Good Practice Briefing

Self-Care and Professional Resilience

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ASCENT – Support services to organisations

Ascent is a partnership within the London Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Consortium, delivering a range of services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, under six themes, funded by London Councils.

ASCENT – Support services to organisations, is delivered by a partnership led by the Women's Resource Centre (WRC) and comprised of five further organisations: AVA, IMKAAN, RESPECT, Rights of Women, and Women and Girls Network.

This second tier support project aims to address the long term sustainability needs of organisations providing services to those affected by sexual and domestic violence on a pan-London basis. The project seeks to improve the quality of such services across London by providing a range of training and support, including:

- Accredited training
- Expert-led training
- Sustainability training
- Borough surgeries
- BME network
- One-to-one support
- Policy consultations
- Newsletter
- Good practice briefings

Good practice briefings

The purpose of the good practice briefings is to provide organisations supporting those affected by domestic and sexual violence with information to help them become more sustainable and contribute with making their work more effective.

For more information, please see:
www.thelondonvawgconsortium.org.uk

Women and Girls Network

Women and Girls Network (WGN) is a free, women-only service that supports women in London who have experienced violence, or are at risk of violence.

We offer counselling, advocacy and advice for women and girls who have experienced gendered violence, including sexual and domestic violence.

Our overall aim is to promote, preserve and restore the mental health and well-being of women and girls, to empower them to make a total and sustainable recovery from their experiences of violence.

Ascent services

Through the Ascent partnership, we offer free counselling for women in London who have experience of any form of gendered violence. To refer, call 020 7610 4678 or email ascentcounselling@wgn.org.uk. Check our website, www.wgn.org.uk, for information on which boroughs referrals are currently open for

Follow us on social media

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1. Introduction

The writing and publishing of this briefing paper is timely and poignant. At WGN we are acutely aware that as professionals working within the fields of gendered violence and wider in health and social care we are facing extraordinary challenges. Years of austerity have stretched the fabric of our society, where those most vulnerable are most negatively impacted without access to the effective resources and interventions required to recover from the effects of VAWG on their lives. As an organisation this means that we are dealing with a higher volume and complexity of cases without any additional resource allocation. The result of this for those on the front-line is that professionals are working in conditions that test their own internal resources. Very little statistical evidence exists to show the rates of burnout and vicarious trauma for those working in the gendered violence sector or the short/long-term impacts. However, according to the Health and Safety Executive (2018) the two industries with higher than average rates of stress, depression and anxiety is in education and health and social care fields, under which those working in the VAWG sector would sit.

As an organisation we are humbled and privileged to witness the dedication, resilience and compassion that our staff at WGN bring within these challenging times. For many years we have understood the necessity to support those who are supporting others. We have recognised the strength and resilience in the women and girls we serve and the workers who empower their recovery. It has been a continuous question for us as to how we maintain and develop resilience on both sides of this exchange. The need and practice of professional resilience is covered in all our wider trainings and we consider it a key practice for any professional working in the VAWG sector, specifically in these unprecedented times, in order to reduce the potential for developing vicarious trauma also known as compassion fatigue and burnout. We consider it our duty of care to both those accessing support services and those providing them, to keep them well in the long run. Our core value of 'total and sustainable recovery' would be defunct if we were unable to understand and balance the needs of both, in this exchange. We are acutely aware however that our ideal working conditions are often rarely dictated by us but are at the directive of funders and a wider political agenda that is more often driven based on cost and efficiency, rather than quality and compassion. It is within this context we develop our professional resilience through resourcing and empowering ourselves with the knowledge and skills to maintain self-care as a necessity and an act of rebellion, as in the words of Audre Lorde "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare".

This briefing paper is based on our training programme for professionals on the importance of self-care and professional resilience. The paper aims to offer both a definition and exploration of self-care, professional resilience, vicarious trauma as well as offering practice strategies to mitigate and reduce the potential of vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout.

Section 1: Self-Care and Professional Resilience
The following section offers practitioners a deeper understanding of the concepts of self-care and professional resilience.

1.1. **Self-care – Definition**
Self-care refers to activities and practices that we can engage in on a regular basis to reduce stress, maintain and enhance our short/long-term health and well-being. Self-care is necessary for your effectiveness and success in honouring your professional and personal commitments. It describes the practices or rituals we use to:
- Reduce stress
- Cope with the challenges of work
- Enhance subjective sense of well-being
- Replenish energy levels

1.1.i. The importance of Self-care
In this section we will look further into the importance of self-care. It is now widely accepted that both self-care is a generative process, in that if these practices are developed when 'the going is good' they can support, bolster and mitigate the impacts of stress and challenge when we are stretched in our working roles and life in general.

> *"In light of recent and significant research indicating that social workers engaged in direct practice are likely to develop symptoms of secondary traumatic stress, it is imperative that the social work profession devotes greater attention to and creates greater awareness of these issues."[1]*

Often those attracted to work in the health and social care sector self-select into caring roles, motivated by wanting to help others. However, the reality of the stress, competing demands and limited resources, can often be demotivating and create disillusionment. The necessary skills required to future proof one-self from developing vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout are rarely understood at the commencement of a professional

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[1] Professional Self-Care and Social Work, policy statement approved by the NASW Delegate Assembly, 2008

career path. Rarely are new workers offered in depth advice on how to meet their client's needs without neglecting their own.

