VICARIOUS TRAUMA AMONG RESEARCHERS

Circumstances that may contribute to vicarious trauma among researchers*:

Researcher's sense of safety and security (collecting data in unfamiliar places, interviewing perpetrators)

Repeatedly hearing stories of violence and abuse but being unable to respond when in a data collection role

The degree to which a researcher engages with the information and stories they are hearing.

Factors that may contribute (positively and negatively) to a researcher's experience of vicarious trauma:

- Personal history of trauma, or past exposure to traumatic events
- Coping and self-care strategies
- Current life circumstances, support systems, and level of self-awareness
- Experiences of historical and current structural oppressions

Signs that a researcher may be experiencing vicarious trauma:

- Anxiety, depression, loss of empathy, numbness
- Reluctance to engage in the work
- Feelings of powerlessness

Research supervisors prevent or mitigate vicarious trauma when they:

- Provide adequate information to team members so that they are aware of the work they will be doing
- Develop policies and procedures that support safety of research team members (i.e. maximum number of interviews per day)
- Provide regular debriefing and supportive supervision
- Include other work to allow for breaks from traumatic material
- Encourage team members to make time for self-care (walking, jogging, gardening).

*Adapted from: Coles, J., Astbury, J., Dartnall, E. & Limjerwala, S. (2014). "A qualitative exploration of researcher trauma and researchers' responses to investigating sexual violence." Violence Against Women, 20, 95-117.

Learn more:

Toward A Trauma- And Violence-Informed Research Ethics Module: Considerations And Recommendations
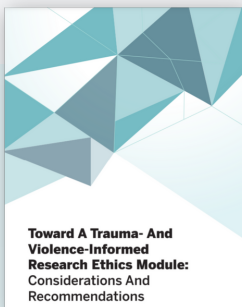
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