

Secondary Traumatic Stress and Related Factors in Australian Social Workers and Psychologists

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Abstract : Secondary traumatic stress (STS) is an indirect form of trauma affecting the psychological well-being of mental health workers; STS is found to be a prevalent risk in mental health occupations. Various factors impact the development of STS within the literature; including the level of trauma individuals are exposed to and their level of empathy. Research is limited on STS in mental health workers in Australia; therefore, this study examined STS and related factors of empathetic behavior and trauma caseload among mental health workers. The research utilized an online survey quantitative research design with a purposive sample of 190 mental health workers (176 females) recruited via professional websites and unofficial social media groups. Participants completed an online questionnaire comprising of demographics, the secondary traumatic stress scale and the empathy scale for social workers. A standard hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the significance of covariates, traumatized clients, traumatic stress within workload and empathy in predicting STS. The current research found 29.5% of participants to meet the criteria for a diagnosis of STS. Age and past trauma within the covariates were significantly associated with STS. Amount of traumatized clients significantly predicted 4.7% of the variance in STS, traumatic stress within workload significantly predicted 4.8% of the variance in STS and empathy significantly predicted 4.9% of the variance in STS. These three independent variables and the covariates accounted for 18.5% of the variance in STS. Practical implications include a focus on developing risk strategies and treatment methods that can diminish the impact of STS.

Keywords : mental health, PTSD, social work, trauma

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