



PhD student:

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Research project:

Vicarious Trauma and Secondary Traumatic Stress Induced by Media Exposure among Migrants in Sardinia, Italy

Abstract:

Background

With the proliferation of mass media in both its traditional and digital forms, individuals are increasingly exposed to distressing, violent, and graphic content. Media exposure to traumatic events has been consistently associated with negative psychological outcomes, including increased stress, anxiety, and symptoms of traumatic stress.

Vicarious Trauma (VT) and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), which were originally studied among professionals working with trauma survivors, are examples of psychological responses to indirect exposure to traumatic events. Recently, media-induced VT and STS have been observed in several crisis contexts, including the COVID-19 pandemic, wars, and natural disasters. In particular, studies have shown that some populations, such as migrants who maintain strong emotional and cultural ties to conflict-affected countries of origin, are increasingly vulnerable to developing VT and STS through media consumption.

Objectives

This interdisciplinary PhD project investigates how media exposure to conflicts in countries of origin affects the mental health of migrant communities in Italy, with a focus on the Palestinian diaspora in Sardinia. Its specific objectives are to:

- Synthesize existing evidence on media-induced VT and STS through a systematic review.
- Adapt and validate a specific measurement tool (the Secondary Traumatic Stress Media-Induced Questionnaire – STSM-IQ) into Italian.
- Quantify the prevalence of VT and STS and their psychosocial correlates among migrants.
- Explore, through qualitative inquiry, lived experiences, representations of trauma, and coping strategies in the Palestinian migrant population of Sardinia.

Methodology

The project adopts a mixed-methods research design.

Phase 1: A systematic review will be conducted to synthesize studies that have investigated media-induced VT and STS.

Phase 2: The STSM-IQ will be translated, culturally adapted, and validated with a sample of migrants in Sardinia. Data will be collected on media exposure and the prevalence of VT/STS.

Phase 3: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a subgroup of Palestinian migrants to explore subjective experiences, cultural narratives of trauma, and coping resources. The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis.

Expected Results

The study is expected to yield an overview of the psychological effects associated with media exposure among migrants, with a focus on symptoms of VT and STS. The validation of the STSM-IQ in Italian will provide a valuable methodological contribution to national research. The qualitative



analysis will enrich understanding of the cultural meanings of trauma and resilience strategies in diasporic contexts. The findings will inform the development of culturally sensitive psychosocial interventions, prevention policies, and mental health support guidelines for migrants exposed to indirect trauma.