Diagram 1: The Importance of Self-care

The importance of Self-Care

Support work → Self-Sacrifice Poor Self-Care → Fatigue Burnout Dissatisfaction

Support work → Good Self-care → Satisfaction Resilience
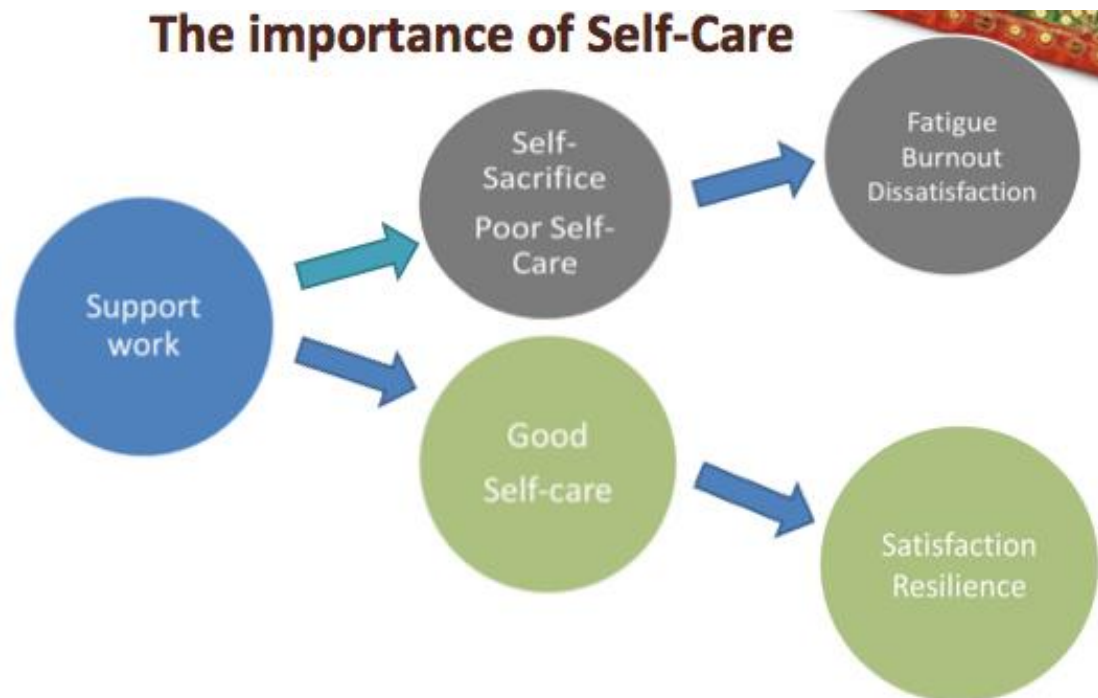
The above diagram offers us two differing trajectories for an individual entering into a support work career. In the upper trajectory we see workers who enter into the work often with a 'Lifesaver/Rescuer' mind-set without having developed skills to support their own well-being, often creating an imbalance of giving to others which outweighs giving/nurturing themselves.
In the second trajectory we see a support worker who is self-aware, observing and tuning into their own needs and well-being, in order to offer support to others from a more robust and resilient body and mind.
The difference between the two trajectories is how reactive or proactive you are in addressing the stresses of your work and ability to achieve work-life balance.

It is important for workers to understand that by overlooking the importance of self-care it can lead to:-

- Poor Quality of Life
- Compassion fatigue and/or reduced ability to be empathic
- Burnout and dissatisfaction
- Vicarious Trauma

- Dropping out of their chosen profession

It would be fair to say that these negative unintended outcomes would be far from what any worker entering into the profession would want to be experiencing or have envisioned as an aspiration when entering into a career in their chosen field.

1.1.ii. Aims of Self-Care

There is often a myth that self-care is an activity that we all do naturally and is an 'easy' behaviour'. The reality is that self-care is rarely taught and requires a great deal of effort, self-awareness and insight into one's varying needs in the roles we are required in our lives. Self-care is rarely just about 'indulgences' into things that make us feel 'good' (bubble baths and chocolate!) Fundamentally, it is also about the behaviours that cultivate a safe container that holds us in times of uncertainty, it is about routines, rhythms, discipline, and in the reverse about knowing when to let these go and to honour a duvet day because your mind and spirit needs to be cocooned in safety away from the world.

