

Teaching while the Black Dogs bark: Understanding the Vicarious Trauma experienced by Secondary Teachers in a digitally disrupted age

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This inquiry seeks to understand the impacts of Vicarious Trauma experienced by secondary teachers in a digitally disrupted age. Teachers find themselves teaching a generation of young people the literature suggests are experiencing trauma more intensely due to their digitally disrupted lives.

The impact of working with trauma-affected students, whose trauma manifests in a variety of ways in the classroom, varies from one teacher to another. The level of distress that teachers experience can range from negative feelings to more serious forms of Compassion Fatigue or Vicarious Trauma. Compassion Fatigue is a phenomenon that is acknowledged to be heavily linked to the professional burnout of educators. Although originally identified in the fields of Medical and Psychological Health care, the more serious terms Vicarious Trauma and Secondary Traumatic Stress are beginning to be applied in educational settings.

The problem for this research is to understand the extent Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma affect teachers and how they could be supported to better endure the risk factors associated with these conditions.

The literature suggests a negative connection between the digitally disrupted lives of young people and their resilience towards trauma. Through an increased exposure to global trauma, young people's resilience to the trauma in their own lives is being eroded. The prevalence of cyberbullying and other forms of online abuse is also serving to drastically colour the experience of young people and their ability to deal with trauma and trauma-related mental health. This in turn leads teachers, as professionals who are expected to connect with and care for these students, to be at greater risk of Vicarious Trauma. However, Teachers are often not equipped to appropriately recognise, or adequately respond to student trauma, hence the emergence of the Trauma-Informed Classroom in recent Educational Research. Although research regarding Trauma-Informed Practice in schools highlights significant developments in education, there has been little application of Vicarious Traumatization research in regards to the wellbeing of secondary teachers. This is in contrast to other fields where there has been significant research done concerning Vicarious or Secondary Trauma concerning professionals who are exposed to similar risks.

Given the complex and uncertain times we find ourselves in, further research into the specific risks, impacts and mitigation of Compassion Fatigue and Vicarious Trauma in Secondary Teachers is vital for healthy and effective educators and in turn, classrooms.