

Addressing Secondary Trauma in Emotionally Challenging Research: impacts, coping and proactive interventions.

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Webinar abstract

Researchers embark on explorations of diverse topics, aiming to deepen our understanding of the numerous issues impacting individuals in today's society, a journey that often leads them into the more disturbing and distressing aspects of the human experience (e.g. war, death, violence, crime, poor mental health, poverty). There is growing recognition that undertaking this type of research can pose many difficulties for researchers, including secondary trauma, yet there are few examples of managing their wellbeing effectively. The Researcher Wellbeing Project, funded by the UKRI Research Culture Fund, acknowledged the challenges inherent in such research, focusing on the often-overlooked aspect of researcher wellbeing. Using a mixed-methods approach, we undertook in-depth semi-structured interviews with researchers undertaking potentially emotionally challenging research across topics and disciplines and employed pre- and post-interview questionnaires. Findings demonstrated that researchers experienced a range of symptoms and that the impacts go beyond the psychological and physical impact, also extending to their social relationships. While most researchers relied on informal coping strategies, such as physical activities and social interactions, a minority with prior professional backgrounds utilised more structured support mechanisms, often at their own financial expense. You can find the full report on our findings [here](#).

Our training workshop guides participants in the use of the resources on our [Researcher Wellbeing Project webpages](#). The webpages are designed as a practical toolkit, providing resources and guidance to support researchers, managers and institutions in managing the emotional aspects of their work and progressing towards a strategic approach to researcher wellbeing and emotionally challenging topics. The workshop is structured into three sessions. The first session will explore the impacts of emotionally challenging research, presenting our findings on the symptoms experienced by researchers. The second session will focus on coping mechanisms and interventions and will give you an opportunity to start using our resources and write your own Researcher Wellbeing Plan. The third session introduces a set of tiered recommendations for institutional support, categorised into Bronze, Silver, and Gold standards, offering a phased approach to their implementation. We will then discuss where your institution fits in relation to these standards, and we will explore further one of the resources (e.g. we could spend more time on the Researcher Wellbeing Plans, or explore the guidance on risk assessment and mental health).

Webinar objectives



By participating in this webinar, you will:

- gain a deeper understanding of the potential impacts of emotionally challenging research,
- learn about effective individual, team and institutional supports to navigate these challenges,
- start to develop your own Researcher Wellbeing Plan,
- understanding how to undertake a risk assessment linked to mental health impacts,

- be equipped to start developing a strategic approach to researcher wellbeing on emotionally challenging topics in your team/institution.

Join us to equip yourself and/or your team/institution with knowledge and tools essential for maintaining emotional wellbeing in the demanding field of research on emotionally challenging topics.

Researcher Wellbeing and Emotionally Challenging Topics 3 hour Training Session DRAFT PROGRAMME 21st June			
Please feel free to bring a yoga mat and do stretches whilst we are speaking if this is helpful for you. Please also select some music you would like to play in the breaks.			
Time		Objectives and Activities	Outcomes
Session 1 - Impacts			
12.00-12.10 (5-10 min)	TS	Welcome and Introduction: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher Wellbeing Project (RWP) overview • RWP webpages and resources launch 	
12.10-12.30 (15-20 min + 5min Q&A)	KB	Outline of Impacts undertaking emotionally challenging research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the potential impacts of conducting emotionally challenging research • Learn about the findings from the Researcher Wellbeing Project
12.30 (1 mins)	Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretch and move in any way that is comfortable and helpful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get stress out of your body • Get your circulation going • Be ready to refocus
12.35-12.45	KB	Breakout groups (2 people) Reflective/Sharing Session: Reflect and share how the presentation resonates with you (or not). Please keep the information shared in your group confidential, only share what you feel comfortable to share about yourself (and/or have permission to share). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce yourself • Are you doing emotionally challenging research, and how has it impacted you (if at all)? • Did any of the findings of the RWP particularly resonate with you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share personal experiences in a supportive environment • Validate personal experiences and foster a sense of community

Time		Objectives and Activities	Outcomes
12.45-12.55 (10 mins)	Self	Break	
Session 2 – Coping and Interventions			
12.55 – 1.15 (15 + 5min Q&A)	TS	To outline coping mechanisms and support needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn about the findings on how researchers cope with the impacts and what they would like to have to cope more effectively Explore a range of effective coping mechanisms
1.15 (1 mins)	Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stretch and move in any way that is comfortable and helpful. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get stress out of your body Get your circulation going Be ready to refocus
1.20-1.45 (25 mins)	TS	<p>Introducing the Researcher Wellbeing Plan</p> <p>Activity in groups of 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access the Researcher Wellbeing Plan Template Start to fill out the wellbeing plan in relation to yourself focusing on the following questions, and telling your partner about your answers (only share what you feel comfortable to share): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your warning signs  Activities/services  <p>Whole group discussion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How did you feel talking about your warning signs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think about your Researcher Wellbeing Plan Recognize your existing coping mechanisms that work. Add new coping mechanisms. Developing confidence in sharing those mechanisms with a colleague.
1.45-2.00 (15 mins)	Self	Break	

Session 3 – Coping and Interventions			
2.00-2.20 (15 + 5min Q&A)	TS	Outline of the Bronze, Silver, and Gold Standards for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researchers, supervisors and teams • Employers and funders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about the tiered standards • Recognise the role of institutional support in addressing researcher wellbeing • Raise awareness of how to start to influence these systems
2.20 (1 min)	Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stretch and move in any way that is comfortable and helpful. 	
2.20-3.10 (50 mins)	KB + TS	Explore other resources on the webpages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline the resources • Particular attention will be given to the following tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Risk assessment guidance ○ Or spending more time writing your Researcher Wellbeing Plans • Feedback/Q&A 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about the available resources and how you might use them.
3.10-3.20 (10mins)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra time incase issues above need more attention. • Workshop evaluation questionnaire. • Close workshop. 	