Self-care is not simply about limiting or addressing professional stressors. It is also about **enhancing your overall well-being**

Diagram 2. Aims of Self-Care
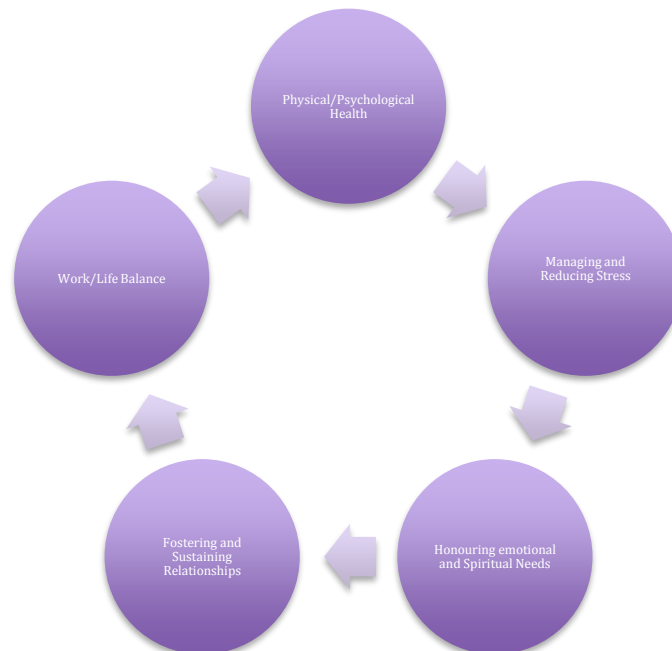
There are common aims to almost all self-care efforts:
- Taking care of physical and psychological health
- Managing and reducing stress

- Honouring emotional and spiritual needs
- Fostering and sustaining relationships
- Achieving an equilibrium across one's personal, school, and work lives

It is important to understand the holistic aspect of self-care in all the above domains. Neglecting one domain can reduce the robustness in that area and this is potentially where a vulnerability can manifest when we are stretched, for example if we are neglecting our physical health, by eating unhealthily, if we are then exposed to chronic long-term stress at work, our physical health can be compromised despite us having good support networks and a spiritual framework that supports us. It is therefore recommended that when assessing and developing our own self-care routines we ensure that each domain is equally and powerfully developed for over-all well-being.

1.2. Professional resilience

We can understand the relationship between self-care and resilience to be symbiotic. Self-care enables us to be resilient and thrive in situations of high demand and pressure. As with self-care, resilience is not a static, one off activity! Often the choices we make in responding to difficult situations, such as our attitude and our willingness to take action, demonstrates resilience. In a professional context it is the role and duty of all those in an organisation to support one another's' resilience across the organisation. In exploring professional resilience, it is also essential to understand what makes an individual resilient.

1.2.i. Professional Resilience - Definition

The most recognised definition of resilience is the 'The ability to bounce back after an adversity'. This implies qualities such as strength flexibility and adaptability are essential to support that 'bouncing back. Within this definition there has been an exploration of looking to understand why some people are able to bounce back quicker and/or stronger than others who may experience the same circumstances.

There are a number of approaches to understand individual resilience. These are separated by whether they focus on internal attributes of the person, the social environment or a combination of the two.

- Personality/Individual Characteristics – within this approach, resilience is seen as an innate ability that forms part of the personality. Including: perseverance, emotional management and awareness, optimism, perspective, sense of humour, self-efficacy; control over ones life (perception) and the ability to problem solve.

- Environment – resilience is dependent on the experiences that a person has with their environment. Therefore external factors (social support they receive; access to resources) will influence how resilient a person is as opposed to their personality.
- Person-environment – resilience is a product of a person's personality in combination with environmental influences such as family, peers and social environment. [2]

More recent developments and understanding of resilience has expanded our understanding of resilience beyond, 'the bouncing back' and personality attributes focused definition.

"Resilience is a dynamic process or outcome that is the result of interaction over time between a person and the environment … Individual characteristics such as self-efficacy, confidence and coping strategies are important in overcoming challenging situations or recurring setbacks … Difficulties are not simply managed, but individuals are able to bounce back quickly and efficiently, persevere and thrive … Successful adaptation occurs despite obstacles and personal wellbeing is maintained … Reciprocal, mutually supportive personal, professional and peer relationships are important in this process.[3]

This develops the concept of resilience as:
- a process rather than an end state
- about thriving not just surviving
- involving supportive relationships/resources and environment
- about adaptive, flexible responses rather than a heroic feat.

Applying this definition to the gendered violence sector, professional resilience can be defined as the capacity to maintain a healthy, flexible and responsive state. Adapting to the ever-changing demands within the environment, through accessing both internal/external resources and relationships that support and maintain well-being.

Resilience is not just about bouncing back after a challenge, trauma and tragedy but about personal growth after the experience. It involves developing behaviours, thoughts and actions; identifying and accessing appropriate resources we need to recover from any challenges and difficulties we may

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[2] Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2011) *Developing Resilience: An Evidence Based Guide for Practitioners*
[3] Beltman et al (2011) *Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience.* Educational Research Review, 6(3) pp. 185-207

face and to then applying any new learning from that experience/event towards our personal and professional growth and development.

1.2.ii. Factors that support professional resilience
An evidence based review undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Professional Development on developing resilience concluded that:-

- Individual, social and institutional factors all play a role in protecting effects of adversity and supporting a healthy adaptation to the challenges faced.
- Organisations need to consider their available resources such as human and physical to sustain adaptability and to change behaviours that support the development of resilience.
- It can be useful to consider professional resilience in terms of occupational health and stress management interventions.
- Developing coping skills and buffers to adverse events as well as building social networks and support into the intervention is a critical success factor.[4]

1.3 Self-Compassion

The concept of self-compassion is included in this section as an important principle to develop alongside, self-care and resilience.

