Do Sexual Health Practitioners Experience Vicarious Trauma?

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Vicarious trauma.

‘Vicarious Trauma is a change in the psychological state of a person as a result of regularly witnessing or hearing about the traumatic experiences of others.’

- Feeling emotionally numb
- Increased irritability/anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- Suffering work-related nightmares
- Feelings of despair and hopelessness
- A more negative view of the world
- Increased illness and fatigue

Vicarious trauma.

- Known to affect aid workers, therapists, emergency services.
- Cumulative effect over time.
- Paucity of evidence for Sexual Health practitioners.
Aim
➢ Is VT something that affects sexual health practitioners?
➢ What current coping strategies do practitioners employ?

Method
➢ Survey distributed via BASHH and SSHA newsletters.
➢ 10 Questions.
➢ VT definition given.
Results

- 121 responses.

![Bar chart showing the distribution of responses.]

- Nurse: 60
- Doctor: 24
- Health adviser: 24
- Health care assistant: 6
- Other: 7
I feel that some or all of the symptoms of Vicarious Trauma apply to me:
In the last 12 months I have come into work feeling physically or mentally unwell:
I sometimes struggle with the emotional impact of my work:
I enjoy coming to work and feel it is a supportive environment
As part of your role, do you receive regular clinical supervision?

- Yes: 50%
- No: 47%
- Not sure: 3%
Coping Strategies

- Alternative Therapies: 8
- None: 9
- Counselling: 14
- Medication: 16
- Faith: 19
- Other: 29
- Drugs & Alcohol: 32
- Exercise: 68
- Humour: 75
- Friends: 84
Other coping strategies

- Support from colleagues
- Support from family
- Mindfulness
- Yoga
- Nature/Countryside

‘I try to keep busy all the time so I don’t have to think about it’
Learning points

➢ Vicarious Trauma may affect sexual health practitioners.
➢ More research needed using validated tools, possible comparisons.
➢ Develop formal supportive networks within Sexual Health
➢ Develop systems for recognising and supporting those most at risk.
➢ Encourage a culture of help-seeking.
With thanks to:

Everyone who completed the survey!