

The Secondary Trauma in Resident Assistants Scale (*STRAS*)

Information Brief

Thank you for your interest in using the Secondary Trauma in Resident Assistants Scale (*STRAS*). 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 *STRAS*? The *STRAS* is a 22-item instrument that was developed in order to identify indicators of symptoms of traumatic stress, as described above, in U.S. college resident assistants. This instrument was developed and reviewed for content validity by higher education faculty, licensed counselors, and residence life professionals from all levels. More information regarding the development and validation of the instrument may be found via Lynch (2017).²

What is the *STRAS* intended to measure? The *STRAS* was developed to assess the magnitude of self-reported items that may be indicative of three of the four symptoms associated with stress-induced mental health disorders: avoidance, intrusive thoughts, and negative alteration to mood or cognition within the context of the internal-self and external-self.

What is the *STRAS* not intended to measure? The *STRAS* 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.

STRAS Items

"Supporting residents who have experienced trauma has left me..."

AVOIDANCE

- ...avoiding working with some residents, if possible
- ...avoiding people, places, or things that remind me of my support of residents
- ...avoiding aspects of my job that remind me of interactions with residents
- ...avoiding thinking about details of residents' traumatic experiences
- ...avoiding interacting with residents in general

NEGATIVE CHANGES TO MOOD & COGNITION-INTERNAL

- ...feeling empty
- ...feeling emotionally numb
- ...feeling drained
- ...feeling generally discouraged about the future
- ...feeling guilt related to the event the traumatized resident experienced
- ...feeling hopeless

NEGATIVE CHANGES TO MOOD & COGNITION-EXTERNAL

- ...less physically active than usual
- ...less interested in being around other people
- ...interacting less with residents
- ...interacting less with friends

INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

- ...feeling as if I was reliving the trauma experienced by residents
- ...feeling tense when I thought about work with traumatized residents
- ...feeling my heart pound when I thought about residents who experienced trauma
- ...having trouble completing class assignments because I kept thinking about the residents' trauma
- ...having distressing flashbacks of working with residents experiencing trauma
- ...having disturbing dreams about my work with traumatized residents
- ...unintentionally thinking about my support of residents who experienced trauma

Lynch, R.J. (2017). The development and validation of the secondary trauma in resident assistants scale. *The Journal of College & University Student Housing*. 44(1), 52-70.

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American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.).

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