

Secondary Traumatic Stress Among Domestic Violence Advocates: Workplace Risk and Protective Factors


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Abstract

This study identified workplace factors associated with secondary traumatic stress (STS) in a sample of 148 domestic violence advocates working in diverse settings. Findings indicate that coworker support and quality clinical supervision are critical to emotional well-being and that an environment in which there is shared power—that is, respect for diversity, mutuality, and consensual decision making—provides better protection for advocates than more traditional, hierarchical organizational models. Furthermore, shared power emerged as the only workplace variable to significantly predict STS above and beyond individual factors. The discussion includes implications for practice and policy as well as directions for future research.

Keywords

domestic violence, secondary traumatic stress, workplace

Over the last several decades, domestic violence services have expanded from small, grass-roots shelters to a nationally organized response by individuals and groups in medical, legal, and community organizations (Chalk & King, 1998). Domestic violence advocates now provide a broad range of essential services to battered women and their children (Peled & Edleson, 1994). Yet, surprisingly little is known about how the demanding work they do affects them or about aspects of their work environments that may endanger or protect their emotional well-being.

Literature on the psychological impact of trauma work among psychotherapists (Bober & Regehr, 2006; Pearlman & MacIan, 1995), domestic violence and sexual assault counselors (Baird & Jenkins, 2003; Wasco & Campbell, 2002), social workers (Bride, 2007), emergency medical personnel (Galloucis, Silverman, & Francek, 2000), and firefighters

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