

Couple relationships, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout in a sample of marriage and family therapists

Gretchen E. Hoyum, BA & Stephanie E. Armes, PhD

Introduction

- Secondary traumatic stress (STS) occurs when a helping professional develops PTSD after hearing a client's trauma (Bride et al., 2004).
- Burnout (BO) is extreme exhaustion surrounding a person's work (Stamm, 2002).
- Previous research has shown that social support can decrease rates of STS.
- Little is known about how couple relationships may be influenced by trauma work.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to explore how couple relationship factors influence BO and STS in marriage and family therapists (MFTs).

Methods

- National sample of MFTs
- Online survey using Qualtrics
- Recruited through MFT program directors, online therapist groups

Measures

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988)

- 12 questions; subscale measuring partner support
- Sample item: "There is a special person who is around when I am in need."

Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007)

- 4 items measuring satisfaction with partner
- Sample item: "I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner."

Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al., 2004):

- 17 items from PTSD diagnostic criteria in *DSM-IV*
- Sample item: "I felt emotionally numb." (1 = Never, 5 = Very Often)

Therapists' couple satisfaction and partner support is a protective factor preventing secondary traumatic stress and burnout

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Hours weekly with trauma clients	1					
2 % trauma clients on caseload	.55**	1				
3 BO	.34**	.28**	1			
4 STS	.28**	.27**	.74**	1		
5 Partner Support	-.15*	-0.12	-.32**	-.19**	1	
6 Couple Satisfaction	-0.10	-0.13	-.17*	-0.13	.49**	1
** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$						

Table 1: Correlations of study variables

Analyses

- Computed correlations of all study variables
- Ran exploratory factor analysis testing multicollinearity between couple satisfaction and partner support

Results

- Negative correlation between relationship satisfaction and BO
- Negative correlation between partner support and STS
- Partner support and couple satisfaction were two distinct factors

Significance

- MFTs' positive couple satisfaction could be a protective factor in lowering levels of STS and BO
- Perceived support from partners could be a preventative factor against developing STS and BO