

An Exploration of Vicarious Posttraumatic Growth in Sex Offender Treatment Providers

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This study examines the experiences of five clinicians who are currently practicing as sex offender treatment providers (SOTP) from Washington state. An essential component of the phenomenological approach to qualitative research is to represent the subjective experiences and perspectives of the study participants. As such, the semi-structured interview format and use of open-ended questioning served the purpose of capturing the essence of the participants' experience from their perspective. The data were then coded and analyzed to identify the emerging patterns and themes within the participants' experiences. The research resulted in four major themes: 1) Negative Personal and Professional Aspects of SOTP work, 2) Holistic Approach to Treatment Achieved through Clinician Empathy and Client Accountability, 3) Adaptive Coping Skills, and 4) Positive Personal and Professional Aspects of SOTP Work. These emerging themes serve as a framework for discussion and further exploration regarding the experience of SOTPs and the roles of vicarious trauma, empathy, and vicarious posttraumatic growth.

This research revealed that SOTPs are a population of clinicians regularly exposed to the graphic details of their clients' sexual offenses and are thus susceptible to experiencing vicarious trauma. The emerging themes from this research, however, revealed that their experience also transcends the effects of vicarious trauma and is representative of individuals who have endured vicarious posttraumatic growth as a result of their meaning-making processes.

Victoria Schroder is a recent graduate from Northwest University where she obtained her doctorate in counseling psychology. Currently she practices as a clinician at Pacific Behavioral Healthcare, an outpatient treatment clinic in Bellevue, WA specializing in the integration of sexuality, intimacy, and mental health. Victoria works primarily with individuals struggling with sexual compulsivity, intimate partner betrayal, and sexual intimacy. Additionally, Victoria works with individuals who have committed sexual offenses. She is currently pursuing professional certifications as a Sex Offender Treatment Provider and Sex Therapist. She utilizes a systems-based, trauma and attachment informed approach to sexual health and wellness supported by the latest empirical research in sexual health, trauma, and relationships.