

WHEN PROFESSIONALS ARE EXPOSED TO CLIENT VIOLENCE: IS THERE A RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRUST AND PTSD?

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Introduction: Violence against professionals has been long documented as a source of stress and post traumatic stress. Interestingly, whereas the effects of violence directed at medical staff have been studied extensively, the frequency of exposure and effects on other practitioners of the helping professions has been scarcely studied.

Objectives: To present the scope of the problem, frequency, and the moderating role of trust on the levels of PTSD experienced by the exposed practitioners.

Methods: A sample of 645 practitioners in social services in Israel. The instrument included the Client Violence Questionnaire, PTSD and related somatic symptoms.

Results: 80% of the practitioners were victimized in at least one form of violence over the last 3 months including verbal abuse, threats, vandalism, and/or physical violence. Positive association was found between each type of abuse and PTSD reactions. Interestingly, trust among team members has shaped the relationships between exposure to violence and PTSD reactions (moderating variable). Higher levels of trust were associated with lesser exposure on the one hand, yet higher levels of trust were also associated with higher correlation between exposure and PTSD.

Conclusions: Trust in team seems to serve a dual function. On the one hand, it serves as a buffer, reducing the odds for exposure to violence. On the other hand it increases the negative effects of exposure - when such occurs. In other words, trust in team may be associated with higher trust in clients, a factor that reduces the anticipation of violence, and thus increases its negative effect.