The emotional cost of ending violence against women and girls: How can researchers, practitioners and activists avoid burnout?

WEBINAR
July 2, 2020 10:30-11:30 BST

The Violence Against Women and Girls Research Network

https://vawgnetwork.mdx.ac.uk/

Please donate, if you can, to raise funds to support women and children fleeing domestic violence and abuse, who have no recourse to public funds during the pandemic:

https://justgiving.com/crowdfunding/abolishnrpf?utm_id=60&utm_term=wnQgve985

Researcher welfare:
researching sexual violence against children

Dr Helen Beckett

Director, The International Centre: Researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking

@uniofbedsCSE

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Context

- Working in this field is a privilege, but can come at personal cost
- All bring different biographies and experience to this
- Unlike requirement for clinical supervision in counselling, no such equivalent for researchers
- Can transfer learning from these fields but unique challenges of research role:

  - difficulty of hearing but not actioning/challenging
  - often limited engagement
  - not knowing what happens afterwards

- Many (brief) references to need to consider researcher welfare in existing documents, but little practical advice on how to do this

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Some potential concerns/difficulties

- Worrying about the 'what ifs':
  - What if I say something insensitive
  - What if they get upset
  - What if I have to break confidentiality
- Worrying you didn't 'do well'
- Impact of hearing difficult or traumatic narratives
- Feeling powerless to change anything
- Guilt at 'triggering' a participant
- Being triggered yourself
- Being unable to 'move on'

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What we have found helps

- Project specific training and preparation
- Planning in downtime/processing space – fieldwork schedules; analysis; reflective fieldwork notes
- Ensure appropriate support structures are in place for participants – someone else is 'holding' them
- Senior/experienced staff on call
- Checking in rather than reporting in

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What we have found helps

- Normalising emotional responses – no 'one size fits all'
- Recognising range of potential triggers – but also allow for the unexpected
- Knowing our 'warning signs' and 'coping mechanisms'
- Permission to look out for yourself
- Permission for others to look out for you

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THE QUEEN'S ANNIVERSARY PRIZES FOR HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION 2013

Blog on CSA Centre website: https://bit.ly/3fz7zK2

Forthcoming survey on researcher welfare in summer

SVRI reports: https://svri.org/documents/briefing-papers-and-reports?link-section=briefing-papers-and-reports

helen.beckett@beds.ac.uk
www.beds.ac.uk/ic
@uniofbedscse

Secondary Trauma from working with sexual violence

Kristina Massey
Senior Lecturer in Criminal Psychology

The Cost of Caring

- My interest in this topic is personal
- 20 years of hearing accounts of sexual and domestic violence impacted on me in some of the same ways as experiencing 1st hand
- Neurological studies of psychotherapists show us that hearing about things elicit low level physiological responses similar to experiencing them
- Avigail Moor (2011) – Dehumanised, humiliated and frozen: key aspects of the rape experience.

The Cost of Caring

- Staff experiences of working in a Sexual Assault Referral Centre: the impacts and emotional tolls of working with traumatised people
- The Impact of Witnessing Other People's Trauma: The Resilience and Coping Strategies of Members of the Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine.
- Police officers and post traumatic stress disorder: discussing the deficit in research, identification and prevention in England and Wales.
- The 'cost' of caring in policing: From burnout to PTSD in police officers in England and Wales.

The Cost of Caring

- Use of negative coping strategies (alcohol, drugs, aggression)
- Changes to way you live your life
- Impact on you as a person, burnout, compassion fatigue
- Raised levels of distrust and suspicion
- Illness (mental or physical)

Supporting those who do this work

- Work place stress increases chances of PTSD
- Supervision
- Opportunities for venting
- Exercise
- Case load….
- Emotional support in and out of the work place

Much to learn

- This work is in its infancy but is so important because of the impact of vicarious trauma on staff members, organisations, clients and society
- The people who work in the sexual violence field need care too!

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Dr Emma Williamson, Reader in Gender Based Violence
Centre for Gender and Violence Research

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The impact of researching gender based violence on researchers

Williamson, E., Gregory, A., Abrahams, H. *et al.* Secondary Trauma: Emotional Safety in Sensitive Research. *J Acad Ethics* **18,** 55–70 (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-019-09348-y

https://policystudies.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/

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Key Themes:

- Trigger points
- Cumulative impact
- Competing demands
- Coping mechanisms
- Potential to make a difference

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….you feel empathy, **anger**, a sense of **injustice** and **helplessness** …having worked on the issue of **sexual exploitation** for several years, one particular trigger for me was when participants described **this form of abuse**. Specifically, a couple of women who had experienced **brutal** (physical and psychological) domestic violence described how their partners also advertised them online and **forced them to have sex with other men**

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Conducting research on sensitive and traumatic topics during a pandemic

Alison Gregory, Emma Williamson and Maria Barnes

http://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2020/06/23/conducting-research-on-sensitive-and-traumatic-topics-during-a-pandemic/

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Key themes during covid-19

- Safety risk
- Intersecting disadvantage
- Interview structure (longer)
- Changed power differentials
- Burden of technology
- Jarring of view and content
- People need more of you
- Maintaining boundaries (at home)
- No downtime

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At the risk of sounding glib, we should probably heed the advice we would give to others:

'be kind to yourself.'

Please don't forget to look after yourselves:

Students - talk to your supervisors

Staff – talk to your line managers

Everyone – reach out to one of the many organisations who provide support for people affected by VAWG
- contact an organisation like Mind or the Samaritans, or find a counsellor
http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/
- talk to your friends and family

Please spare a few moments to complete our feedback form.
The link will be placed in the chat box and you can simply click through to it.
Your input will help us shape future events:

https://bit.ly/38gb4Sc