"Compassion is that which makes the heart of the good move at the pain of others. It crushes and destroys the pain of others; thus, it is called compassion. It is called compassion because it shelters and embraces the distressed". - The Buddha

Having compassion for oneself is really no different than having compassion for others .To have compassion for others you must *notice* that they are suffering. Compassion involves feeling moved by others' suffering so that your heart *responds* to their pain (to "suffer with"). When this occurs you feel warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they *fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them.* Finally, when you feel compassion for another (and not as seen in pity) it means that you realize that suffering, failure, and imperfection *is part of the shared human experience*

The ability to be self-compassionate as a worker in the field of gendered violence means acting the same way towards yourself when you are having a

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[4] Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (2011) *Developing Resilience: An Evidence Based Guide for Practitioners*

difficult time, fail, or notice something you don't like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain, you stop to tell yourself "this is really difficult right now," how can I care for myself in this moment? Perhaps most importantly, having compassion for yourself means that you honor and accept your humanness. The more you open your heart to this reality instead of constantly fighting against it, the more you will be able to feel compassion for yourself and all your fellow humans.

Section 2: Vicarious Trauma, Compassion Fatigue and Burnout
In this section we offer a deeper understanding of vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and trauma so as to increase practitioners knowledge and ability to identify signs and risk factors. Strategies to mitigate the risks are offered in section 3.

2.1. Vicarious Trauma – Definition
Vicarious trauma also known as secondary trauma, refers to the 'indirect trauma' that can occur when we are exposed to difficult or disturbing images and stories second hand. The term was coined by Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) to describe the profound shift in worldview that occurs in helping professionals when they work with individuals who have experienced trauma. They describe it as:-

"the cumulative effect upon trauma therapists working with survivors of traumatic life events… It is a process through which the therapists inner experience is negatively transformed through empathetic engagement with clients trauma material"[5]

It is a process within which helping professionals notice that their own beliefs about the world are altered and damaged by being repeatedly exposed to traumatic material. In the context of the VAWG sector it can manifest as workers abilities to believe that any relationship can be healthy or that children being approached by anyone does not have a more sinister motive.

2.1.i. Compassion Fatigue - Definition
A metaphor that is often used to describe Compassion fatigue is a saturated sponge that is no longer able to absorb more liquid. If we replace the sponge with the compassionate carer, we envision a carer who is no longer able to absorb any more, due having given so much empathy and care. It refers to the emotional and physical erosion that takes place when we are unable to

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[5] Pearlman, L A., and Saakvitne, KW. (1995). *Trauma and the Therapist: Countertransference and Vicarious Traumatization in Psychotherapy with Incest Survivors. P.31*

refuel and regenerate within that care and compassion, that the saturation point now results in an inability to be compassionate as the carers own cup is both empty from giving and full from holding a compassionate space for others.

2.1.ii. Burnout

Is a term that has been used to describe the physical and emotional exhaustion that workers may experience. In 2019, The World Health Organisation included burnout as an occupational phenomenon. Its defines burnout as

" A syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not successfully been managed. It is characterised by three dimensions:

- *feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;*
- *increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and*
- *reduced professional efficacy.*

Burn-out refers specifically to phenomena in the occupational context and should not be applied to describe experiences in other areas of life."[6]

2.2. Understanding Compassion Fatigue, Burn Out and Vicarious Trauma

Vicarious Trauma is related to concepts such as emotional exhaustion, burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary post-traumatic stress disorder. Often the terms are used inter-changeably. It is useful to understand the nuanced differences as high-lighted within the definitions as well as develop a deeper insight as to the causational factors and vulnerabilities as discussed below.

2.2.i Why does it happen?

Empathic engagement is at the core of work with survivors of violence, therefore its inevitable that this will have a pervasive effect on the practitioner's identity. The constant movement into clients' worlds means that you retreat back into your own world with an essence of their trauma and distress. Over time, this has an accumulative impact and manifests in the practitioner in both discreet and obvious ways. Vicarious Traumatisation symptoms resemble that of PTSD such as hyper arousal and intrusive symptoms but also encompass changes in practitioner's frame of reference in terms of identity, sense of safety, ability to trust, self-esteem, intimacy and

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[6] World Health Organisation (2019)
https://www.who.int/mental_health/evidence/burn-out/en/

sense of control. The following tables provide a list of the symptoms that can be experienced by an individual who has secondary traumatic stress it is essential we do not underestimate the negative impact of vicarious trauma and treat it with the care and respect we offer to those with PTSD.

