

# **The impact of conducting GBV research: *Experiences from South African researchers***

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BUILDING A HEALTHY NATION THROUGH RESEARCH



# Vicarious Trauma

- **Exposure to traumatic experiences of our research participants can impact on us both physically and emotionally**
- **Impact on work , family & socially**
- **PTSD like symptoms**



# Defining Vicarious Trauma

**A negative change in thoughts, perceptions, and interpretations as a result of repeated empathic engagement with traumatic materials and experiences  
(Coles, et al., 2010)**



# Impact of Vicarious Trauma

**Differs based on factors such as :**

- **Personal experiences**
- **The nature the research**
- **Support systems**
- **Work environment**
- **Personality**
- **Gender**
- **Maturity**



# Preparing for the Research

- **Emotional preparation**
- **Practical Preparation**
- **Ensuring safety**
- **Interview strategy**
  - **Tension between colluding with research participant and divulging your true feelings**



# Interviewing Perpetrators

*“Talking about my thoughts and feelings allowed me to make sense of my feelings and anxieties”*



# Researching Sexual Violence

***“You can not prepare for the unexpected “ Clinical  
psychologist / researcher***

- The nature of the interviews were not meant to be traumatic**
- Impact was unexpected**
- Patient client interactions distressing**
- Anger and helplessness**



# Researcher vs Counsellor

*“Being a researcher your hands are tied, you can’t make them go for counselling, you can’t provide them with counselling” CSA Researcher*

- **Feelings of powerlessness & guilt**
- **Anger expressed at the system**





# Supporting Staff

- **Competing interests – should the manager be the person providing support?**
  - **We acknowledge the difficulties to do this work**
  - **Open door policy**
  - **Facilitate a process of letting off steam gradually**
  - **When a staff member does not cope ...**
  - **Building a team approach – informal support by colleagues**



# Sexual Assault Service Providers

- **“When you feel like you’ve worked and worked and worked and worked you feel like all your breath has been removed from you, you cannot breathe anywhere anymore because of the things that you’ve heard.” (counsellor)**
- **It’s not easy to listen to the stories because “it touches you because we are people too.” (counsellor)**



# Support

- **Variation of support strategies**
  - **Scheduled debriefing sessions**
  - **Regular supervision**
  - **Training**
  - **Access to counselling service**
  - **Informal support from colleagues**