

# The Secondary Trauma in Student Affairs Professionals Scale (STSAP) Information Brief

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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.*”<sup>1</sup> Although not mentioned by the same name, the 5<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup>

**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 indented* 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.

## STSAP Items

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

### AVOIDANCE

- ...avoiding people, places, or things that reminded me of my work with students
- ...avoiding working with some students, if possible
- ...avoiding aspects of my job that remind me of interactions with students
- ...avoiding thinking about details of students' traumatic experiences

### NEGATIVE CHANGES TO MOOD & COGNITION

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

### INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS

- ...feeling as if I was reliving their traumas myself
- ...feeling upset encountering reminders of my support of students who experienced trauma
- ...feeling my heart pound when thinking about students who experienced trauma
- ...feeling tense when thinking about supporting students who experienced trauma
- ...unable to stop thinking about the details of the trauma the student shared with me
- ...feeling guilt related to the traumatizing event the student experienced

### AROUSAL & REACTIVITY

- ...having trouble falling asleep
- ...having trouble staying asleep
- ...having trouble concentrating
- ...feeling easily annoyed
- ...overreacting to small annoyances
- ...feeling something bad might happen
- ...feeling empty
- ...feeling jumpy
- ...feeling emotionally numb

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

Bride, B., Robinson, M., Yegidis, B., Figley, C. (2004). Development and validation of the secondary traumatic stress scale. *Research on Social Work Practice*. 14(1), 27-35.

Figley, C. R. (1999). Compassion fatigue: Toward a new understanding of the costs of caring. In B. H. Stamm (Ed.), *Secondary traumatic stress: Self-care issues for clinicians, researchers, and educators* (2nd ed., pp. 3-28).

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