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Dirty Work: The Effects of Viewing Disturbing Media on Military Attorneys

By:

Natalie Lynn Sokol

A THESIS SUBMITTED

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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Dirty Work: The Effects of Viewing Disturbing Media on Military Attorneys

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DIRTY WORK: THE EFFECTS OF VIEWING DISTURBING MEDIA ON MILITARY
ATTORNEYS

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Abstract

This study examines the psychological effects of viewing disturbing media on JAG Corps attorneys. Twenty seven legal professionals who work with cases involving child pornography and sexual violence completed measures of secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD), burnout, perceptions of social stigma, and feelings of protectiveness and distrust towards others. A substantial number of participants reported poor well-being, though exposure to disturbing media was not predictive of these outcomes. However, defense attorneys and prosecuting attorneys differed significantly in perceptions of social stigma, which were linked to increased negative outcomes. Furthermore, qualitative results added to the growing pool of data related to methods of coping with exposure to disturbing media which have important practical implications for the legal professionals who engage in this work.

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CHAPTER 1

Dirty Work: The Effects of Viewing Disturbing Media on Military Attorneys

Over the past decade, criminal justice policymakers have turned a spotlight on sex crimes. Lawmakers at both the federal and state level have taken an increasingly “get tough” stance on regulations concerning the creation, distribution, and possession of media containing child pornography and other acts of sexual violence (Mears, 2008). The federally legislated Prosecutorial Remedies and Other Tools to End the Exploitation of Children Today (PROTECT) Act of 2003 prohibiting the production, distribution, and possession of pornographic images of children paved the way for new, supportive legislation at the state level. Many states have since changed their laws to require prison sentences for such crimes and have adopted a number of other policies to better facilitate the identification and prosecution of individuals who commit sex crimes. A few policies that have become commonplace include publicizing names and addresses of sex offenders, limiting areas in which sex offenders are allowed to reside, and the development of DNA databases to help law enforcement identify suspects (Sample & Bray, 2003)

Unfortunately, successful investigation and prosecution of sex crimes has become exponentially more complicated in recent years due to increasingly widespread access to and usage of the internet (Wells, Finkelhor, Wolak, & Mitchell, 2004; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Advances in file-sharing capabilities have made it easy for sex offenders to create and exchange images and videos depicting child pornography via the internet (Jewkes & Andrews, 2005). Some child pornography sites receive up to one million hits per month, and it is estimated that two hundred new images are posted daily (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). As circulation of disturbing media files containing child pornography and other acts of

sexual violence has rapidly increased, law enforcement officials have been forced to respond to this new challenge by investing more time and resources in the investigation and prosecution of internet-based sex crimes than ever before (Finklehor & Ormrod, 2004; Holt & Blevins, 2011; Krause, 2009). In 2009, 4,901 arrests for possession of child pornography were made in the United States; about 33% more arrests than were made in 2006 and nearly triple the number of arrests made in 2000 (Walsh, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2013; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2012). Unfortunately, these increased efforts to combat internet-based crime through the search and seizure of child pornography materials have resulted in many law enforcement officials being exposed to the same intense, disturbing media that they are working to remove from the public eye (Holt & Blevins, 2011; Jewkes & Andrews, 2005; Perez, Jones, Englert, Sachau, 2010).

Although there is now a small, growing body of research on law enforcement officials and exposure to disturbing media, they are not the only occupational group affected by this stressor (Morrison, 2007). Several other occupations notably affected by the increased circulation of disturbing media include customs officials, computer repair technicians, U.S. Postal Service inspectors, and legal professionals (Luft, 1985; U.S. Postal Service, 2012; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006; Vrklevski & Franklin, 2008). Despite research demonstrating that voluntarily viewing disturbing media results in a number of negative outcomes, very little research has investigated individuals who are required to view disturbing media as an essential function of their job (Perez et al., 2010). Considering that more cases involving child pornography are being brought to court than ever before, understanding the effects of viewing disturbing media may be particularly important for individuals involved in the litigation of child pornography cases. Federally charged cases

involving child pornography increased around 25% between the years of 2006 and 2009, and cases at the state level nearly tripled during this time (Wolak et al., 2012). For every one of these cases, defense attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, judges, and sometimes juries are required to carefully examine all evidence relevant to the case, including the disturbing media itself. Worse, they are often required to view disturbing images and videos multiple times in order to prepare their cases for court.

