



Working Through Vicarious Trauma and Burnout with Self-care Strategies

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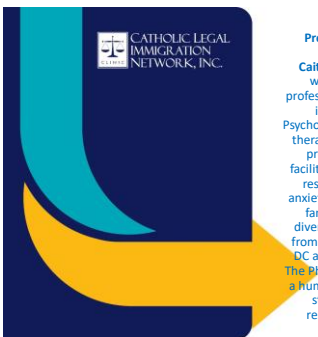
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Moderator: Shaila Rahman, J.D.

As a Field Support Coordinator at CLINIC, Shaila provides immigration program management training and consultation to nonprofit immigration legal service providers across the country. Before joining CLINIC, she worked as a Managing Attorney at Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project. In this capacity, Shaila taught legal education classes, developed new projects, oversaw funding streams, supervised staff, and represented people in all types of immigration matters, including removal defense in immigration court. Rahman received her law degree from UCLA School of Law.

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Presenter: Caitlin Tromiczak (LICSW-C, LCSWC)

Caitlin is a licensed clinical social worker who has worked with immigrant communities and the professionals who serve them for nearly 20 years. She is also a doctoral candidate in International Psychology. She has served in many roles including as a therapist, clinical supervisor, program manager, and professional development content creator and facilitator. Her areas of expertise include trauma and resilience, domestic violence, PTSD, depression, anxiety, grief, immigration and acculturation, torture, family separation in transnational families, and diversity, equity, & inclusion. She draws experience from her work with communities in the Washington DC area as well as abroad in El Salvador, Nicaragua, The Philippines, Rwanda, South Africa, and India. With a humanistic approach to healing and serving, Caitlin strives to create and provide more culturally responsive and effective services and systems.

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CLINIC's Mission Statement

Embracing the Gospel value of welcoming the stranger, CLINIC promotes the dignity and protects the rights of immigrants in partnership with a dedicated network of Catholic and community legal immigration programs.

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Overview

The traumatic experiences of our clients impact us in many ways and can take a toll on our wellbeing, effectiveness, and morale.

In this session we will identify signs of vicarious trauma in ourselves and others. We will also learn to build protections against vicarious trauma and burnout with personal routines and structural approaches within organizational culture.

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Questions to ask & answer

- What is vicarious trauma? How is it different from burn-out?
- How can we recognize vicarious trauma in ourselves and our colleagues?
- What are some strategies to deal with vicarious trauma individually & collectively?
- What else do you hope to gain from this training?

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What leads to Burnout?

- High-Stress & Low-Support
- Increased work loads in a changing environment
- Challenges with setting boundaries and negotiation (people pleasing, cultural & societal expectations)
- Prolonged stress/anxiety/uncertainty
- Increased screen time (video requires more intense attention, focus, energy)
- Certain traits (perfectionism, people pleasing, workholism, etc.)
- Gender implications (societal/cultural expectations)

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Vicarious Trauma

A natural response to hearing difficult stories of trauma, violence, abuse, injustice, etc.

Can occur due to a combination of:

- The story itself
- Feeling like you can't "do enough" to help
- Cumulative exposure
- Lack of support
- Helper's personal history/triggers



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Vicarious Trauma: Signs

- Changes in mood, behavior
- Anger, Irritability, Tearfulness
- No time or energy for oneself, numbness
- Loss of pleasure in work, Loss of hope
- Nightmares, Negative coping mechanisms
- Overwhelming sense of responsibility for someone else's wellbeing
- Trauma junkie (increasing need to hear more)



*These may be different in every culture, what does it look or feel like for you?

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Vicarious Trauma: What To Do

- Pay attention to yourself & continually self-assess
- Use positive coping mechanisms
 - take breaks daily, weekly, annually
 - practice techniques to regularly release stress (match energy/start where you are)
 - maintain your health (eat & sleep well, exercise)



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Vicarious Trauma: What To Do

- Seek support: institutional & personal
 - Structure organization in ways that integrate support
 - Provide staff with flexibility when needed, get creative when under resourced
 - Routinely allot time for sharing & peer support
 - Seek support for impact, not issue itself (limit details to avoid overloading colleague)
 - Set, model, & re-enforce boundaries
 - Advocate for your needs
 - Engage with family, friends, community, therapy
 - Spiritual or religious practice
 - Routine/Ritual to separate work time from personal time (balance)
 - Reconnect with your purpose: what brought you to this work?

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Working with an Interdisciplinary Team

- Shared Mission & Unified Approach
- Boundary Setting
 - Make expectations clear & Ask for others to do the same
 - Repeat & reinforce
- Successful Communication
 - Identify what does and does not need to be shared
 - Play your role



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Guiding Questions



- What am I doing that works?
- What can I implement for myself that I'm not doing?
- What support do I need from others? How do I ask?
- What support/accommodations do I need from my colleagues, supervisor?
- What structural shifts could my organization make to better support my work?

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Scenarios

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Scenario 1

A legal representative is providing Know Your Rights presentations and preliminary screenings to the community, during which he hears the challenges and issues they are struggling with beyond their legal concerns. The clients do not have others to turn to and defer to him to help them solve their problems. He is mentally, physically and emotionally exhausted. He has been running around trying to help everyone but didn't realize how much this has impacted his well-being, and on one occasion a colleague caught him breaking down.

What should the legal rep do?

What should the colleague do to help this legal rep?

What type of policies should be implemented to prevent this from happening in the future?

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Scenario 2

A supervisor has noticed there is a decline in staff morale. There are more interpersonal conflicts and individuals do not seem as excited or committed to the work of the organization and are calling out sick more frequently. There has been increasing staff turnover, causing high caseloads for remaining staff.

How can she respond to this situation and take steps to boost morale and retention?

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Scenario 3

Nina has years of experience as an immigration attorney and has done a couple of VAWA cases in the past. She did such a great job on her VAWA cases, her supervisor decided to give her more of them to do. She hears countless stories from clients being subject to sexual violence, physical abuse and other crimes. She has to assist the client to document this information in their declaration. This has caused Nina to become depressed and irritable at work. She has not mentioned this to her supervisor since she is afraid he will think she can't handle the workload. This has affected her working relationship with her peers.

What should the attorney do?
How should the supervisor address this issue?
What type of policies should be implemented to keep this from continuing?

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Scenario 4

What is a common experience for you that impacts staff and perhaps clients as well?

What are potential solutions or supports that can be added to transform this issue?

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