



Self Care and Secondary Trauma

Change Direction Summit County- Rev. Sandy Selby, D. Min., MBA

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Topics

- Dynamics of compassion fatigue, including secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization, and burnout
- Occupation-specific stressors
- Resilience

What should we call it?

- Compassion fatigue?
- Secondary trauma?
- Vicarious traumatization?
- Secondary traumatic stress?
- Burnout?

Lack of definitional clarity in the field

“Compassion fatigue is...the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” (Figley, 1995)

Compassion Fatigue

Content-related:

- Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)
- Vicarious Traumatization (VT)

Context-related:

- Burnout



Drivers of Trauma Response

Regehr and Bober, 2005

Event Factors:

- Degree of exposure
- Identification w/situation

Social Environment:

- Friends/family
- Organization
- Public

Individual:

- Coping ability
- Trauma history
- Sense of control
- Relational capacity

Trauma Response:

- Intrusion symptoms
- Avoidance
- Arousal
- Long-term problems

Demographic Factors

Which of these individuals is more at risk for compassion fatigue?



Impact of Trauma: Primary or Secondary

- Intrusive symptoms: flashbacks, nightmares
- Constriction, numbing, memory loss, dissociation
- Emotional dysregulation: “acting out,” externalized anger and aggression
- Disruptions in psychological needs: safety, trust, attachment, intimacy, esteem
- Disrupted systems of meaning: cynicism, hopelessness, intense grief

Secondary Traumatic Stress

- **Arousal** (*Related to perceived threat*) - fear/anxiety, sleep problems, irritability, hyper vigilance, poor concentration, somatization, intrusive thoughts, difficulty maintaining boundary between work and life
- **Avoidance** (*Related to chronic fatigue*) - isolation, procrastination, dread, self-medicating, rumination, depression, constriction/numbing

Vicarious Traumatization

- Process through which caregiver's inner experience is transformed. A cognitive phenomenon with affective manifestations
- Disrupts basic sense of identity, worldview, and spirituality
- Disrupts beliefs about safety, control, predictability, and attachment
- Has to do with meaning and adaptation: "The greatest damage of VT is spiritual damage" (Saakvitne, 2002).

“I cannot believe in a God who would allow these things [sexual abuse] to be done to innocent children. I no longer believe that the world is safe. I can't wait to retire.”

“We are marked by what we see.”

—*Social Workers*, Selby (2014)

Burnout

- Related to **context**, not **content**, of work: relational and physical environment, workplace demands
- Comes from perception that something is **lacking** in the workplace: perceived demands outweigh perceived resources
- Telltale signs: **emotional exhaustion**, cynicism, conflict, reduced sense of self-efficacy

Clergy as Counselors

Hendron et al (2011)

- #1 point of contact for 42% of those who seek help
- Resource for making sense of traumatic experience
- Called upon respond to wide range of incidents and stories
- Confidentiality norms can be isolating
- Lots of research on clergy and burnout, but very little on secondary traumatization

Clergy and Trauma

Holaday et al (2001)

- Traumatic stress and burnout similar to mental health professionals
- 57% have moderate to high emotional exhaustion and secondary trauma
- Clergy tend to resist discussing negative or distressing experiences in order to “keep up appearances”
- “Walking on water syndrome” (failure to recognize one’s vulnerability)

Clergy Burnout: Context

Barnard & Curry (2011)

- High expectations but low appreciation from congregants
- On call 24/7
- Low pay
- Disillusionment with content of work
- Sense of the work never being done

Burnout = high emotional exhaustion and low satisfaction

Safety Forces: Organizational Stressors

Regehr and Bober, 2005

- Hierarchical chain of command
- Highest stress among management personnel caught in “the sandwich”
- Burnout tends to increase with length of service

Safety Forces: Occupational Stressors

Regehr and Bober, 2005

- Shift work
- Unpredictability of crisis work
- Culture says “suck it up” - emotional numbing
- Intensity of work partner relationships
- Outsiders “don’t get it”
- Danger as family stressor - “are you coming home tonight?”

