

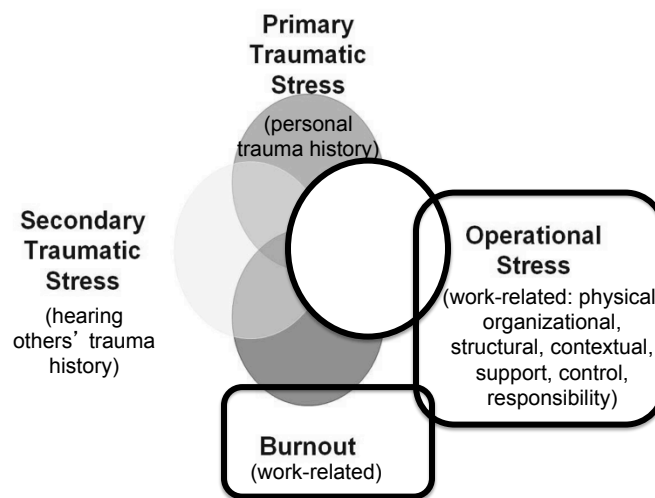
# Why Early Career Trauma Providers Should Care About Self-Care

**Mira Brancu, Ph.D.**

Duke University School of Medicine  
Mid-Atlantic VA Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center

*Division 56 Early Career Psychologist Committee Webinar  
11 July 2013*

## Provider/Compassion Fatigue: Synergistic Effect



(Figley, 1995; 2001; Gentry/Baranowsky Model, 1997)

## First Career Warning Signs

- Type E = Exceedingly Driven
  - Highly motivated
  - High expectations
  - Overdeveloped sense of responsibility
  - Self-sacrificing



## First Career Warning Signs

- High Caseload
- Sole provider
- Inadequate, or insufficient supervision and not listening to supervision



## First Career Warning Signs



## Self-Awareness: The Stress-Distress-Impairment Continuum

- Stress: Happens to everyone
  - In personal life: physical and emotional
  - At work
  - Can be chronic



## Self-Awareness: The Stress-Distress-Impairment Continuum

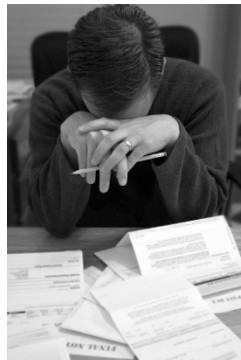
- Distress: The subjective state of experiencing anxiety, pain, or suffering.



"We talked about the strange man yanking your ears last week. We need to look at what else is bothering you."

## Self-Awareness: The Stress-Distress-Impairment Continuum

- Impairment: An objective reduction in professional functioning and performance (doing a poor job). May include subjective experience of distress.



## Potential Risk Factors Relevant for Early Career Providers

- Failing to recognize or attend to negative emotions and thoughts about our work (Warren et al., 2010) and allowing distress to progress unchecked (Barnett & Cooper, 2009).
- Long hours, large caseloads, and higher degree of exposure to traumatized patients (number and/or severity), especially involving survivors of violent or human-induced trauma and/or children (Sprang et al., 2007).
- Personal trauma history (Sprang et al., 2007) - mixed results in the literature.

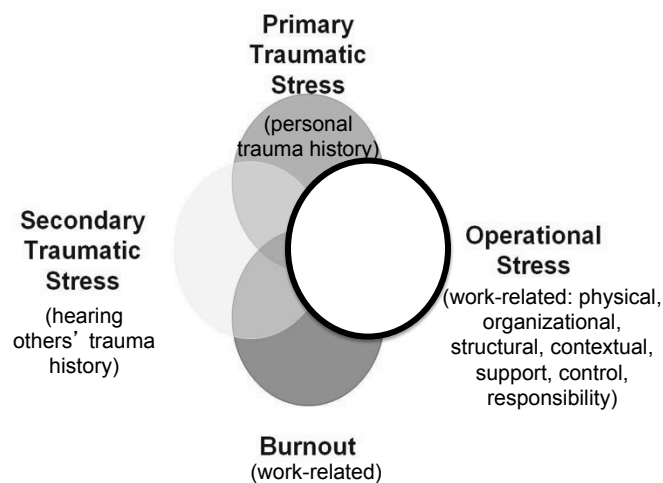
## Potential Risk Factors Relevant for ECPs

