

Trauma patients can indirectly affect the physical health of social workers

July 20 2018, by Jennifer French Giarratano

Exposure to traumatized client populations can have an indirect negative influence on the physical health of clinical social workers through secondary traumatic stress, Georgia State Distinguished University Professor Brian Bride revealed in a study funded by the National Institutes of Health.

Bride and his co-authors, Jacquelyn Lee of the University of North Carolina Wilmington and Ruth Gottfried of the David Yellin Academic College of Education, documented the prevalence of secondary traumatic [stress](#) (STS) in a national sample of clinical social workers. They then examined the relationship between exposure to client trauma, secondary traumatic stress and the perceived [health](#) of clinical social workers.

"We captured the subjects' perceptions about their physical health based on how they said they felt," said Bride, who developed the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale and received a number of honors for his research in this area. He directs the School of Social Work in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.

Eighty-nine percent of social workers provide trauma-related services at least "occasionally," and 53 percent engage in trauma work "often," according to the study, which was published in the *Clinical Social Work Journal* last September.

Social workers who report a higher percentage of clients with [post-](#)

[traumatic stress disorder](#) experience [higher levels](#) of secondary traumatic stress, the researchers' analysis showed. In turn, higher levels of secondary traumatic stress are associated with perceptions of poorer health.

"While it is widely known that providing services to people who have experienced trauma may negatively impact the mental health of clinicians, not much research had been done on the impact of STS on their physical health," Bride said.

He plans to conduct follow-up research that will include the examination of physical health records to support the subjects' perceptions.

Bride and his co-authors believe their findings call for increased attention toward prevention of secondary traumatic stress symptoms among direct service providers, given its prevalence and potential impact on their [physical health](#) and well-being.

"Prevention programs focused specifically on holistic health and self-care may be promising at both individual and organizational levels," they concluded. "Efforts to prioritize professional self-care, defined as engagement in practices that encourage both effectiveness in the professional role and personal wellbeing, may prove beneficial in helping practitioners identify specific, measurable steps in self-care."

More information: Jacquelyn J. Lee et al. Exposure to Client Trauma, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and the Health of Clinical Social Workers: A Mediation Analysis, *Clinical Social Work Journal* (2017). [DOI: 10.1007/s10615-017-0638-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-017-0638-1)

Provided by Georgia State University

Citation: Trauma patients can indirectly affect the physical health of social workers (2018, July 20) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-07-trauma-patients-indirectly-affect-physical.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.