

She'll be right? - managing workplace stress and trauma in the T/I profession

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The greatest levels of workplace stress arise when high levels of responsibility are matched with low levels of control. This is certainly true of the translating and interpreting profession. Practitioners must convey information with extreme clarity and accuracy. However, there is no allowance for modifying words or contexts to “soften the blow” if the message is traumatic. Translators and interpreters are repeatedly exposed to traumatic material. What could be more distressing, for example, than having to explain a negative prognosis to the parents of a sick child, or interpret graphic details of a horrifying assault?

Traumatic events are those involving threats to physical and/or psychological well-being. Physical and temporal proximity to the event is not a prerequisite for its having a profound effect, as the global impact of 9-11 admirably illustrated. Many people were traumatised in their own homes by events that occurred on the opposite side of the world, involving people unknown to them. Translators and interpreters are highly vulnerable to vicarious traumatisation in the course of their daily work.

Additional workplace stressors may include:

- Being challenged by the dominant partner in a working relationship, where a doctor or judge, for example, may not understand the role and ethics of the T/I profession.
- Working in isolation, without the resources and supports of a collaborative environment.
- The unpredictability of the time and space needed for each assignment.



This presentation will examine the nature of workplace stress and trauma and its management in the T/I profession.

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