

# Burnout and Secondary Trauma, Defined

## *Burnout*

A state of extreme dissatisfaction with one's work characterized by:

- ❖ Excessive distancing from clients
- ❖ Impaired competence
- ❖ Low Energy
- ❖ Increased irritability with supporters
- ❖ Other signs of impairment and depression resulting from individual, social, work environmental and societal factors.

- Charles Figley, Ph.D  
Tulane University

---

## *Vicarious or Secondary Traumatization*

These terms refer to "stress and trauma reactions that can occur in response to witnessing or hearing about traumatic events that have happened to others. In these cases, other people are the victims, and you see them undergoing suffering, or hear about traumatic events that have happened to them."

Social workers most often suffer from secondary trauma that are cumulative stress reactions. They are usually related to "low-intensity but more chronic stressors that pervade a person's life and "pile up," one on top of the other."

Secondary trauma is the process of change that happens because you care about other people who have been hurt, and feel committed to or responsible for helping them. Over time this process can lead to changes in your psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.

- ◆ Vicarious trauma is a process that unfolds over time.
- ◆ The effects are cumulative.
- ◆ This process of change is ongoing.

- Laurie Pearlman, Ph.D  
Headington Institute

<http://www.headington-institute.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1787>