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Secondary Traumatic Stress, Burnout and the role of Resilience in New Zealand Counsellors

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Abstract

A survey was conducted with 129 counsellors who were members of various counselling organisations or associations in New Zealand. A quantitative methodology was utilised with questionnaires completed online. Participants were surveyed in relation to the constructs of secondary traumatic stress, burnout, compassion satisfaction, resilience, social support, degree of exposure to trauma and personal history of trauma. The majority of the participants reported age greater than 50 years (n=84), female gender (n=109) and identified as being of New Zealand European/ Pakeha descent (n=105). Statistical analyses were completed to establish the prevalence of secondary traumatic stress, burnout and compassion satisfaction, the relationship between exposure and risk of secondary traumatic stress, the relationship between personal trauma history and risk of secondary traumatic stress and the relationships between burnout, compassion satisfaction, resilience and social support levels with secondary traumatic stress. In addition, the moderating effect of compassion satisfaction was analysed. Results established a prevalence of 21.7% for high risk of secondary traumatic stress, 24.8% for high risk of burnout and 21.7% for high potential for compassion satisfaction in this sample. Results established statistically significant relationships between exposure and secondary traumatic stress, between burnout and secondary traumatic stress and between resilience and secondary traumatic stress. These results are discussed in relation to the secondary exposure to trauma of counsellors working with trauma clients. This research has important theoretical and practical implications for counsellors working with clients who have experienced trauma.

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