

Abstract

This study explored the impact of vicarious trauma on Psychotherapists who work with survivors of torture in an organisational context, to further understand what Steed & Downing, (1998) described as 'a natural and inevitable response to working with trauma survivors'. As an Integrative Psychotherapist working with survivors of torture, I experienced vicarious trauma and recognised the impact on both my professional and personal life. However, for the purpose of this study a qualitative method and phenomenological methodology to include the introduction of 'epoche' (Husserl IN Langdrige 2007) was applied. A pilot with one Psychotherapist was undertaken followed by interviews with a further four accredited Psychotherapists; five in total, 4 females, 1 male age 25-60, each with a minimum of 2 years' experience of working with survivors of torture. A phenomenological analysis of the data was undertaken using a horizontal approach (Moustakas 1994) to make meaning of the emergence of 3 core themes and 11 sub themes. Findings of the data showed that all participants reported symptoms of vicarious trauma including disruption in cognitive schemas, symptoms characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder, and somatic symptoms. One participant reported vicarious post-traumatic growth including an enhanced sense of interpersonal connectedness and positive changes in their philosophy of life and self-perceptions. All participants reported a further understanding was required by the organisation to include additional support in the prevention and protection of vicarious trauma. The findings aim to bring awareness to the field of Integrative Psychotherapy and to organisations working with complex trauma through a series of recommendations for best practice to aid with the health and wellbeing of Psychotherapists, who work with survivors of torture and complex trauma in an organisation.