Research has long acknowledged that the work of lawyers and other legal professionals is stressful. High workloads, long hours, pressure to make important decisions, unpredictability of trial outcomes, and arguing with angry clients and families have all been cited as sources of work-related stress for legal professionals (Chamberlain & Miller, 2009; Levin & Greisberg, 2003). Several studies have examined the negative, stress-related outcomes associated with these stressors, such as anxiety and depression, burnout, social withdrawal, secondary traumatic stress, and vicarious trauma (Bandes, 2006; Chamberlain & Miller, 2009; Jaffe, Crooks, Dunford-Jackson, & Town, 2003; Levin & Greisberg, 2003; Vrkleviski & Franklin, 2008). However, no studies to date have focused specifically on the ways in the stress of being exposed to disturbing media affects the legal professionals involved in prosecuting or defending these cases. This gap in research is alarming, given growing evidence that exposure to disturbing media results in a number of negative outcomes. Thus, the present study will investigate the effects of viewing disturbing media on a sample of attorneys with the United States Military JAG Corps.

Traumatic Exposures in the Workplace

Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD) and Vicarious Traumatization

Many researchers have investigated the negative psychological and behavioral outcomes associated with exposure to traumatic events on the job (Figley, 1995, Fullerton, Evces, & Weiss, 1992; Gersons, 1989, Salston & Figley, 2003). One salient outcome of traumatic exposure at work (as well as in other settings) is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The most recent revisions to the American Psychological Association's DSM-5 classify PTSD as a Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorder, indicating that the onset of the disorder is preceded by a traumatic event or environmental factor (Friedman, 2013). Symptoms of PTSD usually include intrusive memories or re-experiencing the traumatic event, feelings of helplessness, avoidance of stimuli that trigger memories of the trauma, nightmares, and flashbacks. Clinical psychologists and other researchers have concluded that first responders working with victims of traumatic events (natural disasters, sexual assault, car accidents, military combat, etc.) are at risk for developing PTSD (Haugen, Evces, & Weiss, 2012; Fullerton et al., 1992; Gersons, 1989; Robbers & Jenkins, 2005). However, recently researchers have begun to recognize that professionals working in helping occupations may also be at risk for similar negative outcomes due to their indirect exposure to traumatic events through their close work with trauma victims (Bride, 2007; Figley, 1995; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). This indirect exposure to trauma and the negative outcomes associated with it have been defined as Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) which may result in Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder (STSD) when symptoms become severe enough.

Often referred to as "the cost of caring," STSD symptoms closely mirror those of PTSD with persistent, intrusive thoughts and avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma. Other STSD symptoms include loss of interest in life activities, difficulty sleeping,

and emotional disturbances such as feelings of anxiety, irritability, and difficulty concentrating (Bride, 2007). The first quantitative research studies on STS focused on professionals who interacted briefly with trauma victims, such as disaster relief workers or fire fighters, and somewhat less on those with closer, sustained relationships with trauma victims, such as therapists (Greisberg & Levin, 2003). However, subsequent research has shown that sustained, repeated interactions with trauma victims may put professionals such as Child Protective Services workers, therapists, and social workers at particular risk for developing STSD (Cornille & Meyers, 1999). There is growing evidence to suggest that STSD is also prevalent among law enforcement professionals and that their experienced symptoms may be especially severe; several studies have found that police officers displayed greater symptoms of distress and STS than mental health professionals (Greisberg & Levin, 2003).

