



# VICARIOUS TRAUMA & ARE WE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

DR. NORMAN N BLUMENTHAL  
DIRECTOR OF TRAUMA SERVICES, OHEL  
TORAH IN MOTION

COPING AND BUILDING RESILIENCE IN CHALLENGING  
TIMES

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# SECONDARY OR VICARIOUS TRAUMA

Secondary or Vicarious Trauma is the assault on the equanimity and perception of safety and predictability of the caretaker for the primary victim of tragedy or those who witness it remotely. The provider or viewer, in turn, experiences trauma



# LESSONS LEARNED FROM NEWTON WSJ – 12/5/17

*In the days following the 2012 school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newton, Conn. Police Chief Michael Kehoe would scream in his sleep, reliving the gruesome scene in his dreams...His relationship with his wife suffered because he ordered her around in an attempt to exert control. And he was racked with guilt...*

*Studies show that 15% of police officers will develop post-Traumatic Stress Disorder over the course of their career said John Violanti, research professor at School of Public Health at the University of Buffalo. About one third of officers will develop some PTSD symptoms, he said.*



# שמות טו, טז

תִּפֹּל עֲלֵיהֶם אִמְתָּהּ וּפֹחַד

רש"י

תפל עליהם אימתה. על הַרְחֹקִים:

ופחד. על הַקְּרוֹבִים



# SUBTYPES

- Immediate – Ambulance drivers and EMT's; police officers, firefighters, ER health providers, those by happenstance in close vicinity.
- Ancillary – trauma therapists, later health providers, investigators, media, Clergy or those who read/hear about it later or watch on video recordings.



# CHARACTERISTICS

- PTSD symptoms – Intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, emotional lability, etc.
- Very much resembles post primary trauma but more cumulative.
- Creeps up and catches the person unaware.
- Cynicism
- Depersonalization
- Religious conflicts, dangerous world syndrome.

# EMPATHY VS COMPASSION

- Compassion is feeling for and not feeling with the other
- Research indicates that empathy without a capacity to take action results in a fatigue and depression.
- In such instances compassion is more effective which expresses an awareness of the other person's suffering and care.

(Tania Singer and Olga M. Klimecki Current Biology Vol 24 No 18)



## ER DOCTOR

Dr. John G. Raffensperger, emergency room pediatric surgeon in Chicago for the last 40 years, describes what happens psychologically when a patient is brought in following a shooting or stabbing.

*“Blood everywhere, trying to stop it, trying to replace the blood that has been lost. Will it help to split the sternum to get to the proximal artery? Is there enough time to save this child?” After the surgery the sadness catches up.”*



# ANTECEDENTS

- Natural need to bond and connect
- Fathers in primitive cultures with symptoms of pregnancy



# SHARED TRAUMATIC REALITY

- Situation in which the helper and recipient are in a shared trauma (e.g. natural disaster, war zone)
- Blurring of boundaries.
- The benefit of shared experience

Baum, N. Shared traumatic reality in communal disasters: toward a conceptualization. *Psychotherapy*, 2010, 47(2), 249-259

# SHARED TRAUMATIC REALITY

- Do you share your own experience, trepidation?

*When doing therapy there should only be one anxious person in the room...preferably not the therapist.*

Dr. Harry Stack Sullivan





# POLICE OFFICERS VS FIREFIGHTERS

- Anecdotally reported higher incidence of Secondary Trauma among Firefighters
- Experiencing as a group

# OCTOBER 7 SECONDARY OR PRIMARY?

- Our initial impression and later realization
- Only 1-3 generations removed from the Holocaust
- The enormity of the atrocities.
- Internet
- Gravitating to our backyard in the form of anti-Semitism
- Different gradations of primary trauma



# VICARIOUS RESILIENCE

- Complementing or accompanying secondary or vicarious trauma is a concept called vicarious resilience.
- Studying those who treated survivors of massacres, expropriation of lands, forced recruitment of minors into the war, kidnappings and comparable torture in Columbia during armed strife and civil wars, researchers found the providers developing new perspectives and coping methods for their own lives accrued from witnessing the strength and resolve of their patients.



(Hernandez, P. Gangsei, D. & Engstrom, D. "Vicarious resilience: a new concept in work with those who survive trauma." Fam Process 46(2): 229-241.)

# VICARIOUS RESILIENCE

*After working with people who have suffered these kinds of problems, your definition of a problem changes.*

*What helped was that I always found a person or a group of people who showed balance in approaching their interactions in difficult situations. This helped me overcome my fears. I could trust them and I could learn how to handle these difficult situations.*

*This work generates a positive change as you generally may become more resourceful, less fearful, more dynamic, more resolute, more active and eager to question yourself permanently. When you witness someone coping with something like a kidnapping, you question why you don't cope better with your own losses. In other words, you develop your potential.*