

**Enhancing Workplace Health in Addictions Counselling:  
A Participatory Action Research Study to Develop Best Practices  
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There is a growing body of literature that has emerged in the last two decades that suggests that the effect of trauma is far-reaching and has a ripple effect that extends into the workplace. Empirical studies have identified that engaging empathically with another's traumatic material causes risks, have begun to describe the "cost of caring" (Figley, 1995, p.1) and have suggested that those who work with people who experience trauma are vulnerable to experiencing symptoms similar to those they are helping. Compassion Fatigue has been identified as a potential occupational hazard for mental health professionals who listen to stories of trauma (McCann & Pearlman, 1990; Stamm, 1999).

The provision of treatment services to people who experience substance misuse is a challenging and demanding form of practice. The relationship between substance use and experiences of multiple different forms of trauma at various ages of the lifespan is well documented in the academic literature (Burgdorf, Chen, Walker, Porowski, & Herrell, 2004; Downs, Capshew, & Brindels, 2004; Etienne, 2003; Miller, Wilsnack, & Cunradi, 2000). The correlation of substance misuse and a higher prevalence of psychiatric comorbidities is also documented (Zilberman, Tavares, Blume, & el-Guebaly, 2003). There is, however, a gap in the academic literature describing the experiences of addiction workers who listen to these stories on a daily basis as part of their work.

In order to implement an holistic and effective model of program delivery, the occupational health of agency staff becomes paramount. The development of best practices is often enhanced by a collaborative research partnership between agency practitioners and outside researchers. This poster describes one such collaborative study between addiction workers and a university researcher. "Compassion Fatigue: Addiction Workers Experiences' of Listening to Stories of Violence" was a Feminist Participatory Action Research study, using qualitative and visual methods, designed as part of doctoral studies to explore the experiences of twelve addiction workers who not only listen to trauma stories but also work with clients who present with psychiatric comorbidities. Participants were involved in all stages of the research from the design to the dissemination of research findings. Results of this study suggest that, for addiction workers, (1) listening to stories of trauma is identified as work stress, and (2) strengthening the organizational culture through education, workplace strategies and health policies mitigates these stressful effects. This poster will describe the study and focus on the suggestions for personal, interpersonal, and organizational strategies for best practices.

## References

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