

# **Is it Possible to Become Traumatized Over the Phone? Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) in Samaritan Crisis-Line Volunteers June 2009 - June 2010**

## **Background**

This research project funded by the University of Hertfordshire forms part of the requirements for a clinical psychology doctorate. Much of the previous research conducted has focused on individuals who have had direct contact with the primary victims of trauma. Therefore there is a paucity of research looking at contact other than that which is face to face. Given the empirical findings on secondary trauma it follows that telephone operators who interact with potentially traumatized individuals are at risk of becoming traumatized themselves. However, whether helpline volunteers are traumatized by their work, and if so, what factors are protective is not understood.

## **Research Aims**

The primary aims of the research are to:

- 1) Assess the frequency of STS among a sample of Samaritan telephone volunteers
- 2) Assess the impact individual factors, such as length of time volunteering, own trauma history and age have on the development and impact of trauma
- 3) Explore the personal construct system of Samaritan crisis-line operators (both those who report symptoms of secondary trauma and those who do not)
- 4) Consider how an individual's construing of a traumatic event can be used clinically, and how this may impact on the policies and working practices of voluntary telephone operators dealing with potentially traumatic callers

## **Stage 1: Sample design and recruitment [May 2009 – July 2009]**

Four questionnaires will be available on-line through the Samaritans intranet system to all Samaritans telephone volunteers (approximately 14,200 people). A sample of Samaritan volunteers (52 people) will be asked to attend an individual session to complete a repertory grid.

## **Stage 2: Data collection and analysis [July 2009 – February 2010]**

- 1) A demographics questionnaire to obtain demographic and occupational histories of the participants. Quantitative and qualitative data will be obtained
- 2) Traumatic Life Events Questionnaire designed to assess lifetime exposure to 22 types of potentially traumatic events
- 3) Secondary Trauma Scale designed to assess secondary PTSD symptoms in professionals and caregivers
- 4) Brief Symptom Inventory-18 which measures psychological distress
- 5) Repertory grid

## **Stage 3: Report writing [December 2009 – June 2010]**

The final report will be presented to Samaritans in October 2010.

## **Stage 4: Dissemination of research findings [October 2010-2011]**

Research findings will be disseminated within Samaritans and externally during 2010. This will include publications and attendance at events and conferences.

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