Table 1: Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress on Personal Functioning

Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioural	Spiritual	Interpersonal	Physical
Confusion	Powerlessness	Clingy	Loss of purpose	Withdrawn	Shock
Diminished concentration	Emotional rollercoaster	Self-harm behaviour	Questioning the meaning of life	Decreased interest in intimacy or sex	Sweating
Spaciness	Guilt	Irritable	Qnger at god	Mistrust	Rapid heartbeat
Loss of meaning	Anger/rage	Impatient	Ennui	Intolerance	Somatic reactions
Decreased self-esteem	Survivor guilt	Use of negative coping (smoking, drinking etc.)	Questioning prior religious beliefs	Impact on parental role (concern and overprotectiveness)	Breathing difficulties
Preoccupation with trauma	Shut down	Regression	Lack of self-satisfaction	Projection of anger or blame	Aches and pains
Thoughts of harm to self and others	Numbness	Sleep disturbances	Pervasive hopelessness	Isolation from friends	Impaired immune system
Apathy	Fear	Appetite changes		Loneliness	Dizziness
Rigidity	Helplessness	Nightmares			
Disorientation	Sadness	Hypervigilance			
Whirling thoughts	Depression	Accident proneness			
Self-doubt	Hypersensitivity	Losing things			
Perfectionism	Overwhelmed	Moody			
Minimisation	Depleted	Substance misuse			
Trauma imagery	* anxiety	* withdrawn			Source: Yassen 1995

2.2.ii. Impact of Vicarious Trauma on Professional Functioning

The extent to which vicarious trauma affects an individual's professional effectiveness is troubling. Furthermore, it is an important exploration of how this then impacts on an individuals self concept in relation to questioning their personal and professional competency and functioning in other potential roles and responsibilities.

Table 2: Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress on Professional Functioning

Performance of Job Tasks	Morale	Interpersonal	Behavioural
Decrease in quality	Decrease in confidence	Withdrawal from colleagues	Absenteeism
	Loss of interest	Impatience	Exhaustion
Low motivation	Dissatisfaction	Decrease in quality of relationships	Faulty judgement
Avoidance of job tasks	Negative attitude	Poor communication	Irritability
Increase in mistakes	Apathy	Subsume your own needs	Tardiness
Setting perfectionist standards	Demoralisation	Staff conflicts	Overwork
Obsession about details	Lack of appreciation		Frequent job changes
	Detachment		
	Feelings of incompleteness		

2.2.iii. Associated Risk Factors for Vicarious Trauma

It is important for professionals working in the VAWG sector to develop an understanding and insight into the associated risk factors for developing vicarious trauma. It is upon undertaking such a reflection and assessment that we can begin to build a more intimate picture of our own individual vulnerabilities and start to build strategies to buffer and mitigate them. The following offers a list of both risk and protective factors associated with Vicarious Trauma.

Diagram 3: Associated Risk Factors

individual factors

organisational factors

life situation factors
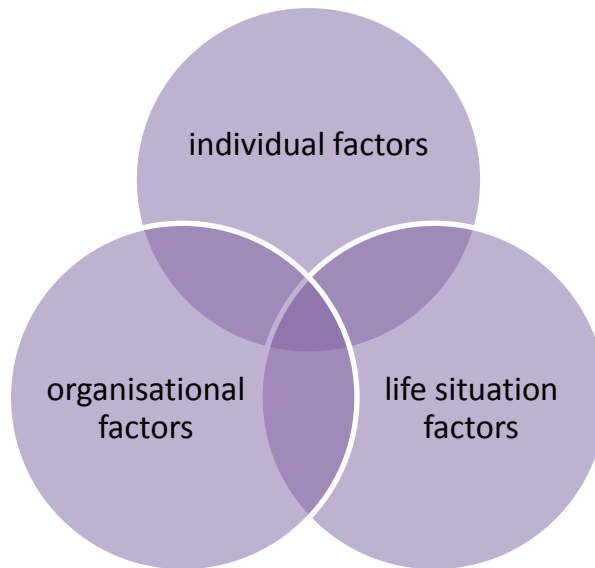
2.2.iii.a. Individual Factors Risk Factors

- Personal history: is there a personal trauma history; experience of gendered violence; other adverse childhood experiences
- Social support; what social support and networks are available; is the individual willing and able to access such support
- Spiritual resources; does the individual have access to a personal spiritual resource; a framework in which to make meaning, have purpose and hope of what they witness and encounter.
- Work style – does the individual have too little experience or too much experience of working with trauma; does the individual withdraw from others during stress; does the individual lack boundaries; over work, over extend themselves; is there a tendency to ignore health problems.
- Lack of self-care
- Lack of training

2.2.iii.b. Individual Protective Factors
- Compassion satisfaction
- Self-awareness
- Able to seek support; able to express feelings
- Home/Life Balance; able to set boundaries
- Self-care strategies
- Open to learning
- Personaliy (optimism)

2.2.iii.c. Current life situation Risk Factors

- Current life circumstances: what is the current circumstance within which an individual operates; stressful life events that may have occurred; divorce, death recently become a carer etc.

- What stress and competing needs in the individual's life has accumulated that makes it more challenging to take care of themself while also working effectively and compassionately with others.

