



# Wellness day

Setting the Foundation –  
Trauma Awareness and  
Mental Wellness for  
Researchers

*Understanding trauma and integrating  
alternative healing modalities*

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# Introduction

As Researchers working in the GBV space; you engage deeply with complex, often emotionally charged subjects, which can take a toll on your mental and emotional well-being. This session aims to shed light on the subtle but profound ways trauma can impact professionals like you, influencing not only your work but also how you show up in your personal and professional spaces.

The purpose of this wellness day is to create **awareness** about the effects of trauma on Researchers, **share information** regarding the role of somatic therapies and holistic healing practices, and **equip** you with practical tools to manage stress. The ultimate goal is to foster a culture of self-care and healing, empowering you to *navigate the challenges of your life and work with fierce compassion and gentle kindness*







# Session Objectives

- Understand the impact of trauma on researchers.
- Differentiate between primary and secondary trauma.
- Learn practical self-care strategies and somatic healing practices.
- Engage in grounding techniques to manage emotional overwhelm.

## Why This Matters:

- Researchers in the GBV space are constantly exposed to distressing narratives.
- High emotional demands can lead to burnout, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue.







# Understanding Trauma

Trauma is the emotional, psychological, and physiological response to a distressing event or prolonged exposure to distress.

- Not limited to direct experiences—witnessing or hearing about traumatic events can also have an impact.

## Types of Trauma:

1. **Primary Trauma** – Direct exposure to traumatic events.

- Example: A survivor of GBV sharing their lived experiences.

2. **Secondary Trauma (Vicarious Trauma)** – Indirect exposure through others' experiences.

- Example: A researcher constantly reviewing distressing case studies.

3. **Complex Trauma** – Repeated or prolonged exposure, leading to deep-seated psychological impacts.





# Understanding Trauma

**What sort of trauma do you think you struggle with most frequently? (It can be a combination of things)**

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# Impact of Trauma on researchers

Anxiety, irritability, persistent sadness, inexplicable or explosive anger, emotional numbness.

## EMOTIONAL

Fatigue, exhaustion, muscle tension, or chronic pain, stomach upsets, headaches, sleep disruptions.

## PHYSICAL

Difficulty concentrating, memory issues, or decision-making struggles & dissociation

## COGNITIVE

Withdrawal, procrastination, or increased reliance on unhealthy coping mechanisms & emotional detachment from work

## BEHAVIOURAL

### Unique challenges faced by researchers include:

- **Constant exposure** to distressing material and stories you come across;
- **Ethical and moral dilemmas:** Struggling to balance advocacy with objective research.
- **Vicarious guilt:** Feeling guilty for benefiting academically from another's trauma.

### Long-Term Risks:

Burnout, PTSD symptoms, loss of motivation and purpose.



# Reflection questions

**Reflect on your current stressors and understand how trauma may be affecting your work and well-being**

**Please share your experiences**

- Have you ever felt overwhelmed by the stories you've heard?
- What emotions come up when you engage with traumatic research material?
- How do you process and manage the effects of trauma after being exposed to distressing content that has left a physical and emotional impact on you?







# Self-Awareness & Managing Triggers

*is hard work :-)*



## Recognizing Personal Triggers

- Certain topics, words, or situations might trigger emotional responses.

\* It's important to identify these to manage stress effectively\*.

## Self-Check Exercise:

- On a scale of 1-10, how emotionally drained do you feel after engaging with traumatic material?
- What are the signs that indicate you need a break?

## Some tips on what to do when you are triggered:

- Pause and Acknowledge the Trigger
- Engage in Immediate Grounding Techniques
- Step Away if Necessary
- Reframe Your Perspective





SELF  
CARE

# Practical Self-Care Strategies

## **Emotional Self-Care:**

- Journaling, therapy, talking to a mentor or peer.

## **Physical Self-Care:**

- Exercise, movement therapy, proper rest.

## **Mental Self-Care:**

- Setting boundaries, mindfulness, taking breaks.

## **Social Self-Care:**


- Connecting with support groups, engaging in positive relationships.

## **Spiritual Self-Care:**

- Meditation, prayer, spending time in nature.




# Visualization meditation for self-compassion




**A JOURNEY INTO SELF-COMPASSION**

*“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”*









*Let your compassion be your wings*



## A Journey into Self-Compassion

10 OCT 12PM / Storytime with Mental Wellness Initiative

00:00  08:14

64k

**iono.fm**





# Somatic Healing Practices

## Q: Why Somatic Healing?

- Trauma is stored in the body, and cognitive processing alone is not enough.
- Somatic therapies help process trauma by releasing stored tension and emotions from the body, promoting nervous system regulation and emotional resilience.



## Techniques to Release Stress:

1. Grounding Exercises: Bring focus back to the present moment.
2. Breathwork: Deep breathing to regulate the nervous system.
3. TRE (Trauma Release Exercises): Gentle movements to release tension.
4. Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Tensing and releasing muscle groups.



