

Vicarious Trauma for Lawyers: How it Works and What to Do About It

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Who is Robert Wright?

- Social Work Private Practitioner (direct practice and forensics)
- Former:
 - Frontline C.W. Worker
 - Race Relations Co-ord. DDSB
 - Mental Health Worker ,WSP
 - Ex. Dir. FCS Cumberland
 - Ex. Dir. Child & Youth Strategy
- Facilitator, ManTalk



Trauma – A Definition

- At your table take a few minutes to construct a definition of Trauma
- Once done, share with your table mates the most important question you want to gain an answer for from today.
- When we regroup:
 - Share the definition
 - Share the Question

Trauma - A Definition



Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event.

Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea.

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/01/15/new.york.plane.crash/index.html>

Vicarious Trauma



Vicarious Trauma is the term given to the symptoms experienced by a trauma worker or helper that results from empathic engagement with traumatized clients and their reports of traumatic experiences.

Similar to compassion fatigue, burnout, secondary trauma

Vicarious Trauma for Lawyers



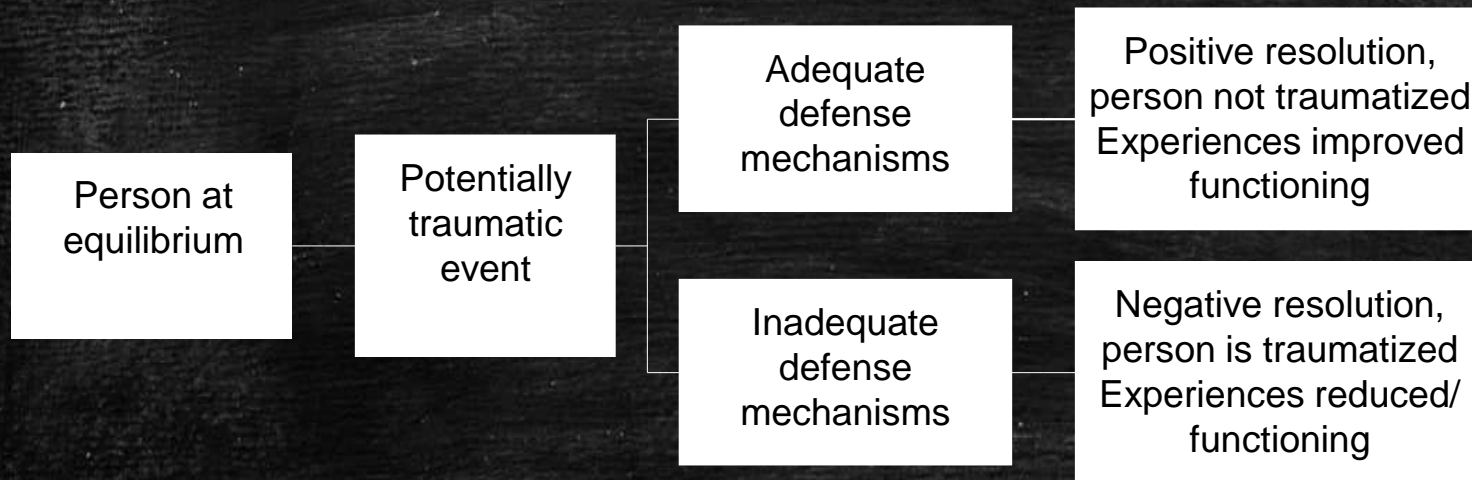
63% judges reported symptoms, female judges reported more (Jaffe, 2003)

Compared to mental health and social service workers, lawyers demonstrated higher levels of VT (Levin & Greisberg, 2003)

Trauma Symptoms

- **Re-experiencing:** spontaneous, intrusive memories; recurrent dreams ; flashbacks; prolonged psychological distress.
- **Avoidance:** efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, activities, places; inability to remember; sense of foreshortened future; emotional numbing.
- **Negative cognitions and mood:** distorted sense of blame; estrangement from others; depression, anxiety
- **Arousal:** aggressive, reckless or self-destructive behavior; sleep disturbances; hypervigilance.

