Creating a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization:

THE VICARIOUS TRAUMA TOOLKIT

Karen Irene Kalergis, MA
Product Coordinator
Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Project
It takes courage ...
Direct and Indirect Trauma

- Death
- Sexual Assault
- Serious Injury
- Work Exposure
- Loved One
What is Vicarious Trauma?

Vicarious trauma is the work-related exposure to the trauma experiences of others.
Mass Violence and Cumulative Exposure
• Stress
  • Acute
  • Chronic
• Traumatic stress

• Vicarious traumatization
• Secondary traumatic stress
• Compassion fatigue
• Burnout
What signs do you see?
Signs and Effects: Personal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Rapid pulse/breathing, headaches, impaired immune response, fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological</td>
<td>Feelings of powerlessness, numbness, anxiety, fearfulness, disillusionment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Irritability, sleep/appetite changes, isolate from friends/family, substance abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>Loss of purpose, questioning meaning of life, questioning goodness vs. evil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive</td>
<td>Cynicism, pessimism, hopelessness, preoccupation with clients, traumatic image</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational</td>
<td>Withdraw or become “clingy”, mistrustful, lack of interest in sex, lack of close friends</td>
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</tbody>
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- Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995
“After 20 years in law enforcement, I have seen the personal effects of the transition from well meaning rookie to cynical cop to fully jaded human being. I have seen in myself an increasing lack of compassion... I simply don't like or care about people as much any more. And I see the same thing in many others around me. Far too many public safety professionals are losing themselves to the profession they love.”

Law Enforcement
## Signs and Effects: Professional

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Decrease in quality/quantity of workload, low motivation, task avoidance or obsession with detail, working too hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale</td>
<td>Decrease in confidence, decrease in interest, negative attitude, apathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Detached/withdrawn from co-workers, poor communication, conflict, impatience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>Absent/tardiness, overwork, exhaustion, irresponsibility, poor follow-through</td>
</tr>
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- Adapted from J. Yassen in Figley, 1995
Lost Productivity
Decreased morale, cohesion, communication, collaboration and quality of services

Poor Organizational Health
Erosion of concentration, focus, decision making, motivation and performance

Staff Turnover
Time, resources needed to hire train drains remaining staff
Does where we work put us more at risk?
Personal:
• Trauma history
• Pre-existing psychological disorder
• Young age
• Isolation, inadequate support system
• Loss in last 12 months

Professional:
• Lack of quality supervision
• High percentage of trauma survivors in caseload
• Little experience
• Worker/organization mismatch
• Lack of professional support system
• Inadequate orientation and training for role

Bonach & Heckert, 2012; Slattery & Goodman, 2009; Bell, Kulkarni, et al, 2003; Cornille & Meyers, 1999
Theory from 35 years in sexual assault field …

Organizations that work with traumatized populations can become traumatized themselves.

- Vivian and Hormann, 2013
Who is at risk?

- Administrative staff
- Receptionists and dispatchers
- Communications and development staff
- Researchers and evaluators
- Judges, jurors
- Many others
“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

- Remen, 1996
A resource for victim services and first responders to become vicarious trauma-informed

THE VICARIOUS TRAUMA TOOLKIT
By the Field for The Field

- National Partners from your discipline
- National Survey: 8,140 participants
- Tools from your discipline
- Pilot-tested by your peers
VTT Compendium of Resources

- Policies, procedures, practices and programs (114)
- Research literature (281)
- Websites, podcasts and videos (102)
- New tools (16)
1. Recognizes the potential negative consequences of the work
2. Assumes the responsibility for proactively addressing the impact of vicarious trauma through policies, procedures, practices and programs.
Five Pillars of Healthy, Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organizations

1. Leadership and Mission
2. Management and Supervision
3. Employee Empowerment and Work Environment
4. Training and Professional Development
5. Staff Health and Wellness

Vicarious Trauma-Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG),
Created by the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Project, 2016
Based on Organizational Psychology and Relational Coordination Theories
A way to address identified needs