# Practical Exercise – Grounding Techniques

**How to regulate your nervous system in moments of emotional overwhelm:**

5-4-3-2-1 Exercise:

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can touch
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Breathwork Exercise:

- Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 6 seconds.

Quick Body Scan:

- Identify areas of tension and release them through mindful stretching.



# Creating a sustainable self-care plan







# Creating a Sustainable Self-Care Plan

## **Developing Personal Strategies:**

- Identify one practice to integrate daily, weekly, and monthly.

## **Setting Boundaries:**

- Learning to say no, taking breaks, and scheduling "off" time.

## **Support Systems:**

- Seeking peer support, supervision, and professional counseling.







# Build a realistic toolbox

## 1st set of tools: Prepare yourself

- Positive self talk
- Have a plan
- Bring a support person if possible
- Get a goodnight sleep and make sure you are not hungry

## 2nd set of tools: Have something in your pocket, in case you get triggered

- Deep breathing
- Relax your muscles
- Count to 10
- Walk away for a moment
- Self affirmation statements

## 3rd set of tools: How to recover post a traumatic experience

- Call a friend /Colleague/Therapist
- do some tension release exercises
- Journal
- Do something you love
- Try to remember 1 good thing that happened recently.

# Q&A



- Please share your reflections on key takeaways and set an intention for your well-being. (You may do so in the chat)

## **Additional Resources**

Suggest readings:

- The Body Keeps the Score by Dr Bessel van der Kolk.
- Compassion Fatigue: Coping with Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized" – Charles R. Figley  
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1995-97891-000>
- The Trauma Therapist Podcast – Hosted by Guy Macpherson, Ph.D.
- Discussions on trauma research and self-care strategies  
<https://www.youtube.com/@TheTraumaTherapistProject>



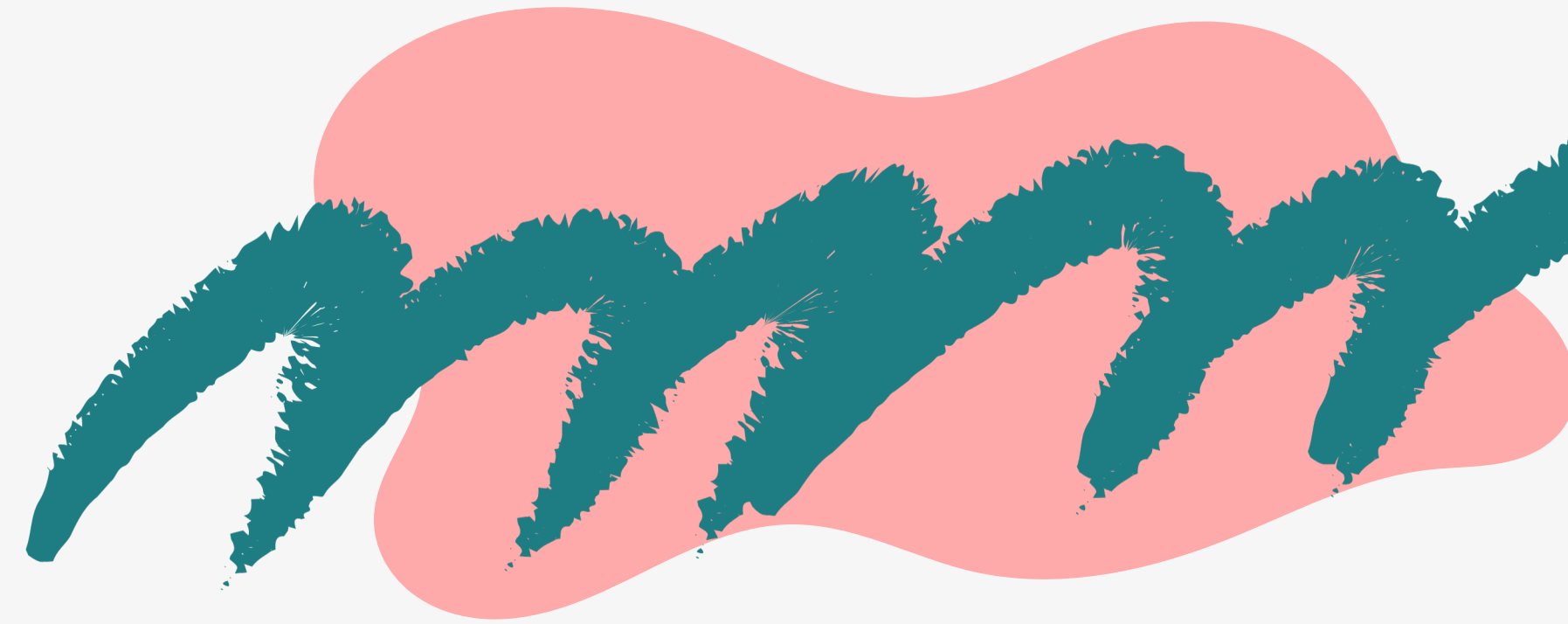


# Grounding meditation & closing





# Get in Touch with Us



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