

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION PROJECT: Secondary Traumatic Stress and Vicarious Traumatization: Protective Factors and Their Utilization

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This study examined the impact on psychotherapists who are repeatedly empathically exposed to their client's traumatic content. Psychotherapists were asked to complete survey packets which included quantitative measures of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and Vicarious Traumatization (VT), which are both theorized to be negative conditions which may develop after being exposed to other's traumatic content. Some respondents were then interviewed, and the transcribed interviews were analyzed utilizing the qualitative technique of grounded theory. The results of this study suggested psychotherapists mediate the impact of traumatic exposure through a variety of factors, including personal characteristics, external support systems, and the use of a variety of self-care skills. These factors, along with psychotherapist's responses to barriers interfering with accessing these factors, appear to change over time as therapists gain experience. Additionally, rather than developing negative symptoms as a result of their work, many therapists appear to develop positive outlooks, a deep respect for their client's and human resiliency, and a sense of confidence that they can help their clients.