5 pillars of a VT-I organization

• Leadership and Mission
• Management and Supervision
• Employee Empowerment and Work Environment
• Training and Professional Development
• Staff Health and Wellness

IDVSA “VOICE” Recommendations

• Share power, walk the walk, communication, transparency, adequate compensation/benefits
• Supports staff, discuss stress, manage caseload, balance tasks
• Organizational climate fosters community, diversity, peer support
• Training – work skills, conflict, VT
• Facilitate wellness and coping
Blueprint for a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization
A Step-by-Step Guide

1. Accept the responsibility to pro-actively address the occupational challenge of vicarious trauma using the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit.
2. Build a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Workgroup
3. Assess current capacity using the VT-ORG and prepare findings
4. Determine priorities, develop an organizational action plan
5. Explore the VTT for resources to implement your plan.
Is addressing vicarious trauma a priority for your organization?
Step 1:

Accept the responsibility to pro-actively address the occupational challenge of vicarious trauma using the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit.
Organizations have an ethical mandate of a “duty to train” wherein workers are taught about the potential negative effects of the work and how to cope.

Munroe, J. F., in Compassion Fatigue, 1995
Reflection …

• Do you have decision-making authority on whether and how your organization addresses impact of this work on staff?
• Can you bring ideas to management on how it might address Vicarious Trauma?
• What would be the scope of the effort – the whole organization? Your program or department?
Blueprint Step 1:

**Tasks**

- Gather leaders
- Discuss “why” you should have an organizational response
- Evaluate the benefits of using the VTT as the organizational response
- Look at video and see what your peers are saying

**VTT Tools**

- Making the Business Case
- Talking points: Using the VTT to Address VT
Benefits of using the VTT

- Field driven
- Discipline specific
- Organizational approach
Theoretical Basis for a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization ... 

Rooted in research on what makes organizations healthy
Step 2:

Build a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Workgroup
Blueprint Step 2:

Tasks

• Give workgroup responsibility for organizational response
• Create workgroup that represents the organization
  • Suggestions for team members
  • Requirements for team members
• Convene workgroup and introduce them to VTT, their role

Tools

• Talking Points: Using the VTT to Address VT
• VT-ORG for Victim Services
• Guideline series
What does your agency do now to address vicarious trauma?
Step 3:

Assess current capacity using the VT-ORG and prepare findings
Introducing the Vicarious Trauma Organizational Readiness Guide

The VT-ORG can:
- Assess current capacity: strengths & gaps
- Prioritize needs
- Identify resources
- Help navigate the VTT
Blueprint Step 3

**TASKS**
- Understand evidence basis for 5 areas of organizational health
- Determine best way to conduct VT-ORG assessment in your agency
- Score survey responses
- Prepare findings to distribute to staff

**TOOLS**
- VT-ORG assessment for Victim Services
- Scoring Packet
- Sample Report of VT-ORG Findings
Five Pillars of Organizational Health

- Leadership and Mission
- Management and Supervision
- Employee Empowerment and Work Environment
- Training and Professional Development
- Staff Health and Wellness

Vicarious Trauma-Organizational Readiness Guide (VT-ORG), Created by the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit Project, 2016
Based on Organizational Psychology and Relational Coordination Theories
Likert Scale for Scoring

- 1 – Never
- 2 – Rarely
- 3 – Sometimes
- 4 – Often
- 5 – Always
- N/A – Not applicable or don’t know
Scoresheet Produces Average Scores
1=Never  2 = Rarely  3 = Sometimes  4 = Often  5 = Always

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<th>Leadership and Mission</th>
<th>Management and Supervision</th>
<th>Employee Empowerment and Work Environment</th>
<th>Training and Professional Development</th>
<th>Staff Health and Wellness</th>
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<tr>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.36</td>
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</table>
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION USING VT-ORG
Leadership and Mission
Leadership and Mission

• Leadership models, values and promotes open and respectful communication among staff.
• Leadership communicates clear and specific information on decision-making throughout the organization (e.g., resource allocation, scheduling, deadlines, implementation of polices and procedures).
• Leadership proactively addresses vicarious trauma in the organization’s long-term vision and strategy.
• Leadership models a healthy work/life balance.
Tools For Leadership and Mission
Items from the VTT Compendium

Resources from the Field
• Constructive Communication – the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Walk
the walk
AND
talk
the talk!

