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Effectiveness of art-based interventions in reducing stress among mental health professionals working in a shared war reality

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Statement of the Problem: Mental health professionals (MHPs) are among the first responders to address the needs of traumatized people following exposure to terrorist attacks and war-related stressors. In Southern Israel, MHPs encounter a double exposure to war-related trauma as community members and professionals providing service to terror victims. Research on MHPs exposed to a shared war reality show that they are subject to increased emotional pressure, family conflict and an increased risk for PTSD and vicarious symptoms. The aim of this study was to examine the effectiveness of an art-based intervention in reducing stress among Israeli MHPs who shared war-related stress with their clients during operation protective edge.

Methodology: The art-based intervention included drawing pictures that were later shared in small groups related to three topics: emotions and thoughts related to the war situation; resources that may help them cope with the war-related stressors and; integration of the stressful image and the resource picture. To examine the intervention effect, the Subjective Units of Distress (SUDs) values of 47 MHPs were measured using a pre-post design.

Findings: The study results indicate that MPHs' initial stress levels significantly decreased on completion of the intervention.

Conclusion & Significance: The study results show the efficacy of an easily implemented art-based tool for stress reduction among MHPs operating in shared war conditions. Implications for future research and for interventions designed for MHPs operating in additional shared disasters will be discussed.

Recent Publications

1. Baum N (2014) Professionals' double exposure in the shared traumatic reality of wartime: Contributions to professional growth and stress. *Brit J Soc Work* 44(8):2113-34.
2. Boscherino A J, Figley R C and Adams E R (2004) Compassion fatigue following the September 11 terrorist attack: a study of secondary trauma among New York city social workers. *Int J Emerg Ment Health* 6(2):57-66.
3. Craig C D, Sprang G (2010) Compassion satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout in a national sample of trauma treatment therapists. *Anxiety Stress Coping* 23(3):319-39.
4. Finklestein M, Stein E, Greene T, Bronstein I and Solomon Z (2015) Posttraumatic stress disorder and vicarious trauma in mental health professionals. *Health Soc Work* 40(2): e25-e31.
5. Huss E, Sarid O and Cwikel J (2010) Using art as a self-regulating tool in a war situation: A model for social workers. *Health Soc Wor.* 35(3):201-209.

Biography

Dorit Segal-Engelchin is an Associate Professor. She is the Head of Spitzer department of Social Work and Co-director of the Center for Women's Health Studies and Promotion, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Her research interests include "Diverse aspects of women's health and well-being, stress and coping, and evaluation of art-based interventions designed to reduce stress among people exposed to disasters".

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