To date, few studies have focused on legal professionals who also work closely with traumatized individuals. One study by Greisberg and Levin (2003) demonstrated that attorneys working with traumatized victims not only reported significant symptoms of STS, they also reported higher levels of STS than social workers and other mental health providers in the sample. A subsequent, larger study by Levin, Albert, Besser, Smith, Zelenski, Rosenkranz and Neria (2011) supported these results, finding that attorneys working with traumatized clients reported higher levels of STS compared to their administrative support staff members who worked in the same environment but had significantly less client contact. The lack of research on legal professionals is troubling, as these findings suggest that failure to acknowledge the potential for secondary trauma and

provide resources for coping may increase the detrimental effects of exposure (Morrison, 2007).

Another relevant construct in secondary trauma research is vicarious traumatization (VT), which refers to a transformation of an individual's worldview due to working with victims of trauma (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Whereas STSD describes psychological and emotional disturbances due to secondary exposure to trauma, VT involves maladaptive changes in the cognitive schemas that occur in an individual as a result of secondary trauma exposure. These changes in one's cognitive frame-of-reference occur in regards to the view of one's self and others, often in the areas of safety, trust, control, esteem, and intimacy (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). Despite these conceptual differences between STSD and VT, existing research has shown that there is sufficient overlap between the two variables to draw on both areas of research for the purposes of this study (Jenkins & Baird, 2002). Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) suggest that any occupation that requires empathetic interactions with trauma victims are at risk for VT, and it has been studied mostly among populations of therapists who help victims of violence, sexual assault, and incest, though healthcare providers, disaster response workers, emergency service personnel, and journalists have all been identified as at-risk occupations for VT (Follette, Palm, & Pulusny, 2004; Jenkins & Baird, 2002; Murray & Royer, 2004).

As with STS, there is some evidence to suggest that VT may be equally, if not more, prevalent among legal professionals compared to more commonly studied helping professions. As Murray and Royer (2004) point out, lawyers are exposed to the same traumatized victims, abusive history client reports, and general traumatic materials as the previously listed professions. Vrkleviskil and Franklin (2006) found that criminal lawyers

who worked frequently with traumatized individuals reported significantly higher levels of VT than non-criminal lawyers who did not with trauma victims. Similarly, criminal lawyers also reported higher levels of stress, depression, and negative cognitive changes in relation to personal safety, safety of others, and intimacy. When unaddressed, VT may lead to detachment from family and friends, disillusionment with the attorney's employing organization, and a less effective relationship with the client (Murray & Royer, 2004; Vrkleviskil & Franklin, 2006). More research is clearly needed regarding the prevalence and severity of VT among legal professionals and how it may affect their effectiveness at and outside of work.

Although there is only limited research exploring whether disturbing media exposure results in negative outcomes such as STSD and VT, the research that exists strongly suggests this relationship. Perez et al. (2010) found that forensic examiners working with disturbing media experienced higher levels of STS symptoms than other occupations such as social workers. Qualitative data from the same study revealed that law enforcement professionals, specifically computer forensics experts viewing evidence of violent crimes, reported negative changes in their worldviews (specifically feelings of general distrust in the public and increased protectiveness of loved ones), and that they attributed these changes to their work with disturbing media (2010). Furthermore, quantitative results linked this increased sense of protectiveness with higher reported levels of STS, suggesting that elements of both STS and VT are also prevalent among law enforcement professionals in addition to mental health professionals. A second study of law enforcement officers with disturbing media exposure (Divine, 2010) also found higher reported levels of STS than reported in previous research with social (Bride, 2007). Qualitative data collected about

work with disturbing media in Burns, Morley, Bradshaw, and Domene (2008) and Stevenson (2007) is also consistent in suggesting the prevalence of STSD and VT among digital forensic investigators and Stamm, Varra, Pearlman, and Giller (2002) suggests that VT may be aggravated by the severity of disturbing material to which a helping professional is exposed.

