

**ARTICLE:**

Bonach, K., & Heckert, A. (2012). Predictors of secondary traumatic stress among children's advocacy center forensic interviewers. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse, 21*(3), 295-314.

**SUMMARY:**

The purpose of this study was to examine factors that may predict the risk or impact of secondary trauma among forensic interviewers working in CACs.

Three hypotheses for the study:

1. The higher the level of satisfaction with the organization, the lower the secondary trauma
2. The higher the organizational buffers (supervision, mentoring, clinical supervision), the lower the secondary trauma
3. The higher the perception of job support, the lower the secondary trauma

**Method:**

257 forensic interviewers working at CACs responded to the email invitation to participate in the survey and completed the survey

- 229 females and 27 males
- Ages – 24 to 68
- Average of 6.3 years conducting forensic interviews
- Average number of forensic interviews per week – 4.01

Percentage of time these forensic interviewers spent conducting interviews:

- 76-100% - 28%
- 51-75% - 23%
- 26-50% - 22%
- Less than 25% - 2%

Independent Variables:

Satisfaction with Organizational Scale – 5 questions with 1-5 likert scoring

Organizational buffers – several question with 1-5 likert scoring

Job Support scale – 11 questions

Dependent Variables:

Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS) – 17 items (3 subscales) designed to measure symptoms from the past six months associated with indirect exposure to traumatic events

## **Findings:**

1. Mean score of 36.7 on STSS
2. The higher the level of satisfaction with the organization, the lower the secondary trauma – this was not supported by the analysis
3. The higher the organizational buffers (supervision, mentoring, clinical supervision), the lower the secondary trauma – this was not supported by the analysis
4. The higher the perception of job support, the lower the secondary trauma – this was well-supported by the analysis
  - a. Support from colleagues and friends
  - b. Professional supervision
  - c. Talking to family
  - d. Support from administration and incentives help workers cope with trauma and stress
5. Two control variables were significant predictors of secondary trauma:
  - a. Age was modestly and negatively associated with secondary trauma
    - i. Suggests possible washout of those who are not resilient to adapt
    - ii. OR, those who remain have learned appropriate coping skills
  - b. Whether the interviewer had experienced a significant loss in the past year
    - i. These individuals had scores six points higher
6. Three themes from qualitative data provided by forensic interviewers:
  - a. Work-related concerns
    - i. Dual roles of forensic interviewing and coordinating or some other job duties are draining
    - ii. Lack of strong leadership or job support can be more frustrating than the children's disclosures
    - iii. Poor teamwork – lack of desire to accomplish best practice
  - b. Suggestions for direct practice coping
    - i. Need for continuing education on forensic interviewing, court preparation and expert testimony, STS training, and stress management
  - c. Regulatory implications to explore
    - i. More widely available forensic interview training by those who require this training
    - ii. Certification of forensic interviewers

## **Discussion Points:**

1. Forensic Interviews vs. Therapists – what are the differential experiences of these individuals, both working in the CAC/MDT environment?
2. Value of having staff provide ratings on:
  - a. Current workload?
  - b. Red tape/bureaucracy which negatively impacts their work
  - c. Support from the MDT
  - d. Functionality of the MDT
  - e. Support from others in the employee's life
3. Awareness of employee losses?
4. Importance of training and supervision as a buffer

National Children's Advocacy Center (2014). Predictors of secondary traumatic stress among children's advocacy center forensic interviewers. Research to Practice Summary. Huntsville, AL: Author.

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