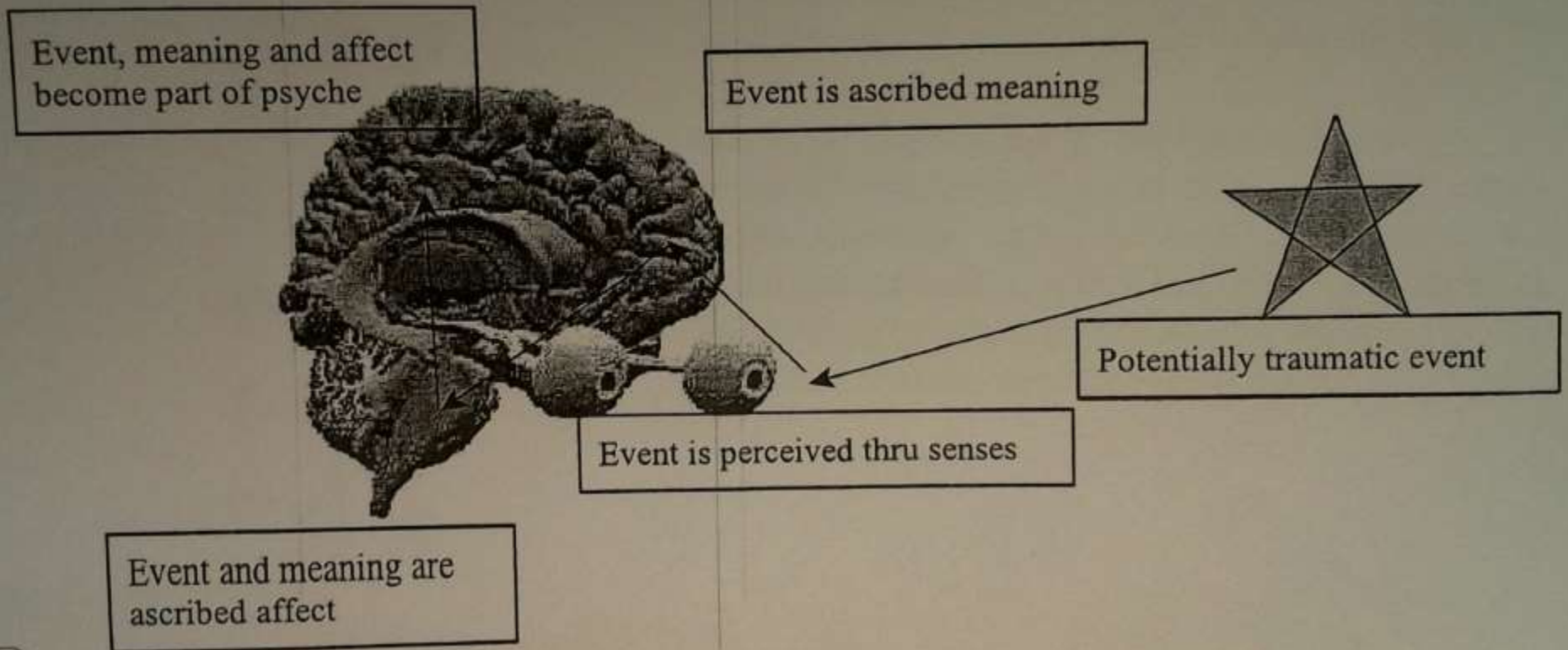
The Psychological Model



That which does not kill me makes me stronger . F. Nietzsche

The Psychological Model

The Thinking/Feeling Dialogue



Avoiding and Responding to Trauma

- Personal resilience important; physical, emotional, relational, spiritual health
- Be “present” during event
- Debriefing trauma most effective within 72 hours
- If professional debriefing not available, discussion with colleagues, family or friends is helpful – Confidentiality Critical!!!
- Debriefing: Review sensations, construct thoughts and meaning, explore and clarify feelings
- Explore larger meaning and purpose – spirituality

Traumatic Event Debriefing

- Fact Phase: focus on the details
- Feelings Phase: focus on the physiological and emotional feelings
- Thoughts Phase: what or who did you think about as the event occurred
- Reaction Phase: what thoughts, feelings, images linger?
- Symptom Phase: what physiological and emotional symptoms are present
- Teaching Phase: educate about healing stages, reorganization as a lifetime process, stress management . . .
- Re-entry Phase: end session on mundane, routine activities, chatting about weather over coffee, “one thing you look forward to this week”

Q & A

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