2.2.iii.d. Organisational risk factors

- Agencies that work as top down hierarchies (with little opportunity for those at lower levels to communicate their concerns, get the latest accurate information on the agency's priorities and policies, or influence important decisions)
- Agencies that ignore the demanding nature of this work and do not work to create a supportive organisational culture
- Agencies that fail to provide adequate time off and/or that overwork staff chronically
- Dealing with large numbers of clients with traumatic experiences especially related to child sexual violence
- Work overload
- Lack of autonomy over work
- Lack of rewards or acknowledgement for work
- Role in the workplace
- Lack of communication or relationship with co-workers
- Exposure to trauma
- Homogeneous caseloads
- Lack of organization's resources (professional development, etc.)
- Lack of peer support, ability to debrief
- Poor leadership style, or lack of supervisory support
- Lack of consistency/predictability
- Conflict between personal values and job requirements
- Worker safety and belonging
- Lack of fairness at workplace
- No support for reflective practice

2.2.iii.e. Organisational Protective Factors

- Workers are recognized, acknowledged, respected, valued
- Workers feel safe and a sense of belonging
- Peer support is integral to work environment

- Reflective practice is encouraged, expected
- Open communication between peers, and workers and leaders
- Leaders identify VT and burnout and take action
- Adequate supervision, positive leadership style (open to feedback, good decision-making)
- Consistent policies and procedures
- Agency has resources to meet demands of work, and provide support to workers
- Workers have opportunity to continually learn

Some additional factors that were identified in a literature review by Jackson et al. (2007)[7] argue for the need to teach and encourage all helpers to:

- Identify their own risk and protective factors
- Share experiences of both vulnerability and resilience so that others may learn from—and perhaps emulate—the strengths and also avoid the pitfalls
- Acknowledge and praise success in peers' achievements
- Promote feelings of pride
- Encourage storytelling and Role Play

Section 3: Practice Strategies for Self-Care, Resilience and Self-Compassion

3.1. Strategies to support self-care
A key to supporting ones self-care also lies in the ability to Identify and manage the general challenges that all hard-working professionals face, such as the potential for stress and burnout or interpersonal difficulties; to be aware of your own personal vulnerabilities, such as the potential for re-traumatisation (if you have a trauma history), vicarious or secondary traumatization, and compassion fatigue; as well as striving for balance in your life, by maintaining and enhancing the attention you pay to the different domains of your life in a way that makes sense to you.

The following table provides some ideas and strategies that can be used to maintain that balance. The list is not exhaustive but is compiled in order to offer some ideas for you to work and build your own list that works in each area.

Table 4: Self-care Strategies

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[7] Jackson, D., Firtko, A. and Edenborough, M. (2007) *Personal resilience as a strategy for surviving and thriving in the face of workplace adversity: A literature review*. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 60; 1-9

Work place / Professional	Physical	Psychological	Emotional	Spiritual	Interpersonal
• Take breaks during the work day (e.g. lunch or between meetings) • Take time to chat with colleagues • Create uninterrupted time to complete tasks • Set boundaries with clients and colleagues • Balance your workload so that you are not overwhelmed • Arrange your work space so that it is comfortable and comforting	• Eat regularly • Exercise regularly • Access medical care when needed (both preventative and acute) • Take time off when sick • Regular physical activity that I enjoy • Get enough sleep • Physical • Sleep, exercise, and nutrition • Calming the body • Healing through movement and music	• Take time out (trips out of town, to the beach or a weekend away) • Take time away from telephones, email, social media and the internet • Make time for self-reflection • Notice your inner dialogue (listen to your thoughts and feelings) • Have your own personal development and/or external supervision	• Spend time with non-work friends, family and acquaintances • Stay in contact with important people in your life • Acknowledge when you have done well • Value yourself • Identify energising/positive activities people and places, and actively seek them out • Allow yourself to cry or be upset • Find things that make you laugh • Express your opinion on social issues outside of work	• Do some form of reflective practice (meditate, pray or reflect) • Spend time in natural environments • Connect to a community or network with shared values • Be open to feeling inspiration, awe and other positive emotions • Nurture your optimism and hope • Be open to not knowing • Identify what is meaningful to you and notice it's place in your life • Contribute to causes in which you believe in outside of work	• Schedule regular time with significant others (e.g. partner, kids, friends, family) • Stay in contact with mates, acquaintances and networks • Make time to reply to personal correspondence • Allow others to do things for you • Meet new people • Ask for help when you need it • Share your feelings: good, bad or other with someone you trust

3.2. Top 12 Self-Care Tips

The following self-care tips are adapted Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Compassion Satisfaction[8]

1. Take Stock-What's on your plate

Assess the challenges you face in order to know the changes and improvements you need to make.

- Make a detailed list of all the demands on your time and energy (work, family, home, health, volunteering, other).
- List the main stressors you see (number of clients, or, amount of paperwork, or difficult boss, etc.).
- Review the list. What stands out? What factors are contributing to making your plate too full? Life situations or things you have taken on? What would you like to change most?
- If you are comfortable sharing this with a trusted friend or colleague, explore with them strategies and new ideas.
- It maybe helpful to access the help of a good friend, counsellor or coach to help you with this exercise.

2. Start a Self-Care Idea Collection

Either with friends or at work start making a list to support your self-care. (This list could include activities you do not do or at the moment is unaffordable) The activity is about generating ideas.

A suggestion is to also do this at work. You could have a "self care board" where people post their favourite ideas. You could have a "5 minutes of self care" at each staff meeting, where someone is in charge of bringing a new self care idea each week.

- Once you have a really nice long list, pick three ideas that jump out at you.
- Make a commitment to implementing these in your life within the next month.

