Why Early Career Trauma Providers Should Care About Self-Care

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Provider/Compassion Fatigue: Synergistic Effect

Primary Traumatic Stress
(personal trauma history)

Secondary Traumatic Stress
(hearing others’ trauma history)

Operational Stress
(work-related: physical, organizational, structural, contextual, support, control, responsibility)

Burnout
(work-related)

(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.

- 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 (Pulido, 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.”

References


