

## The Relationship between Vicarious Trauma and Job Performance of Workers in Humanitarian Organizations Of Southwestern Uganda.

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**ABSTRACT:-** This study explored the relationship between vicarious trauma and job performance among workers in humanitarian organizations in Southwestern Uganda, involving a sample size of 263 participants. A quantitative research methodology was utilized, with data collected through structured questionnaires and interviews. The analysis employed Pearson's linear correlation coefficient to evaluate the relationship between the two variables. The results indicated a statistically significant negative correlation  $r = -0.222$ ,  $p = 0.000$  between vicarious trauma and job performance, suggesting that as vicarious trauma increases, job performance tends to decline. This correlation is unlikely to have occurred by chance, highlighting the necessity of addressing vicarious trauma to enhance workplace productivity. The study rejects the null hypothesis, confirming a significant negative relationship between these variables. An interview with a key informant from UNHCR provided further insight, revealing that frequent exposure to traumatic refugee narratives has deepened his empathy but also resulted in emotional exhaustion and difficulties in maintaining work life balance, which adversely affects decision making and focus. This underscored the urgent need for interventions to mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma among humanitarian workers.

**Key Words** Vicarious Trauma, Job Performance, Humanitarian Organizations

### I. INTRODUCTION

VICARIOUS TRAUMA, A SIGNIFICANT CONCERN FOR HUMANITARIAN WORKERS, REFERS TO THE EMOTIONAL AND psychological effects that arise from exposure to the traumatic experiences of others (TRAUMA, DEPRESSION, AND BURNOUT IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD: IDENTIFYING BARRIERS AND PATHWAYS TO RESILIENT ADVOCACY, n.d.). This issue is particularly pertinent in regions like Southwestern Uganda, where humanitarian workers frequently encounter distressing narratives from individuals affected by conflict and displacement. The cumulative impact of these experiences can adversely affect job performance, emotional wellbeing, and overall productivity.

Research has shown that humanitarian aid workers are at a heightened risk for mental health issues, including vicarious trauma, which can lead to burnout and decreased job effectiveness (Foo et al., 2023). A study involving humanitarian workers in the Middle East highlighted the prevalence of compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress, indicating that these factors significantly influence the quality of care provided to clients (Sawyer, 2024). Furthermore, the emotional toll of working with traumatized populations can impair decision making and focus, ultimately affecting the workers' ability to perform their roles effectively. The relationship between vicarious trauma and job performance is critical, as it underscores the need for targeted interventions to support humanitarian workers (Li & Li, 2024). A key informant from UNHCR noted that frequent exposure to traumatic refugee stories has enhanced his empathy but also resulted in emotional exhaustion and challenges in maintaining work life balance, which adversely impacts decision making and focus. This highlighted the urgent need for organizations to implement strategies that address vicarious trauma and promote the wellbeing of their employees. This study investigated the relationship between vicarious trauma and job performance among humanitarian workers in Southwestern Uganda, employing a quantitative research methodology to provide empirical evidence on this important issue. By exploring this relationship, the study

sought to contribute to the existing literature and inform the development of effective interventions to support humanitarian workers in their challenging Job performance.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between vicarious trauma and job performance among workers in humanitarian organizations in Southwestern Uganda. A cross sectional approach was employed to gather data at a single point in time from a diverse sample of humanitarian workers. The study included a sample of 263 participants, recruited from various humanitarian organizations operating in the region.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation from different roles within these organizations, including field workers, program managers, and support staff. Data were collected through structured questionnaires that included validated scales measuring vicarious trauma and job performance. The vicarious trauma scale assessed participants' experiences of secondary trauma, emotional exhaustion, and stress related to their work. The job performance scale evaluated self reported effectiveness, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. In addition to the questionnaires, in depth interviews were conducted with key informants from selected organizations, including a representative from UNHCR. These interviews aimed to gain qualitative insights into the experiences of humanitarian workers regarding vicarious trauma and its impact on job performance. Data from the questionnaires were analyzed using Pearson's linear correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between vicarious trauma and job performance. Statistical analysis was conducted using software such as SPSS, with a significance level set at  $p < 0.05$ . The qualitative data from interviews were thematically analyzed to identify common themes and insights related to the research objectives. The ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process by anonymizing participant data.