Causes of Compassion Fatigue

- Exposure to primary and secondary trauma
- Bearing witness to suffering
- Empathy
- Isolation/alienation
- Moral dilemmas
- Issues of meaning
- Workplace context: perceived imbalance of resources and demands



Resilience

The ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and prolonged adversity, strengthened and more resourceful

Cultivating Resilience

- Awareness
- Agency and self-regulation
- Meaning and purpose
- Connections and support
- Self-care and revitalization



Awareness

- Energizers and drainers
- “Triggers” and awareness of perceived threats
- How do you know that you are “in trouble?”

Agency

Internal vs. external locus of control

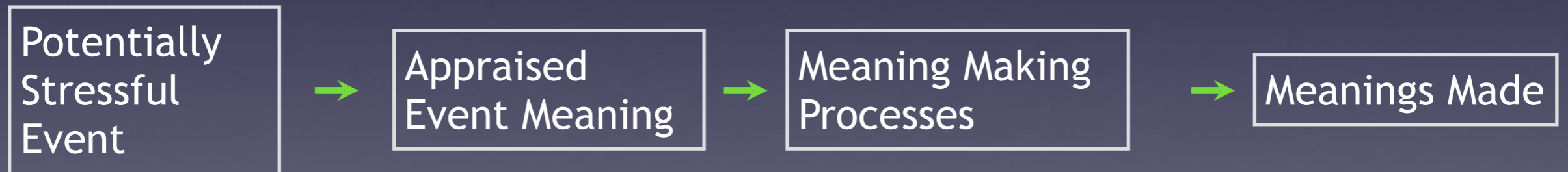
“We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that **everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.**

—Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

Meaning-Making Model

Global Meaning

Situational Meaning



Crystal Park (2010)

Finding Meaning in Our Work

- *Sense of vocation* - doing something you were “meant to do”
- *Compassionate presence* in witness-bearing
- *Community*: shared experience, team efficacy, solidarity
- *Vicarious Post-Traumatic Growth*
- *Spirituality*: transcendence, presence, connection, hope
- Recognizing *beauty* around you
- *Involvement* around systemic societal issues

