waking
Social life
Personal interests

Coping Skills: Personal Care
Under Your Personal Control
Exercise
Healthy diet and water
Sleep
Time
Rituals
Plans for waking
Social life
Personal interests

Incorporating Family
Spouse/Significant Other
Overview of job—not the graphic content
Talk about normal vs. warning signs
Develop a code word
Talk about intrusive thoughts
Talk about hyper-vigilance
Incorporating Family

**Children**
- Age appropriate discussion
- Talk about feelings
- Answer questions if they have them
- Allow them to give to you

**Have fun together:**
- Laugh and play!

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Building Resiliency Outside of Work

- Education or self-help
- Being part of a group
  - Social support
- Outside interests and hobbies
- Spiritual practice
- Seek professional assistance when needed:
  - Individual
  - Marital
  - Pastoral

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Colleagues and Staff

- Get to know each other
- Give positive reinforcement
- Offer training and information
  - Impacts
  - Coping skills
  - Support and intervention options
### Colleagues and Staff

- Pay Attention
  - Check in as necessary
  - Offer support

- Share informal events
  - Eat lunch together
  - Celebrate life events together
  - Celebrate successes

- Accept support when it is offered

### Jurors

- Information on possible effects and coping behaviors
- Enforce consistent breaks
- Provide trial schedule information
- Limit long hours and sequestration
- Address safety concerns
- Provide debriefing for difficult cases
- Referrals for post trial counseling

### Court Staff

- Provide training
- Enforce consistent breaks
- Limit exposure prior to the end of the workday
- Provide debriefing for seriously difficult cases
- Provide regular opportunities for checking in regarding impact of the work
- Referrals to EAP or other behavioral health support
Development of Transformational Meaning

Meaningfulness makes a great many things endurable, perhaps everything.
C. G. Jung

Wrapping Up

Questions?

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