Burnout

A less acute but nonetheless concerning effect of working with trauma victims is burnout. Burnout refers to the feeling of being “at the end of one’s rope,” and is commonly experienced by individuals who have frequent or emotional interactions with patients, clients, or customers at work (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Maslach et al. (2001) identified three dimensions of burnout, including emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and a decreased sense of personal accomplishment at work. Emotional exhaustion refers to a depletion of emotional resources due to job-related demands. Cynicism can be described as overall indifferent or negative reactions to work-related situations, often accompanied by feelings of detachment from others. Lastly, a decreased sense of personal accomplishment occurs when one no longer feels that they are making valuable contributions at work. Burnout symptoms develop gradually over time, and can include both physical manifestations such as fatigue, poor sleep, and headaches, as well as emotional disturbances such as irritability, feelings of anxiety or depression, hopelessness, and aggression. Research has linked many negative outcomes to burnout, including but not limited to poor job performance, failing personal relationships, turnover intentions, and substance abuse.

Burnout is most commonly recognized in occupational groups that require frequent or emotional interactions with others such as social services, medicine, mental health,

teaching, and law enforcement (Chamberlain & Miller, 2009; Jenkins & Elliot, 2004; Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli & Peeters, 2000; Shelby, Stoddard, & Taylor, 2001; Thorpe, Righthand, & Kubik 2001). Given the frequent interactions with victims of trauma that legal professionals may experience on the job, it is not surprising that burnout is common among judges and attorneys; some evidence exists that attorneys may experience even higher caseloads involving traumatized clients than other mental health workers (Greisburg & Levin, 2003). These attorneys also reported higher levels of burnout, as well as more frequent intrusive thoughts about their cases, less pleasure and interest in everyday activities, and more sleep difficulties and emotional disturbances. In the largest study to date investigating attorneys working with traumatized individuals, researchers found that attorneys reported higher levels of burnout compared to their administrative support staff, a relationship which was mediated by longer working hours and greater contact with the traumatized clients (Levin et al., 2011). Lastly, Chamberlain and Miller (2009) suggested that many judges are also at high risk for burnout. In summary, research indicates a high prevalence of burnout among legal professionals, and suggests that exposure to trauma victims and related materials may be an important contributing factor.

Research also suggests that individuals who work closely with victims of sexual trauma are even more susceptible to experiencing burnout (Shelby, Stoddard, & Taylor, 2001). However, law enforcement professionals working with child pornography cases seem to differ from other helping professionals in their experiences of work-related burnout. While these individuals report higher levels of exhaustion and cynicism due to the nature of their work, they maintain a high sense of professional accomplishment in their work (Holt & Blevins, 2011; Morales, 2012; Perez et al. 2010). Research by Maslach (2003) suggests that

a possible explanation for this difference may lie with the tendency for different occupations to have different burnout profiles determined by work-related factors. For example, working in a job with a particularly taxing social component but clear work goals may result in exhaustion and cynicism, but not in a diminished sense of professional accomplishment (2003). Given these similarities, it is reasonable to believe that these work-related factors may explain the sense of personal efficacy maintained by attorneys even when exhaustion and cynicism increase.

Other Reactions to Disturbing Media

To further explore the effects of exposure to disturbing media, several studies have included open-ended response items that prompt participants to describe how their work has affected their daily lives and personal relationships. These personal accounts reveal a number of additional negative outcomes of work with disturbing media, including an increased awareness of exploitation of children via the internet, intrusive thoughts about work, feelings of isolation, an increased sense of protectiveness over others, concern about the well-being of other team members, increased general distrust of others, disruption of sexual activity, and feelings of general distress (Burns et al., 2008; Harms, 2011; Holt & Blevins, 2011; Perez et al., 2010; Stevenson, 2007). Two of these negative outcomes seem to be particularly relevant to research on disturbing media: an increased sense of protectiveness over others, especially loved ones and children, and increased general distrust of the public.