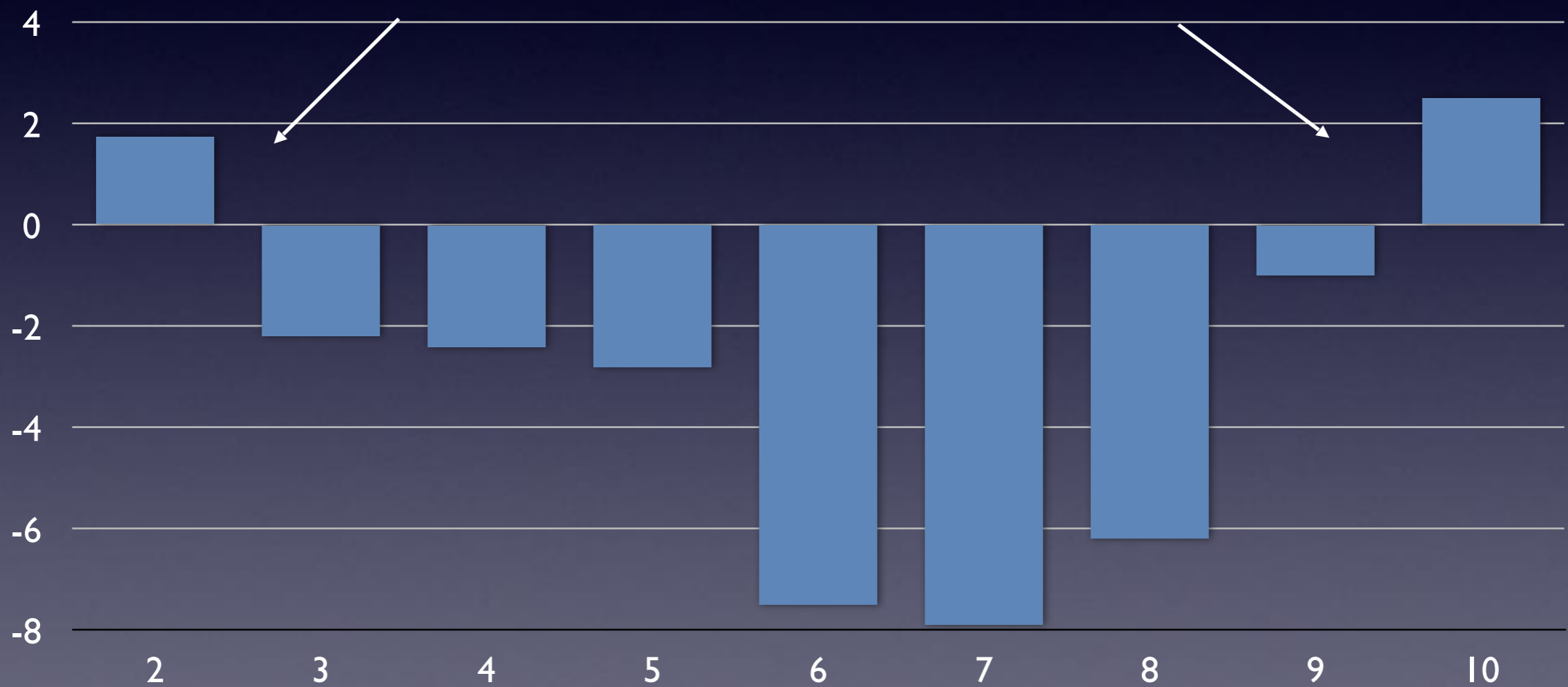
Resilience and Connection

- Importance of transcendent values (“a power greater than ourselves”), that may or may not be “religious” in nature
- Importance of supportive, sustaining community - professional and personal network
- Importance of practices that reinforce our values
- Importance of connections with those we serve

Compassion Fatigue by Religiosity

Selby (2014)

“Healthiest” individuals are those who are the **most** religious or the **least** religious



Frequency of faith community attendance + frequency of prayer/meditation

Self-Care and Revitalization

- Wellness
- Aerobic activity
- Proactive health care
- Diet
- Sleep
- Financial planning
- Spiritual practice/mindfulness
- Beauty



Spirituality is nurtured
by ***beauty***, which
fosters awareness and
connection in the
moment



Self-Compassion

- *Self-kindness* and self-understanding during times of disappointment
- Feeling *connected to others*, not isolated, during times of pain
- Holding worries in *mindful awareness* without ruminating

Clergy Burnout and Self-Compassion

Barnard, 2011

- Self-compassion can reduce impact of factors that contribute to burnout
- Clergy tend to have high desire to please others
 - Prone to guilt and shame
 - Difficulty differentiating self from role
- Clergy higher in self-compassion have higher satisfaction and lower emotional exhaustion



Organizational Perspectives

Organizational Supports

- Trauma-informed organization with compassion capability
- Ongoing training
- Peer support - informal and formal
- Time and space for “down time”
- Opportunity to defuse and debrief experience
- Team efficacy

Summary

Compassion Fatigue and Individuals

- Crisis workers universally have compassion fatigue
- Bearing witness to suffering and growth can be both a source of stress and of meaning and hope
- Enhancing personal resilience and agency is essential
- Cultivate spirituality and connection, pay attention to beauty

Selected Books

- Laurie Pearlman and Karen Saakvitne, *Trauma and the Therapist* (1995) - about vicarious traumatization in mental health counselors
- Cheryl Regehr and Ted Bober, *In the Line of Fire: Trauma in the Emergency Services* (2005)
- Bessel Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score* (2014) - how trauma affects us, and what to do about it
- Robert Wicks, *Bounce: Living the Resilient Life* (2007) - strategies for cultivating resilience

Selected Studies

- Barnard and Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions,” *Pastoral Psychology* (2012) 61:149-163
- Holaday et al, “Secondary stress, burnout and the clergy,” *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling* (2001) 4(1), 53-72.
- Hendron et al, “The Unseen Cost: A Discussion of the Secondary Traumatization Experience of the Clergy,” *Pastoral Psychology* (2012) 61:221-231

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