



# The Effect of Social Support on Secondary Traumatic Stress and Posttraumatic Growth: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy

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## BACKGROUND

The lifetime of prevalence of direct exposure to traumatic events in Poland is high – up to 75,6 % in general population (Lis-Turlejska, 2002). According to American Psychological Association (2002) even people who do not experience traumatic event directly can suffer from symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder.

Social workers and professionals working with victims of childhood abuse, domestic violence, violent crime, disasters, war and terrorism are indirectly exposed to traumatic events through their work with traumatized people.

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1997) assumes that self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in recovering after trauma. Self-efficacy refers to believes in one's ability to cope with demands of traumatic situation.

Social support, another resource in coping with trauma and its effects, may enable self-efficacy (Cieslak et al., 2009; see enabling hypothesis, Schwarzer & Knoll, 2008).

Experiencing traumatic event does not always lead to negative outcomes. Post Traumatic Growth describes positive changes in one's life following traumatic experiences. These positive changes are observed in health or relations with others or in finding life more meaningful (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

## OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study was to examine the predictors of secondary traumatic stress and posttraumatic growth among workers exposed to secondary trauma. In particular, we investigated if:

- (1) perceived social support would have an effect on secondary trauma self-efficacy beliefs,
- (2) if self-efficacy beliefs would predict secondary traumatic stress and posttraumatic growth.

## METHOD

### Inclusion criteria

- Age  $\geq 18$  years.
- Being employed as first responder, social worker, fire fighter, nurse or paramedic.
- Indirect exposure to trauma through work.
- Working with trauma victims  $\geq 1$  year.

### Participants

- 271 professionals.
- Mean age - 35 years ( $SD = 8.62$ ).
- 76% female.
- 79% bachelors degree or higher.
- Mean work experience = 9 years ( $SD = 8.42$ ).

### Measures

- *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (Zimet et al., 1988); 12 items,  $\alpha = .96$
- *Secondary Trauma Self-Efficacy Scale* (Benight et al., 2004); 9 items,  $\alpha = .92$
- *Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale* (Bride et al., 2004); 17 items,  $\alpha = .91$
- *Posttraumatic Growth Inventory – SF* (Cann et al., 2010); 10 items,  $\alpha = .92$

### Procedures

- Participants filled in the web-based questionnaires.

## RESULTS

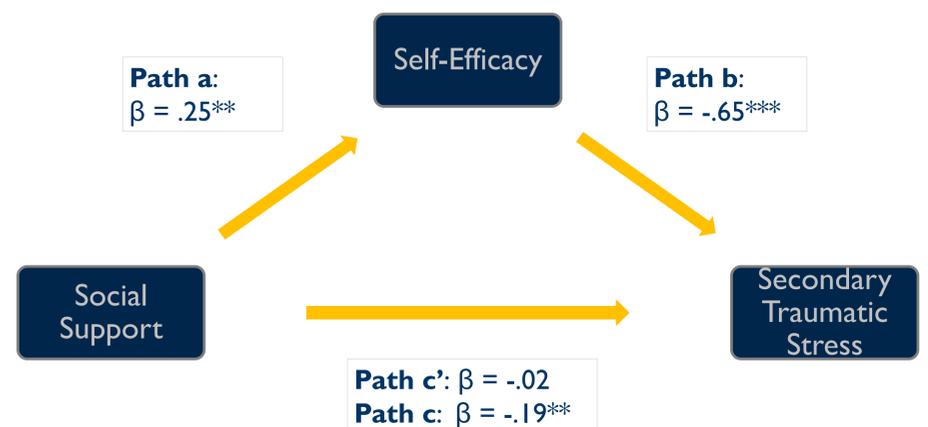
Table 1  
Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	35.48	8.62	—					
2. Gender	—	—	-.01**	—				
3. Social Support	4.93	1.54	-.03*	-.02*	—			
4. Self-Efficacy	5.18	.95	-.20**	.16**	.25**	—		
5. Secondary Traumatic Stress	2.31	.65	.24**	-.20**	-.19**	-.66**	—	
6. Post Traumatic Growth	2.91	1.06	-.13*	-.10*	.10*	.13*	-.07	—

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Self-efficacy mediated the effect of perceived social support on the outcome variables:

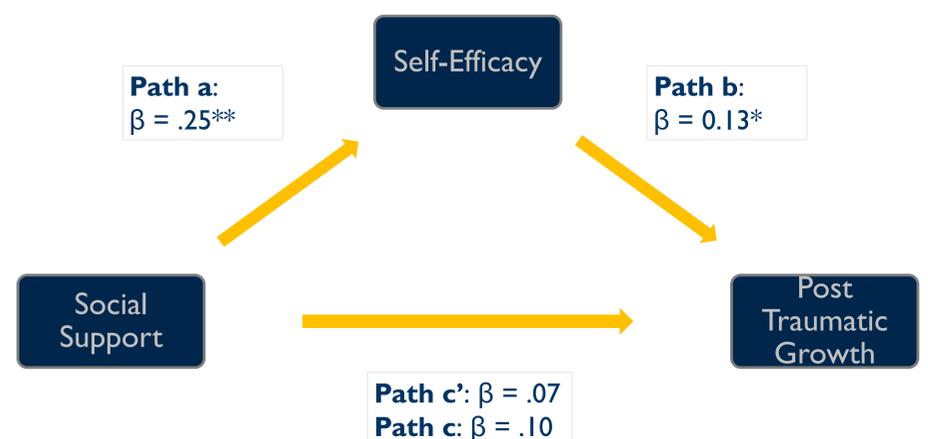
- (1) high perceived social support predicted higher self-efficacy beliefs and
- (2) high level of self-efficacy predicted lower secondary traumatic stress (Figure 1) and there was a statistical trend to predict higher posttraumatic growth (Figure 2).



Sobel test  $Z = -3.95, p \leq 0.001$

Figure 1. Mediation analysis testing if the effect of social support on secondary traumatic stress is mediated by self-efficacy beliefs.

Note: \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



Sobel test  $Z = 1.85, p \leq 0.1$

Figure 2. Mediation analysis testing if the effect of social support on post traumatic growth is mediated by self-efficacy beliefs.

Note: \* $p < .05$

## CONCLUSION

The findings suggested that self-efficacy may be an important resource in dealing with indirect traumatization and that social support operates through self-efficacy in predicting secondary traumatic stress. These results confirm enabling hypothesis (Schwarzer & Knoll, 2008) in the context of secondary traumatic stress.