Lack of Basic Safety

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The human service system and virtually every component of it, including the mental health system have been and continue to be under conditions of chronic stress, individually and collectively experiencing repetitive trauma. In many helping organizations, neither the staff nor the administrators feel particularly safe with their clients or even with each other. This lack of safety may present as a lack of physical safety, abusive behavior on the part of managers and/or staff, and a pervasive mistrust of the organization. A perceived lack of safety erodes trust which is the basis for positive social relationships. As a result these organizations are very tightly wrapped and tensions run high. Under such unrelenting stress helping professionals and the agencies themselves become more highly reactive and are more ready to see threat rather than opportunity, pathology rather than strength and risk rather than reward.

The exposure to traumatizing events among human service workers – and therefore the lack of basic safety - is extremely high. There is a surprising amount of organizational silence when it comes to literature about the impact of traumatic events in mental health and other social service programs despite the frequency of these events. We must assume that if anything, the impact on workers in children's program is even more devastating, consistent with experience in the traumatic stress field indicating that adults dealing with traumatized children are even more vulnerable to severe distress than those working with traumatized adults.

In crisis environments the "constant state of arousal" may be a special risk for increasing the likelihood of violence [1]. Living with a chronic sense of fear is one of the most disabling conditions a person can experience. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, stress in the workplace is a widespread problem and is a result of a variety of situations, and being a witness of or victim of violence is one of the most overwhelming situations workers encounter. Since the 1980s, violence has been recognized as a leading cause of occupational mortality and morbidity. On average, 1.7 million workers are injured each year (about half of these injuries occur in health care and social services), and more than 800 die as a result of workplace violence [2].

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- Link to Sanctuary as a Safety Culture
- Link to Psychobiology of Trauma

- Link to Commitment to Nonviolence

References

1.	Cooper, C.L., P.J. Dewe, and M.P. O'Driscoll, *Organizational Stress: A Review and Critique of Theory, Research and Applications*. 2001, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

2.	NIOSH, *Workplace Violence Prevention, Strategy and Research Needs*. 2006, Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease and Control Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, [www.cdc.gov/niosh/conferences/work-violence/]. Cincinnati, OH.