

**Background.** “Professional identity” plays a significant role in mental health in the workplace. Derived from social interactions, it acts as a subjective framework that can either protect workers or precipitate psychological distress (Kelchtermans, 1999; Thoits, 1999). The identity and mental health of caregivers (e.g. those working in health care services, social work, child protection work, etc.) and law enforcers (e.g. police officers, security agents, rangers, law officials, etc.) are often negatively affected by the inherent adversity of their work. On a daily basis, they must deal with the aggressive behaviors of their clientele, all while being exposed to stories of trauma, abuse, neglect, violence and other cruelties (Guay, Goncalves, & Jarvis, 2014; Kassam-Adams, 1995; Koritsas, Coles, & Boyle, 2010; Lanctôt & Guay, 2014; Littlechild, 2005; Macdonald & Sirotych, 2005; Schauben & Frazier, 1995). As such, caregivers and law enforcers are the two professions in which workers are most often exposed to workplace aggression (Jackson, Clare, & Mannix, 2002; McCarty, Zhao, & Garland, 2007). In addition, these workers are held accountable for the professional decisions they make in the course of their duties (Osofsky, Putnam, & Lederman, 2008). Thus, providing public service can become a burden for caregivers and law enforcers since the problems they encounter are complex, and their clients often have difficulty in their interpersonal relationships and face situations that are highly emotional (Strozier & Evans, 1998). Thus, this thesis focuses on how caregivers and law enforcers cope with workplace aggression, exposure to traumatic material, and how they experience accountability.

**Objective.** The goal of this thesis is to understand how caregivers and law enforcers cope with workplace aggression and accountability. Relying on identity theory, a theoretical framework that encompasses workplace aggression, exposure to traumatic material and felt accountability is put forth to understand the development of compassion fatigue among child protection workers. Next, the theoretical formulations are integrated and examined through the *Professional Quality of Life* of child protection workers. Professional identity is then used as a guide in the investigation of individual and organizational predictors of trivialization of workplace aggression among caregivers and law enforcers. Finally, the impact of trivializing workplace aggression on psychological wellbeing is assessed.

**Method.** To examine the *Professional Quality of Life*, a survey conducted among a representative sample of 301 Canadian child protection workers was utilized. The effects of exposure to workplace aggression, exposure to traumatic material and stress emanating from accountability on compassion satisfaction and fatigue were evaluated in a path analysis model. The mediating effects of gender roles, perceived organizational support, adherence to professional identity, coping ability and confidence in coping with patient aggression were also tested. To identify predictors of workplace aggression, responses to a survey research conducted among a convenience sample 1141 Canadian caregivers and law enforcers were computed in linear regression modeling. Using the same dataset but only selecting victims of workplace aggression resulting in a sub-sample of 376 Canadian caregivers and law enforcers, individual and organizational factors were used in path analysis modeling in order to predict psychological consequences. Normalizing and tabooing were introduced as mediating variables. For the objectives regarding trivialization of workplace aggression, analyses were also conducted separately for women and men.

**Findings.** By integrating the notion of professional identity, this thesis adds a subjective perspective to the compassion fatigue model allowing for the consideration of compassion satisfaction and takes into account the influence of stress caused by accountability. Results showed that masculine attitudes, adherence to professional identity, positive appraisal/problem-solving coping strategies, and confidence in coping with client aggression increase compassion satisfaction. Exposure to workplace aggression had positive indirect effects on compassion satisfaction through masculine attitudes, adherence to professional identity and confidence in coping with client aggression. Exposure to workplace aggression, felt accountability and avoidant coping strategies increased compassion fatigue among child protection workers while masculine attitudes, adherence to professional identity and confidence in coping with client aggression decreased it. Inconsistent mediations were found in the relation between workplace aggression and compassion through these three factors. Finally, adherence to professional identity and avoidance were found to partially mediate the effect between felt accountability and compassion fatigue. As for predictors of trivialization of workplace aggression, male respondents were more likely than women to think that workplace aggression was normal. Law enforcers were more likely than caregivers to taboo workplace aggression. Organizational factors were all significant negative predictors of tabooing violence. Finally, being older, prior direct victimization, injury requiring hospitalization and tabooing workplace aggression were positively associated with negative psychological consequences following workplace aggression victimization. Gender-based analyses revealed specific predictors for males (e.g. normalizing) and for females (e.g. tabooing).

**Implications.** When developing and disseminating policies to help workers to cope with specific work-related stress, organizations must consider the “professional identity” promoted by the job as well as the gender of the workers. Adapted to these identities, they should sensitize workers on the impact of aggression and accountability in order to break the taboo while fostering strategies that dampen the impact of these stressors.

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