New Tools
• Making the Business Case

Website
www.shiftwellness.net
Materials for jurors and judges
Management and Supervision
Management and Supervision

- My shift supervisor is readily accessible to support staff members following a critical or acute incident.
- I meet individually with my supervisor.
- Meetings with my supervisor provide a forum for addressing exposure to trauma.
- Staff meetings are an opportunity to address topics related to vicarious trauma and stress management.
Tools for Management and Supervision

*Items from the VTT Compendium*

*New Tools*

- Supervision Guidelines for a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization
- Human Resource Guidelines for a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization
- Vicarious Trauma Plan Guide: Strategies to Address Work-Related Trauma Exposure for Children's Advocacy Centers and Multidisciplinary Teams
Employee Empowerment & Work Environment
Employee Empowerment and Work Environment

• My organization provides opportunities for all staff members to provide input into the development of programs, practices and policies.
• Disparaging comments and other demonstrations of disrespect are not tolerated.
• I experience a genuine sense of positive teamwork in my organization.
• When needed, my organization uses effective methods to address staff who are not able to contribute to a positive atmosphere or act as team players.
Tools for Employee Empowerment & Work Environment
Items from VTT Compendium

Resource from the Field
Employee Satisfaction Survey, NCAC

Research
Speaking Up and Stepping Back: Examining The Link Between Employee Voice and Job Neglect  (Travis, Gomez, & Mor Barak, 2011)
Training & Professional Development
Training and Professional Development Questions

• My organization provides training and education to all staff on work-related vicarious trauma and its impact on work performance.

• My organization provides training and education to all staff on strategies to address work-related stress and vicarious traumatization.

• My organization supports attendance at outside meetings and trainings.

• I am prepared to cover for co-workers who are absent.
Tools for Training and Professional Development

*Items from VTT Compendium*

*Resources from the Field*

- Beth Stamm PPT and Instructor Notes
- Trauma Exposure Response Training Handout

*New Tools*

Introduction to Vicarious Trauma for Victim Services
Staff Health and Wellness
Staff Health and Wellness Questions

• My organization offers services that support individual staff members, (e.g., employee assistance program, chaplain services, mental health providers).

• Differentiation between work and non-work hours is recognized and respected.

• My organization encourages wellness activities (e.g. fitness program, mindfulness/meditation, yoga, gym access).

• My organization’s policies and/or practices support family members of employees.
Tools for Staff Health and Wellness
Items from VTT Compendium

Resources from the Field
• Tips for First Responders Choosing Behavioral Health Services

New Tools
• Family Support Guidelines for a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization
Step 4:

Determine priorities and develop an organizational action plan
Blueprint Step 4

Tasks
• Become familiar with findings
• Identify current strengths and gaps
• Choose 3-5 priorities
• Create an action plan for a recommended timeline of 1 year

Tools
• Scoring Packet – Sample Report
## Blueprint Step 5

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<tr>
<td>• Learn how to use the search function on the VTT to search by discipline, topic or area of organizational health</td>
<td>• Filters on VTT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learn how to search for policies, research or websites</td>
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Addressing vicarious trauma in a victim services agency means having good eyes…knowing what your people are experiencing. Once you’re aware of that, you’re compelled to do something. It’s a no-brainer. It’s part of the job. I owe this to not just my agency or my department, but I also owe it to my field. That commitment comes from knowledge. Knowledge, coupled with caring and responsibility, becomes commitment.

William Petty,
Former Director Victim Services, Austin Police Department

https://vimeo.com/195987813/3fd253afd6
www.ovc.gov/vtt

THE VICARIOUS TRAUMA TOOLKIT
Need some help?

Contact OVC TTAC for TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ON THE VTT

TTAC@ovccttac.org
1-866-682-8822
Be joyous in your work and thank you!

Karen.Kalergis@gmail.com