Response to Traumatic Stress

# Compromised Work Performance

Street intervention workers described how their response to trauma can result in compromised work performance. Study participants reflected on how they might fall behind with administrative tasks such as data entry, grant reports, or team meetings especially after a shooting or homicide. Many described how they weren’t able to perform work tasks to the best of their ability or even avoided work tasks altogether. They admitted to avoiding engaging with clients, not making phone calls or checking in on their caseload, avoiding community events and outreach activities, even avoiding going in to the workplace. The fluid and dynamic nature of street intervention work may allow for outreach staff to detach from work for an extended period of time, where absenteeism and lack of client engagement may go unnoticed.

These actions are normal responses to the traumatic stress experienced as a result of violence intervention work. Organizations may reprimand workers for not completing job responsibilities, but these actions should signal to organizations that their staff may be in need of support in responding to traumatic stress.

*I was MIA from work for like maybe two months…I guess the nightmares were kicking in real hard. I was getting very violent nightmares-- having very violent nightmares, man. Blood, uh, lots of blood, lots of death, um, and it affected me to where I was MIA from work from January to February.*

# Food for Thought

* What practices are in place to monitor staff’s wellbeing and work responsibilities? (i.e. individual supervision, team meetings, data systems, checking in with participants)
* When someone on the team is having a hard time completing their work tasks, how is that identified and discussed with them?
* Do staff feel comfortable communicating with supervisors when they feel stressed out from work? Are supervisors equipped to respond in a supportive manner to staff when they are struggling with work tasks?