Dyregrov (1995) suggested that daily exposure to traumatized children might increase general distrust of humanity, and subsequent research has supported this view. Drawing on previous literature, Perez et al. (2010) developed the Reactions to Disturbing

Media measure to examine how exposure to disturbing media affects the relationships and general adaptation of employees. Results showed that increased protectiveness was positively related to STS symptoms, as well as to the exhaustion and cynicism subscales of burnout (Perez et al., 2010). In a qualitative study of Internet Child Exploitation (ICE) team members, Burns (2008) found that many investigators reported increased feelings of protectiveness of their own children, as well as others' children, due to exposure to images of child pornography. Participants described several different forms of protectiveness, including feeling "on guard" when they were out in public, carefully observing the behavior of adults around children, feeling a strong need to educate other parents about the dangers of the internet, and limiting their own children's activities out of fear for their safety. In the words of one participant, "I am far more paranoid now because I now know what they could do to my child (Burns et al., 2008, p.25)."

A second negative outcome that has been identified in research with disturbing media is general distrust of the public. Several studies of digital forensic investigators have identified increased general distrust of the public as an outcome of their work with disturbing media images (Burns et al., 2008; Stevenson, 2007). Similarly to protectiveness, Perez et al. found increased general distrust in the public to be positively related to STS symptoms as well as to the exhaustion and cynicism subscales of burnout (2010). Although no studies have examined these reactions among legal professionals in response to disturbing media, the results of one recent study examining legal professionals suggest that these outcomes may be relevant for attorneys as well. Vrkleviskil and Franklin (2006) found that criminal and non-criminal lawyers differed significantly in their perceptions of how safe their loved ones were, with criminal lawyers reporting lower scores. More research is

needed to better define and understand the extent to which exposure to disturbing media results in changes in attitude and STS symptoms among attorneys who work with disturbing media.

Defining Exposure

When examining the effects of exposure to disturbing media on attorneys, it is important to clarify what constitutes exposure and what features of that exposure might be most important. Unfortunately, to date there has been little consistency in the assessment of exposure to disturbing media. Although research findings on the effects of exposure to disturbing media at work has been fairly consistent; higher exposure results in increased negative outcomes for the viewers, researchers have yet to agree on what exactly defines “exposure.” Past studies have used varying measures of exposure, including total number of cases involving disturbing media, average percentage of total cases involving disturbing media, and time since first exposure (Cornille & Meyers, 1999; Harms, 2011; Perez et al., 2010). Still other studies have defined exposure to disturbing media using different types of exposure (video with or without sound, photographs, audio), or as the extent of personal contact with victims of trauma (Divine, 2010; Morales, 2010). No studies to date have examined whether time since last exposure to disturbing media has an effect on the prevalence or severity of negative outcomes.

While positive correlations have been found between many measures of exposure to disturbing media and negative outcomes, the overall picture is mixed. Harms (2011) found in a study of 100 law enforcement special agents that overall length of time working with disturbing media was not predictive of STS levels or burnout. Barnes (2013) found similar results with a sample of child pornography and exploitation workers. However, Perez et al.

(2010) found that overall length of time working with disturbing media was positively correlated with STS levels in digital forensics investigators. These results may be explained by overall exposure to disturbing media; the average number of disturbing media cases in Perez et al. (2010) was fifty two, whereas the average in the study by Harms (2011) was only ten. Though neither study found the total number of disturbing media cases worked on to be related to any dimensions of burnout or STS, the interaction between number of cases and overall time working with disturbing media was not explored (Harms, 2011; Perez et al., 2010). It is clear that additional research is needed to explore how different facets of exposure to disturbing media affect these negative outcomes among law enforcement professionals, and no studies to date have looked at these exposure variables among attorneys.

Social Influences on Traumatic Exposure at Work

Social Support

When examining the effects of viewing disturbing media at work, it is necessary to understand any potential mechanisms that may help to mitigate or exacerbate the negative effects associated with this work. A particularly important beneficial mechanism that has emerged in occupational stress research is social support. Although researchers have yet to agree on the exact mechanism, there is considerable evidence that social support from loved ones, coworkers, and even supervisors can have a positive impact and may serve as a buffer against many forms of occupational stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Jenkins & Elliot, 2004; Sargent & Terry, 2000; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999). Law enforcement professionals are no exception to the benefits that social support can offer; social support is negatively correlated with perceived organizational stress among law enforcement officers

(Graf, 1986), and is negatively correlated with PTSD symptoms (Stephens & Long, 1997). Social support also appears to be important for legal professionals, especially those working in criminal courts. One study found that criminal lawyers were twice as likely to seek peer support as non-criminal lawyers while judges in a second study of STS and burnout identified social support as a very important coping mechanism (Jaffe et al., 2003; Vrkleviskil & Franklin, 2006).