3. Find time for yourself every day – Rebalance your workload

Assess how you could make time for yourself everyday. Below are some ideas.

- This could simply be that you bring your favourite coffee cup to work, and have a ritual at lunch where you close your door (if you have a door) and listen to 10 minutes of your favourite music.
- Take a nap on your yoga mat at work during her lunch break.
- Is there a way for you to rejig your case-load so that you don't see the most challenging clients all in a row?

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[8] Mathieu, F, M.Ed., CCC., (2007) Transforming Compassion Fatigue into Compassion Satisfaction: Top 12 Self-Care Tips for Helpers

- Make sure you do one nourishing activity each day.
- This could be having a 30 minute bath with no one bothering you,
- Going out to a movie, or it could simply mean taking
- 10 minutes mindfulness during a quiet time to sit and relax.

4. Delegate - learn to ask for help at home and at work

Are there things that you are willing to let go of and let others do their own way?

5 Have a transition from work to home

Reflect on how you transition between work and home? Do you have a 20-minute walk home through a beautiful park or are you stuck in traffic for two hours? Do you walk in the door to kids fighting and hanging from the curtains or do you walk into a peaceful house? How could you create a transition process when you get home? Here are some suggestions:-

- A change of clothes; putting on cosy clothes when getting home and mindfully putting their work clothes "away".
- Having a 10 minute quiet period to shift gears,
- Going for a run.

6 Learn to say no (or yes) more often

Helpers are often attracted to the field because they are naturally giving to others. As helpers, we know that learning to say no is fraught with self-esteem and other personal issues and triggers. Do you think you are good at setting limits? If not, this is something that needs exploring. Can you think of one thing you could do to say no a bit more often? Or have stopped saying yes to all requests, because you are feeling so depleted and burned down, feel resentful and taken for granted. Have you stopped saying yes to friends, to new opportunities?

Take a moment to reflect on this question and see where you fit best: Do you need to learn to say no or yes more often?

7.Assess your Trauma Inputs

Do you work with clients who have experienced trauma? Do you read about, see photos of, and are generally exposed to difficult stories and images at your work? Take a *trauma input survey* of a typical day in your life.

- Starting at home, what does your day begin with? Watching morning news on tv; Listening to the radio or reading the paper?
- Note how many disturbing images, difficult stories, actual images of dead or maimed people you come across.
- Now look at your work. Not counting direct client work, how many difficult stories do you hear, whether it be in a case conference, around the water cooler debriefing a colleague or reading files?
- Now look at your return trip home. Do you listen to the news on the radio? Do you watch tv at night? What do you watch?
- If you have a spouse who is also in the helping field, do you talk shop and debrief each other?

It is important to recognize the amount of trauma information that we unconsciously absorb during the course of a day. There is a lot of extra trauma input outside of client work that we do not necessarily need to absorb or to hear about. We can create a "trauma filter" to protect ourselves.

8. **Learn more about Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma**

Learn more about compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma, including ways to recognise the signs, symptoms and strategies to address the problem.

9. **Consider Joining a Supervision/Peer Support Group**

It is important to be able to access supervision and peer support. If your work place does not currently offer the opportunity it is good to discuss how this can be introduced and implemented. Discuss with your managers, colleagues and teams the importance of supervision/ peer support and how to set one up in your work place.

10 Attend Workshops/Professional Training Regularly

Researchers in the field of compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma have identified that attending regular professional training is one of the best ways for helpers to stay renewed and healthy as opposed to feeling de-skilled. There are of course several benefits to this: connecting with peers, taking time off work, and building on your clinical skills.

11. Consider working part time (at this type of job)

Studies have shown that one of the best protective factors against Compassion Fatigue is to work part time or at least, to see clients on a part time basis and to have other duties the rest of the time.

12. **Exercise**

Physical exercise is a protective factor to a number of mental and physical ailments. Regular physical exercise is a great self-care practice. The key is to do it on a regular basis and to set realistic goals. Can you think of three small ways to increase your physical activity?

3.3. Strategies for Building Resilience

The following offers some ideas on how to support the development of both personal and professional resilience. The over-lap and connection between self-care and promoting resilience is evident. It is also important to understand the way in which cultivating resilience is muscle that needs to be trained and flexed.

3.3.i. Ten Ways to Build Personal Resilience[9]
1. **Make connections**: cultivate good relationships; accept help and support; assist others.
2. **Look for opportunities for self-discovery:** know yourself, your strengths and self-worth.

