

SHAPING THE FUTURE

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

T-09

Compassion Fatigue and Secondary Trauma Among Clinicians Treating Sex Offenders in Correctional Settings

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Secondary and compassion fatigue have been defined as “the natural and consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about the traumatizing event experienced by a significant other – the stress results from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.”

The purpose of this presentation is to evaluate the effects of treating sexual offenders and the impact of vicarious trauma on clinicians providing sexual abuse treatment. Upon review of the literature of several studies and their respective methodologies, suggests the need for caution when interpreting the findings.

There seems to be a growing number of studies regarding the effects on clinicians who treat sexual offenders in the community and in prison settings and much of what is reported is descriptive data. Numerous studies have found that clinicians who treat sexual offenders have been found to experience secondary trauma and compassion fatigue. These effects include, but are not limited to: disrupted cognitive schemas, intrusive imagery, avoidance, decreased sense of personal safety, sexual dysfunction or decreased sexual activity, reduction in trust, damaged relationships, self-esteem issues, depression and increased substance use.

In all, the empirically-validated research provides a necessary framework for the understanding and developing of necessary coping strategies in reducing secondary trauma in clinicians that are treating sexual offenders in correctional programs. Findings; however, should be viewed as preliminary as there is significant work to be done in the area of clinical secondary trauma. Clinical experiences, risk, prison environment, correctional support, supervision and training all serve as impactful variables to how one may experience secondary trauma or compassion fatigue.

The effects of secondary trauma have been far-reaching. There are published ethical concerns, in that, such traumatic experiences may interfere with a clinician’s ability to follow best practices, develop appropriate treatment plans and be objective in making risk and treatment recommendations.

Relevance to those attending: Whether you are a provider in a correctional setting, private practice, hospital, or treatment facility; the clinical experiences that come from treating

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sexual offenders may exploit vulnerabilities, resulting from empathic engagement and exposure to sexually traumatic events and materials. Vicarious trauma is a process that requires continual self-assessment and monitoring, prevention and intervention.

Presentation Outline:

- I. Intrapersonal Consequences
 - a. Anxiety
 - b. Hypervigilance
 - c. Intrusive Thoughts
 - d. Nightmares
 - e. Emotional Exhaustion
 - f. Decreased Self-Actualization
- II. Interpersonal Consequences
 - a. Damaged Intimate Relationships
 - b. Decline in Personal Sexual Interests/Activity
 - c. Personal Safety and Trust
 - d. Negative Emotional Responses
- III. Coping
 - a. Development of Emotion-Oriented Coping Patterns
 - i. Denial and Avoidance
 - ii. Personal Ineffectiveness
 - iii. Lack of Control
 - b. Mitigating the Negative Consequences
 - i. Social Support
 - ii. Training
 - iii. Supervision
 - iv. Psychological Debriefing

Learning Goals:

- Participants will be able to Identify and Explain the therapeutic consequences of treating incarcerated sex offenders
- Participants will be able to Identify and Explain the clinical coping strategies in conjunction with the consequences of the treatment of incarcerated sex offenders
- Participants will be able to Identify and Explain the adverse outcomes of secondary trauma/compassion fatigue of treating incarcerated sex offenders

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Dr. Victor Kersey was appointed as the Director of Institutional Programming for the Utah Department of Corrections in May of 2016 where he supervises over 200 programming staff in Utah's two state prisons and 21 county jails. Victor earned his Ph.D. from Capella University in 2006. Victor began his career after being selected for a predoctoral internship with the Illinois Department of Corrections in 2003 where he treated maximum security male and female inmates who were profoundly mentally ill. Upon completion of his training, he accepted a position as a psychologist with the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice where he treated juvenile sexual offenders, and in 2006 he became the Clinical Director. In 2013 he received a promotion to serve as the Psychologist Administrator at Dixon Correctional Facility until his 2014 appointment as the Assistant Superintendent of Programs and Psychologist Administrator with the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. Victor has also served in the United States Navy for 28 years. Victor is a member of the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers, American Correctional Association, Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma, Correctional Education Association and the Utah Sex Offender Task Force.

Greg Hendrix LCSW- Has worked for the Utah State Prison for 18 years and is a Programming Deputy Warden. He started his correctional career as a therapist in the Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) unit for three years. He transferred to the male substance abuse treatment program (Con-Quest) as a therapist. In 2005 he was promoted the Director of the female substance abuse treatment program (Excell). In 2012 he was transferred to supervise and direct the Con-Quest Program (male residential substance abuse treatment). In February 2015 he was promoted to Deputy Warden in the Institutional Programming Division where he manages the treatment programs for both male and female offenders (SOTP/SATP).

He received his M.S.W. from Brigham Young University in 1997. He has been in the substance abuse treatment field since 1993. His career has taken him to the states of Idaho and Utah. He specializes in the treatment of all addictive behaviors, marital therapy, and mood disorders. He has been married 25 years and has four children and one granddaughter he adores.