### Study Findings

		Vicarious Trauma	Job Performance
Vicarious Trauma	Pearson Correlation	1	-.222
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000
	N	263	263
Job Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.222	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	263	263

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

The findings on the above table revealed a statistically significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.222$ ,  $p = .000$ ) between vicarious trauma and job performance among the 263 participants. This suggests that an increase in vicarious trauma is associated with a decrease in job performance. The significance level indicates that this relationship is unlikely to be due to random chance. While the correlation is weak, it emphasizes the potential effects of vicarious trauma on employees' job performance. This outcome underscores the critical need for interventions designed to reduce vicarious trauma in order to enhance workplace productivity. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  which posited that there is no significant relationship between vicarious trauma and job performance among workers in humanitarian organizations in Southwestern Uganda, was rejected. The study demonstrated a statistically significant negative correlation ( $r = -0.222$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) between these variables, with the p-value being lower than the conventional significance threshold of 0.05. This provides sufficient evidence to conclude that a significant negative relationship exists between vicarious trauma and the job performance of humanitarian workers. Although the correlation is weak, it indicates that as vicarious trauma increases, job performance tends to decline, highlighting the necessity of addressing vicarious trauma to improve job performance. A key informant from UNHCR shared their perspective on how exposure to traumatic stories has impacted their professional life, stating that "As a UNHCR team leader, frequent exposure to traumatic refugee stories has deeply affected my professional life, enhancing my empathy but also causing emotional exhaustion, stress, and challenges in work life balance, impacting decision making and focus, requiring proactive management of these effects."

## IV. DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The results of this study indicated a statistically significant negative correlation between vicarious trauma and job performance among humanitarian workers in Southwestern Uganda. The correlation coefficient of  $r = -0.222$  and a p-value of 0.000 suggest that as vicarious trauma increases, job performance tends to

decrease. This finding is consistent with existing literature that emphasizes the harmful effects of vicarious trauma on individuals in Job performance, especially within humanitarian settings (Azam et al., 2023). The study also revealed a significant negative correlation between Vicarious trauma and Job performance.

The negative correlation indicates that vicarious trauma may significantly impair the ability of humanitarian workers to perform effectively. As workers are frequently exposed to distressing stories and experiences of trauma, they may experience emotional exhaustion, leading to decreased motivation and productivity. This finding supports previous research that has linked exposure to traumatic narratives with increased compassion fatigue and burnout among aid workers (Sawyer, 2024). The emotional toll of vicarious trauma can hinder decision making processes and reduce the overall quality of care provided to those in need. Given the significant impact of vicarious trauma on job performance, there is an urgent need for organizations to implement interventions aimed at mitigating these effects. Strategies could include training programs focused on stress management, emotional resilience, and self-care techniques. Providing access to mental health resources and support systems can help workers process their experiences and reduce the impact of vicarious trauma. The qualitative insights from the UNHCR key informant further underscored the importance of addressing this issue. The informant's acknowledgment of enhanced empathy, coupled with emotional exhaustion and challenges in work life balance, highlighted the dual nature of vicarious trauma. While empathy is crucial in humanitarian work, its excessive toll can lead to significant professional and personal challenges. Organizations must find a balance between fostering empathy and providing adequate support to prevent burnout.

The study's findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing vicarious trauma within humanitarian organizations. The significant negative correlation with job performance points to a critical area for intervention.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study provides compelling evidence of a significant negative correlation between vicarious trauma and job performance among humanitarian workers in Southwestern Uganda. The findings highlighted that as vicarious trauma levels rise, job performance tends to decline, underscoring the critical impact of emotional and psychological stressors among the humanitarian workers. Given the substantial challenges posed by vicarious trauma, it is imperative for humanitarian organizations to prioritize the mental wellbeing of their employees. Implementing targeted interventions, such as stress management training and access to mental health resources, can help mitigate the effects of vicarious trauma and enhance job performance.

The insights gained from this research not only contribute to the existing literature on vicarious trauma but also emphasize the need for proactive measures within organizations to support their workers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- [1]. The local government should establish and enforce policies that prioritize the mental health and wellbeing of humanitarian workers. This can include guidelines for regular mental health assessments and support services within humanitarian organizations.
- [2]. They can also implement training programs focused on emotional resilience and stress management for humanitarian workers. These programs should be included in the onboarding process and offered regularly.
- [3]. Non-government organizations should provide access to mental health resources, including counseling services and peer support groups. This would help workers process their experiences and reduce the impact of vicarious trauma and also host workshops that educate staff about vicarious trauma, its effects, and coping strategies. This will equip them with tools to manage their emotional responses effectively.
- [4]. Donors should allocate funds specifically for mental health initiatives within humanitarian organizations. Financial support for training programs and mental health resources will enhance the capacity of these organizations to care for their staff and also should require organizations to include mental health impact assessments in their project proposals. This will encourage the integration of mental health considerations into the overall program planning and funding processes.
- [5]. Academic institutions such as Kampala International University should conduct further research on the impacts of vicarious trauma in humanitarian settings. This includes exploring effective intervention strategies and best practices that can be shared with organizations.
- [6]. Government should establish partnerships with nongovernmental organizations to develop and implement training programs based on research findings, ensuring that interventions are evidence-based.

- [7]. Community leaders like the religious leaders and traditional leaders should promote awareness of the effects of vicarious trauma within the community. Creating an understanding of these issues can foster a supportive environment for humanitarian workers

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