Response to Traumatic Stress

# Relational Distress

In the study, street intervention workers described how trauma exposure impacts their relationships, specifically their coworkers and their family.

**Coworkers:**

Street intervention workers gave examples of how their response to traumatic stress created challenges with coworkers while others reflected that when they were stressed, they felt unsupported within their organizations and developed negative opinions of their supervisors. The sources of conflict described by study participants included miscommunication, misunderstandings, feeling judged by a coworker, gossip and rumors, cliques within organizations, favoritism from supervisors, previous “beefs” based on one’s previous street affiliation and/ or street reputation, and/ or lack of respect for coworkers or leadership. These sources of conflict place a strain on teams and negatively impact street intervention work. It can even risk the safety of staff members when they are conducting mediations:

*You know, even times when, uh, guys would call me out at three in the morning telling me, "Hey, man. Is the situation going? I'll meet you there," then I get at the situation, they not there. So, doing this kind of work, you have to be really careful who you have around you and who you work with because it's got some points. I thought people trying to set me up when- when I get there and you ain't there and you even told me to get up out my bed and then go there and you're not there. What kind of stuff is that?*

**Families and Intimate Relationships:**

This research also highlighted how the stress that street intervention workers experienced on the job impacted their home life and relationships with family members and significant others. These negative emotions may be anger, frustration, paranoia, anxiety, or deep sadness. Not all family members were understanding or supportive of the work of the study participants. Some street intervention workers encounter prejudice or discriminatory opinions about the population they work with in their very homes. Encountering a negative attitude about street-involved men and women can be discouraging or demoralizing if it is occurring within one’s close networks and lead to a sense of alienation even while living under the same roof.

*My family doesn't really understand my work or what we do. I mean, they understand it, but my mom's from like straight up from Mexico and my dad is from the country. Like he's from Mississippi, so they don't understand what it is to live in the city and be seduced by, um, the street life, you know, they just think it's all bad decisions and, you know, you're just effing your life up and all that, but they don't understand what these influences– where these influences come from and how you're susceptible to them.*

As a result of the relational strain, several study participants admitted that they had many failed relationships, even divorce. This is noteworthy, as street intervention workers emphasize the importance of family and positive relationships in their own life transformation journey. It is possible that street intervention work is eroding the very support systems crucial to provide social and emotional support in a profession with high exposure to trauma.

# Food for Thought

* What opportunities exist to build trust, support, and effective communication systems within street intervention teams?
* When there is tension among team members, how is it identified and how is it addressed by coworkers and supervisors?
* Are there opportunities within individual supervision and/or team meetings for staff to share how their personal relationships are going?
* Does the team engage in open, social events where family members and friends can become familiar with the organization and coworkers?
* Are there ways in which the organization can help staff share information about street intervention work with their family members? (i.e. social media, news clips, celebratory events, etc.)