With respect to exposure to disturbing media, Perez et al. (2010) found that digital forensic investigators of child pornography cases who felt supported by loved ones reported lower levels of STS as well as exhaustion related to burnout, and also experienced greater professional efficacy. Similarly, Morales (2010) found that overall social support significantly predicted lower STS, exhaustion and cynicism related to burnout, and feelings of protectiveness and distrust. Thus, it is evident that social support may serve as an effective buffer against the negative effects of viewing disturbing media. Unfortunately, it appears that the potential benefits of social support may not be fully realized by individuals working with disturbing media.

Social Isolation and Social Stigma

Research suggests that there are a number of challenges to the social relationships of those who work with disturbing media. These challenges include concerns about sharing disturbing experiences with loved ones as well as perceiving a negative social stigma from others. Results from numerous qualitative studies (Burns, 2008; Perez et al., 2010; Stevenson, 2007) have shown that some workers exposed to disturbing media are hesitant to share their experiences because they simply did not wish to talk about them or they wished to spare loved ones from the horrible images that they were required to view. Those

individuals made a conscious choice to separate their traumatic work experiences from their personal lives. However, for others this was not a matter of choice. Many report being told by spouses and friends that they would rather not hear about the work at all (Burns et al., 2008; Holt & Blevins, 2011; Perez et al, 2010; Stevenson, 2007). Several participants also shared stories of significant others expressing outright disgust with their work, or even jealousy in response to hearing about work involving pornographic images (Perez et al., 2010). In summary, research suggests that not all loved ones are supportive of their partner or friend's work with disturbing media and those who perform this work are aware of these negative perceptions.

Furthermore, the isolation, disgust and condemnation that some may feel from loved ones may be reinforced by the public at large. Investigators interviewed by Stevenson (2007) reported that they felt stigmatized even by other members of the law enforcement community because of their work. If workers exposed to disturbing media feel openly condemned by fellow officers because of the work that they do, it is reasonable to expect that they would also feel openly condemned by the general public as well as loved ones for the work that they perform. Even more troubling, existing evidence on attorneys, particularly defense attorneys, suggests that they generally suffer from negative social stigmas (Bandes, 2006; Krieger, 1999). Extrapolating from that evidence, it is reasonable to expect that attorneys who work with disturbing media may suffer from more intense social stigma than other attorneys, especially those defending accused sex offenders. The following section will discuss work-related stigma known as "dirty work," and how it applies specifically to the sample of this study.

Stigma and "Dirty Work"

Based on public opinion surveys, one might expect Americans to appreciate the role of legal professionals in putting sex offenders behind bars. Recent polls show that the American public generally supports harsh sanctions for sex offenders (Mears, 2008). One recent poll found that 94% of Americans agree or strongly agree with the view that sex crimes should be top priority for law enforcement efforts in the U.S., and 89% agreed that distribution of child pornography is grounds for incarceration (Mears, 2008). Despite this public support for a legal system that takes a tough stance on sexual crimes, many individuals involved in the litigation of sex offenders cannot escape the social stigma attached to child pornography. This may be due to the public perception that disturbing media depicting child pornography is dirty or tainted, and therefore those who work with such materials are unavoidably tainted as well.

