

The Secondary Trauma in Student Affairs Professionals Scale (STSAP)

Information Brief

Thank you for your interest in using the Secondary Trauma in Student Affairs Professionals Scale (STSAP). This information serves as a brief reference for those interested in learning more about the instrument and its intended use.

What is secondary trauma? Secondary traumatic stress, also known as vicarious trauma, may be described as “*the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.*”¹ Although not mentioned by the same name, the 5th edition of the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual for Mental Health Disorders (DSM-V), mentions stress-induced mental health conditions that derive from repeated exposure to others’ traumas as a result of one’s vocation or occupation.³ Through this lens, symptoms of secondary traumatic stress may include the following, among other criteria:

Avoidance: Avoiding internal or external reminders associated with the traumatic event.

Intrusive Thoughts: Reoccurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks associated with the traumatic event.

Arousal & Reactivity: Reckless behavior, concentration issues, sleep issues, hypervigilance.

Negative Alteration to Mood or Cognition: Amplified negative beliefs or expectations of oneself or others, persistent negative emotional state, detachment, disinterest in activities.

What is the STSAP? The STSAP is a 23-item instrument that was developed in order to identify indicators of symptoms of traumatic stress, as described above, in U.S. college student affairs professionals across functional areas. This instrument was developed and reviewed for content validity by higher education faculty, licensed counselors, and student affairs professionals from all career levels. More information regarding the development and validation of the instrument may be found via Lynch & Glass (2017).²

What is the STSAP intended to measure? The STSAP was developed to assess the magnitude of self-reported items that may be indicative of the four symptoms associated with stress-induced mental health disorders: avoidance, intrusive thoughts, negative alteration to mood or cognition, and arousal and reactivity with the context of the physical-self and emotional-self.

What is the STSAP not intended to measure? The STSAP is not intended to be a diagnostic instrument. Only a licensed mental health professional may diagnose mental disorders; however, this tool may assist individuals or organizations in better understanding personal wellness and/or prompt individuals to seek assistance.

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College student personnel sometimes report experiencing effects themselves from helping students who have experienced various traumas. Think about your experiences supporting students experiencing a traumatic life event over the past year. To what degree has each statement been true for you? Please indicate your response using the scale below:

1=Completely Untrue

2=Somewhat Untrue

3=Slightly Untrue

4=Slightly True

5=Somewhat True

6=Completely True

Supporting students who have experienced various traumas has left me...

1. ...avoiding people, places, or things that reminded me of my work with students
2. ...avoiding working with some students, if possible
3. ...avoiding aspects of my job that remind me of interactions with students
4. ...avoiding thinking about details of students' traumatic experiences
5. ...interacting less with friends
6. ...interacting less with family
7. ...less physically active than usual
8. ...less interested in being around other people
9. ...feeling as if I was reliving their traumas myself
10. ...feeling upset encountering reminders of my support of students who experienced trauma
11. ...feeling my heart pound when thinking about students who experienced trauma
12. ...feeling tense when thinking about supporting students who experienced trauma
13. ...unable to stop thinking about the details of the trauma the student shared with me
14. ...feeling guilt related to the traumatizing event the student experienced
15. ...having trouble falling asleep
16. ...having trouble staying asleep
17. ...having trouble concentrating
18. ...feeling easily annoyed
19. ...overreacting to small annoyances

- 20. ...feeling something bad might happen
- 21. ...feeling empty
- 22. ...feeling jumpy
- 23. ...feeling emotionally numb

Avoidance

Add scores for question 1-4 [], then divide by 4.

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Negative Alteration to Mood or Cognition

Add scores for question 5-8 [], then divide by 4.

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Intrusive Thoughts

Add scores for question 9-14 [], then divide by 6.

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Arousal & Reactivity

Add scores for question 15-23 [], then divide by 9.

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Secondary Trauma Aggregate

Add all scores for questions 1-23 [], then divide by 23.

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