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[9] American Psychological Association

3. **Accept that change is a part of living:** learn ways & techniques to manage change.
4. **Keep things in perspective:** see the broader context/long-term perspectives.
5. **Take decisive actions to fix problems:** Adopt a solution mind-set; use problem resolution tools and techniques.
6. **Move toward your goals:** use goal-setting tools & techniques; measure regular progress; celebrate small accomplishments.
7. **Nurture a positive view of yourself:** Develop your assertiveness; boost your self-esteem.
8. **Maintain a hopeful outlook:** Nurture optimism, enthusiasm; visualize your goals.
9. **Take care of yourself body and mind;** pay attention to your needs and feelings; exercise regularly.
10. **Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.**

3.3.ii. Eight steps to Building Professional Resilience[10]
1. **Accept change**: find ways to become more comfortable with change
2. **Become a continuous learner:** learn new skills, gain new understanding, and apply them in times of change
3. **Take charge:** take charge of your own career and your own development and self-empowerment
4. **Find your sense of purpose:** A clear sense of purpose helps you to assess setbacks within the framework of a broader perspective
5. **Create Balance**: form your identity apart from your job. You are more than your professional role! Separate what you do from who you are!
6. **Cultivate relationships**: develop and nurture a broad network of personal and professional relationships to build a strong support base.
7. **Reflect:** reflection fosters learning: new perspectives, and self-awareness that increases your resiliency.
8. **Reframe Skills:** reframe how you see your skills, talents and interests. Seeing yourself in a new way, may shift into new patterns of work and behaviour.

[10] Centre for Creative Leadership (2020)

3.3.iii. Practice Strategies: Vicarious Trauma and Compassion Fatigue

Like anything else if we have a framework to help us, we can better understand what we are doing and why we are doing it. One framework that is easy to make use of and remember is the ABC framework. (Awareness, Balance and Connection). This is a framework that we consider highly accessible.

The following are principles we have added to this framework as essential in preventing vicarious trauma:-

- The importance of valuing oneself
- Self awareness and the ability to respond to one's own needs.
- Monitoring of self-care
- Developing daily, weekly and monthly rituals and practices
- Compassion and empathy for self
- Creating a support network.

Diagram 4. Management of Vicarious Trauma - ABC
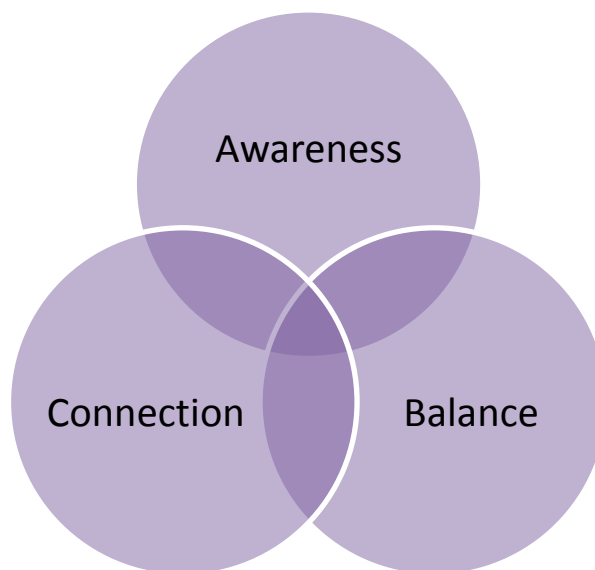
Awareness of needs limitations and emotions and resources - self monitoring, self-empathy, identify the impact of work on you emotionally, psychologically, physically and recognise own.

Balance – amongst activities of work play and rest, unconditional compassion for self , limit exposure to traumatic information outside of work i.e. consider what TV you watch, how might you manage work to restore, replenish balance, how do you preserve empathetic connection with self-preserving distance in your work with clients. Introduce proactive steps to

prevent mitigate burnout. When confronted with occupational stress tend and befriend rather than fight or flight.

Connection – to yourself, others, and something larger- how do you counter isolation, become more aware of gendered violence and taking clients home, develop and maintain positive relationships outside of home. Friendships connection and acceptance of fun ensuring that you have regular respite helps us to maintain perspective of the real world i.e. a world apart from violence and trauma

Building upon the ABC model, below are the additional components that we consider essential.

Relationships: Building positive professional relationships through networks and mentoring

Optimism: Maintaining positivity through laughter, optimism, and positive emotions

Emotional Intelligence: Developing the emotional insight to understand one's own risk and protective factors; Developing reflective practices (meditation, journaling etc.) which helps access emotional strength and assists in meaning making and thus, in transcending the present ordeal

Spiritual Practices: Achieving work/life balance and using spirituality to give one's life meaning and coherence

Professional Structures: Access to good quality and consistent supervision, Opportunities to debrief and engage with reflective practice and/or peer supervision.

Activism: Embedding the work in the wider fight of social activism and rebellion as a way to connect the everyday work into the wider movement of change and transformation. This offers another form of connection, meaning and solidarity with others who also are engaged in such work.

3.4. Final thoughts

It would be naïve for any worker to believe that they are completely resistant to vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue or burn out. The reality under which we currently operate has exponentially grown in challenge, both for survivors and the workers who are supporting them. It would be incongruent for us to avoid mentioning the fact that this briefing paper has been completed during the Covid-19 challenge. We acknowledge that it brings with it an indistinguishable future, in terms of how we provide services to support survivors during these tribulations whilst maintaining our own well-being. It has offered us an opportunity to cultivate our resilience, at the same time as leaning into our own practices, self-care rituals and support networks. It would be fair to say that this present time, is the most critical time to review and implement personal strategies to nurture self-care and resilience. Our hope is that the paper will inspire you to take action, in nurturing and preserving your

well being and those around you. As in the words of June Jordon ***"We are the ones we have been waiting for"***

Women and Girls Network
April 2020

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