Trauma is an umbrella term often used to describe extremely disturbing experiences

1. The event is often sudden or unexpected
2. Creates significant distress
3. Overwhelms coping capacity
4. Has the potential to alter the way one views the world
What constitutes a traumatic event is in the eye of the beholder.

**PRIMARY TRAUMATIC STRESS**

Direct exposure to an extreme or life-threatening event

How many primary traumatic events have you experienced in your career?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Events</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 or more</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=1,264
PHYSICAL RESPONSES OF TRAUMA
- Headache
- Muscle tension
- Increased heart rate
- Higher blood pressure
- Fatigue
- Exhaustion

COGNITIVE RESPONSES OF TRAUMA
- Shock, disbelief, and numbness
  - Especially for unexpected events
- Intrusive imagery of the event
- Rumination
  - Trying to make sense of it

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES OF TRAUMA
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Depression
- Sadness
- Guilt
BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES OF TRAUMA

- Decreased or excessive eating
- Hyper-vigilance
- Hyper-startle
- Alcohol / drug use
- Sleeping problems

SPIRITUAL RESPONSES OF TRAUMA

- Anger at God or spiritual equivalent
- Question world view
Nightmares
Fearful thoughts
Intrusive images
Suspicion
Rumination
All of these people spend a **significant** part of their work day **listening** to or **reading** about accounts of **victimization**

**SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS**

Professionals begin to experience trauma responses themselves due to their secondary exposure to human suffering

- Hyper-vigilance
- Intrusive thoughts
- Feeling detached and numb
- Sleeping difficulties
- Avoidant behaviors
- Questioning faith / spirituality
Those who work with offenders are called upon to bear witness to the crime.

– Judith Herman, 1992

WORKING IN THE COURT

- Animosity between parties
- People who are suffering
- Evidence
- Testimony
- Victim contacts
- Collateral interactions
- Dealing with the public

In the course of your day, how often are you exposed to traumatic material?

Always 28% 31%
Frequently 17% 15%
Often 10%
Occasionally Rarely

N=801
Indirect exposure to an extreme or life-threatening event

- Disturbing testimony
- Videos of victimization
- 9-1-1 recordings
- Suicide of defendant / litigant / victim
- Violent death
- Horrific accounts of abuse / neglect
- Exposure to detailed accounts of human suffering
- Dealing with death penalty cases

How many secondary traumatic events have you experienced in your career?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Events</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>4 or more</td>
<td>64%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6%</td>
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</table>

N=1,239
VICARIOUS
TRAUMA

Exposure to the trauma of someone else can cause people to vicariously experience a change in their own world view.

Occurs when secondary traumatic stress becomes global
  - Instead of just being angry or disappointment in the perpetrator, all of mankind is viewed with disdain and cynicism.

VICARIOUS TRAUMA RESPONSES

1. Increased cynicism (77%)
2. Less tolerant (71%)
3. Chronic suspicion of others (70%)
4. Feeling desensitized (70%)
5. Loss of empathy (61%)
6. Distorted world view (53%)
THE STARTING POINT

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”
-Naomi Rachel Reme

THE STARTING POINT

“Removing the judgments and inhuman expectations are precursors to healing.”
-Laura va Dernoot Lipsky

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

Reactions to trauma exposure are adaptive and protective
Conscious Awareness = Conscious Choice

Create a work culture that promotes healthy coping, awareness, and self-care practices
- Addressing job impact is paramount to sustaining the highest quality of professionalism
- Exercise
- Dance
- Meditate
- Journal
- Unplug
- Nap
- Help someone / volunteer
- Reengage in a favorite hobby
- Do social activities that rejuvenate
- Stretch out the kinks / Get a massage
Mindfulness is a method of mental training that increases awareness
- Disconnecting from autopilot
- Attention and focus on present moment experiences
- Observing physical and emotional reactions with non-judgmental curiosity

Being present can interrupt the negative consequences of trauma exposure
- When we are numb, it is more difficult to understand or see when we are doing harm
RESEARCH ON MINDFULNESS

- Reduces emotional reactions, exhaustion and burnout
- Improves memory
- Stimulates creativity
- Increases reaction time
- Prevents depression
- Improves physical effects of stress
- Increases Immunity
- Positively affects brain patterns

Play Tetris for 10 minutes within 4 hours of an event with unpleasant graphic images.
Play Tetris for 10 minutes within 4 hours of an event with unpleasant graphic images. Visual/spatial tasks compete with visual images for resources in the brain. Interferes with memory consolidation that produces involuntary flashbacks but not with voluntary memory of the event.

**HAPPINESS**

Significant improvements in optimism/life satisfaction by engaging in one of these activities every day for 3 weeks:
- Write down 3 things for which you are grateful
- Meditate for 3-minutes
- Describe in a journal a meaningful experience of the day
- Perform a random act of kindness
Happiness
Research suggests the brain can rewire, creating alternate pathways as new habits develop.

Transforming Stress

Redefining Stress
Stress is what arises when something we care about is at stake.
- Includes thoughts, emotions, and physical reactions.

(Kelly McGonigal, 2015 pp. xxi & xxi)
Stress and meaning are inextricably linked

- We don’t stress over things we don’t care about
- We can’t create a meaningful life without experiencing some stress

(Kelly McGonigal, 2015 pp. xxi & xxi)

- Many people in high stress professions instinctively shut down the parts of themselves that respond to pain and suffering
- To protect themselves, they distance and desensitize

Becoming desensitized and emotionally numb can, paradoxically, increase burnout in professionals
- Attempts to “not care” as a strategy to lower stress will not reduce the challenges inherent in the work...
  ...it just removes the meaning
Taking the time to see the value and purpose of your work can improve stress without reducing stress.

How many meaningful experiences have you witnessed in your career?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>4 or more</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>count</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

N=232

An unexpected consequence of focusing on trauma exposure...

...many employees also started reporting positive aspects of their experiences.
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