- Younger age and fewer years of professional experience (Sprang et al., 2007; Craig & Sprang, 2010; Smith & Moss, 2009)
- Less education (Sprang et al., 2007) or experience working with a specific sub-population (Pudilo, 2012).
- Poor, inadequate, or insufficient supervision (Pudilo, 2012).
- Professional and emotional isolation (Smith & Moss, 2009) and insufficient self-care (Barnett & Cooper, 2009).
- Lack of therapeutic success (Smith & Moss, 2009).

## Lessons Learned

- Over-ambition
- Managing personal expectations
- Listening to supervisor feedback
- Identifying warning signs
- Self-care and improving work-life balance

## Provider/Compassion Fatigue: Synergistic Effect



(Figley, 1995; 2001; Gentry/Baranowsky Model, 1997)

## Promoting Self-Care

---

- Colleague Assistance Committee
  - Psychologist wellness – career is tied to self-awareness and self-care – ethically and by professional standards
  
- Supervision
  - Success of organization and program depends on health of employees

## The Nature of Working with Trauma

---

“It ‘s not a question of whether or not caregivers will hurt in the course of treating trauma, but how they will handle it when it comes up.”

Bruner, Adams, Bicknell, Beder, & Steele (2009) Building Resilience: Rebounding from and Preventing Compassion Fatigue, Presented to DoD Deployment Health Clinical Center.

# References

- Barnett, J., & Cooper, N. (2009). Creating a culture of self-care. *Clinical Psychology Science and Practice, 16*, 16-20.
- Craig, C.D., & Sprang, G. (2010). Compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout in a national sample of trauma treatment therapists. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping, 23*, 319-339.
- Devilly, G.J., Wright, R., & Verker, T. (2009). Vicarious trauma, secondary traumatic stress or simply burnout? Effect of trauma therapy on mental health professionals. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 43*, 373-385.
- Figley, C. R. (1995). *Compassion Fatigue: Secondary traumatic stress from treating the traumatized*. New York: Bruner/Mazel.
- Figley, C. R. (2002). Compassion fatigue and the psychotherapist's chronic lack of self care. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 58*, 1433-1441.
- Hernandez, P., Engstrom, D., & Gangsei, D. (2010). Exploring the impact of trauma on therapists: Vicarious resilience and related concepts in training. *Journal of Systemic Therapies, 29*, 67-83.
- Kahill, S., (1988). Symptoms of professional burnout: A review of the empirical evidence. *Canadian Psychology, 29*, 284-297.
- Maslach, C., (1976). Burned-out. *Human Behavior, 5*, 16-22.
- Maslach, C., & Goldberg, J. (1998). Prevention of burnout: New perspectives. *Applied and Preventive Psychology, 7*, 63-74.
- McCann, I. L., & Pearlman, L. A. (1990a). Vicarious traumatization: A framework the psychological effects of working with victims. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 3*, 131-149.
- Pulido, M.L. (2012). The ripple effect: Lessons learned about secondary traumatic stress among clinicians responding to the September 11 terrorist attacks. *Clinical Social Work, 40*, 307-335.
- Slattery, S.M., & Goodman, L.A., (2009). Secondary traumatic stress among domestic violence advocates: Workplace risk and protective factors. *Violence Against Women, 15*, 1358-1379.
- Smith, P.L., & Moss, S.B. (2009). Psychologist impairment: What is it, how can it be prevented, and what can be done to address it? *Clinical Psychology Science and Practice, 16*, 1-15.
- Sprang, G, Clark, J.J., & Whitt-Woosley, A. (2007). Compassion Fatigue, compassion satisfaction, and burnout: Factors impacting a professional's quality of life. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 12*, 259-280.
- Stamm, B.H. (1999). *Secondary traumatic stress: Self care issues for clinicians, researchers, and educators*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Baltimore: Sidran.
- Warren, J., Morgan, M.M., Morris, L.B., & Morris, T.M. (2010). Breathing words slowly: Creative writing and counselor self-care – The writing workout. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health, 5*, 109-124.