



Order in the Court! Workers in Support!



**Presentation at the**  
**DVCAN 5th State-wide Conference**  
**Cairns October 2005**

HUMAN RIGHTS



Social Justice

The Cost of  
Care



Experiences of and Effects on Workers in the DV Sector



# TRAUMA

- Trauma permanently changes a person's reality
- Fear and anxiety – characterized by vigilance – turn life's ordinary hassles and stresses into potentially threatening events
- 25 – 80% of DV survivors may have symptoms of PTSD
- A lack of joy and hope compromise the experience of being alive.



# TRAUMA

- Our Hope
- Our Joy
- Our Life-force



# TRAUMA

- Counsellors, advocates, court-support workers face special challenges and hazards in working with trauma survivors:
  - Sadness, anger, fear, frustration, fatigue, vulnerability, shame
  - + Personal growth, resilience, appreciation, hope, wisdom, inspiration



# What Are We Doing?

- Listening to the Unspeakable
- Resisting Violence
- Challenging Despair,
- Cradling and Nurturing Hope
- Constructing Futures
- Rebuilding Lives





# Vicarious Trauma

- **We pay a price for the stories we hear!**
  - Intrusive imagery
  - Changes in trust
  - Feelings of control
  - Issues of intimacy
  - Esteem needs
  - Safety concerns





# Vicarious Trauma

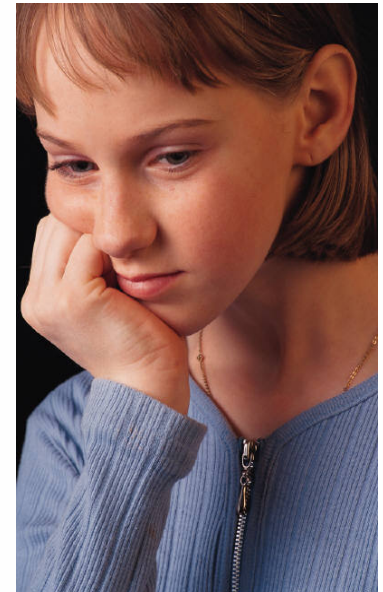
- **We pay a price for the stories we hear!**
  - “Engulfed in anguish”
  - “Sinking into despair”
  - Personal functioning
  - Professional functioning
  - Helplessness





# Vicarious Trauma

- **We pay a price for the stories we hear!**
  - Grief
  - Loss of control
  - Potential for clinical error
  - Therapeutic impasses
  - Ethical concerns





# Effect on Organization

- **Quality and effectiveness compromised**
- **High staff turnover**
- **High rate of absenteeism**
- **Loss of energy, morale, commitment and optimism of staff members**
- **Inexperienced staff more at risk**
- **Watch out – “the more distressed the client group, the more distressed the organization”**



# Vicarious Growth

- Creation of meaning
- Commitment
- Purpose
- Social Action
- Appreciation
- Resilience
- Spirituality





# Who is Who?

- 65 participants from 8 agencies (surveys, questionnaires, and focus groups) = 64 women and 1 man
  1. IWSS
  2. Caboolture
  3. Gold Coast
  4. Mackay
  5. Townsville
  6. Toowoomba
  7. BDVAS
  8. Cairns



## Who is Who?

- Average age of participants is 40 (min 21 and max of 63)
  - : 21-30 yrs = 14
  - : 31-40 yrs = 18
  - : 41-50 yrs = 21
  - : 51+ yrs = 10



## Who is Who? Yrs in DV Sector

- Number of years working in DV sector ranged from 3 months to 21 yrs
- Average number of years working in DV sector was around 6 yrs although 4 of the staffs out of the 8 averaged below that.



## Who is Who? Yrs in Current Workplace

- The number of years in the current workplace ranged from 3 months to 18 years
- The average number of years in the current workplace was about 3.5 years
- 6 out of the 8 places had staff whose average number of years in the workplace was actually lower than 3.5



## Who is Who? Roles

- 55% of participants indicated that one of their roles in the workplace was counselling
- 49% of participants indicated that theirs was also an advocacy role
- 55% of participants indicated that they also were in court support roles
- Different sites had different focuses with those roles



## Who is Who? With Whom?

- Nearly 70% of work-time was spent with survivors (women and children) face to face.
- 88.8% of participants worked with women
- 32% worked with children
- 7.7% worked with men (3 agencies did some work with men)



## Who is Who?

- 74% of participants had at least a bachelor's degree
- 26% had Associate Diploma or Secondary Education



# Who is Who?

- Only 23% of group had specific DV courses or training in the University degree
- No DV training in last 10 years = 19%
- Some in-house or on-the-job training = 10%
- 3 or less courses or workshops = 17%
- Combination of in-house and external training = 30.5%
- On-going professional development, workshops and conferences = 23.5%



## Who is Who?

- Only 58% of participants receive adequate clinical supervision. 4 places had staff that claimed their supervision satisfaction rates were 44%, 43%, 38%, and 33%

**NB – There is a relationship between secondary traumatization and the adequacy of clinical supervision**



# Who is Who? Personal History

- Overall 82% of workers presented with a personal history of trauma
- Personal history of trauma and the TSC-40 had significant overlap especially in the following areas
  - Dissociation
  - Anxiety
  - Sexual abuse
  - And trending to significance for depression and sleep disturbance



# Who is Who? Personal History

- Of those with a trauma history, 92% said it had an impact on their work, with half believing it made them better workers because of their insider understanding of clients
- The other half considered the relationship between their background and their work more problematic with a negative impact both ways



# TSC & ProQol

- TSC -40
  - Dissociation
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Sexual abuse trauma index
  - Sleep disturbance
  - Sexual problems
- ProQol
  - Burnout
  - Compassion satisfaction
  - Secondary traumatization



# What Employers Need to Know

- History of Personal Trauma
- Training plan
- Supervision requirements
- Peer Support opportunities
- Community support opportunities





# Self Care

- Beware of over-commitment
- Beware if there is not enough laughter in your workplace
- Beware if you are not looking out for each other
- Beware if there is a lack of balance in between work, rest, play
- Beware if you are feeling isolated





# Self Care

- **WHAT ARE YOUR:**

- Safety Needs?
- Trust Needs – self and other: a healthy dependency?
- Self-valuing and valuing of others?
- Intimacy needs- the need to feel connected to others and to oneself and to the world?
- Control needs?





## Questions we need to ask ourselves

1. What am I doing about my own experience of personal trauma?
2. How is this helping or hindering my clients?
3. How can we give workers an ongoing positive experience of clinical supervision?
4. What ongoing training do we need to do this work effectively?
5. How am I consciously and deliberately caring for myself in this work knowing the risks involved?



# The Narcissistic Snare

- To Know All
  - To Heal All
  - To Love All
- Keep it real!**





# REMEMBER

- You are not GOD!
- Their trauma is not happening to you!





# Keeping the Dream Alive

But I, ..., I have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams  
(W. B. Yeats)





# The Sullivan Kids



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