In order for society to function, there are many different tasks that must be performed in a wide range of occupations. Inevitably, not all jobs are glamorous; some are actually quite the opposite. In 1971, Hughes coined the phrase *dirty work*, as he observed that there are certain jobs in society in which workers are stigmatized despite the fact that their work serves to better the society in which they live (Ashford & Kreiner, 1999). There are many different types of occupations that are considered dirty work, but they all have one thing in common: they lead others to question how the individuals who perform such work are able and willing to do their job (Diacoff, 2008). Expanding on Hughes' definition, Ashford and Kreiner (1999) identified three different ways that dirty work can be tainted. Physical taint occurs when an occupation is associated with garbage, death, or other subjects that provoke feelings of disgust (e.g. butcher, mortician, and janitor). Moral taint occurs when an occupation is generally regarded as sinful or deceptive in nature (e.g. stripper,

psychic, and police interrogator). Lastly, social taint occurs when an occupation involves regular contact with people or groups that are already stigmatized (e.g., prison guard and public defender). Attorneys in general do seem to be aware that their work is tainted to a certain degree; Krieger (1999) describes the common caricature of a lawyer as shallow, greedy, and dishonest, alluding to the moral taint that attaches itself to lawyer work.

However, attorneys involved in child pornography cases likely also face physical taint due to their association with disturbing media itself. Federal law enforcement officers in a study by Harms (2011) reported feeling stigmatized simply because they were required to view disturbing media in order to build a case against a perpetrator who created, distributed, or owned the material. More research here is needed, but it is reasonable to assume that the awareness of that stigma likely also exists for attorneys working with disturbing media.

The Dirtier Work of Defense Lawyering

Although all attorneys face a certain degree of moral taint, as suggested by the common caricature of a lawyer as immoral, attorneys who work with disturbing media likely also experience physical taint due to the pornographic media with which they work. Defense attorneys, however, may face more severe perceptions of moral taint surrounding their work defending the accused, as well as social taint not faced by prosecuting attorneys resulting from this association with stigmatized individuals. Despite the fact that defense attorneys are an integral part of the legal system that tries and sentences sex criminals, their role in this process is seldom appreciated. Bandes (2006) states:

Whereas doctors treating pediatric AIDS patients receive societal support and even admiration, criminal defense attorneys are constantly called to account for their

representation of the reviled—not just by the lay public but by others in the legal arena as well (p.10).

The stigmatization that defense attorneys face from the general public is not new; many defense attorneys are well aware that the public opinion of their work is generally negative (Krieger, 1999). Defense attorneys in the U.S. suffer a wide variety of accusations regarding the nature of their work, ranging from living in complete denial of the criminal acts committed by their clients to actively collaborating with criminals to ensure their acquittal (Bandes, 2006). For the defense attorney working with defendants accused of sex crimes involving children, the path to public acceptance is even more difficult. Murray and Royer (2004) state that while prosecuting lawyers are seen as advocates for a point of view about certain historical facts, defense attorneys are seen as advocates for the client themselves; in this case, an alleged sex offender. According to this view, it may be nearly impossible for a defense attorney to separate themselves from the association with the alleged criminal acts, and inevitably, from the social taint that goes along with them.

Given the strong evidence that social support plays an important role in mitigating the negative outcomes that occur as a result of viewing disturbing media, the social stigma surrounding the work of attorneys is troubling. If attorneys are facing a lack of social support from loved ones and coworkers, or worse, open stigmatization as a result of their work with disturbing media, they may be particularly vulnerable to the aversive effects associated with working with disturbing media. Lastly, there is reason to believe that defense lawyers may suffer from more intense social stigma due to poor public perceptions of their work defending individuals accused of sexual crimes. No studies to date have examined the extent to which attorneys involved in disturbing media cases experience

feeling stigmatized by others due to the nature of their work. This research is critical in understanding how these individuals can better cope with stress of working with disturbing media.

The Current Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of viewing disturbing media on members of the United States Military JAG Corps. JAG attorneys and judges represent members of the U.S. Military in military courts throughout the country. In the case of JAG defense attorneys, much like public defenders, they do not have the option to turn down clients; if a military member requires counsel they will provide it. JAG defense attorneys commonly deal with cases involving sexual assault and child pornography. When working with cases involving child pornography, prosecuting and defense attorneys spend hours viewing disturbing media images, video, and audio accompanied by a digital evidence expert. All contraband related to the case must be carefully examined, and cases can involve up to several terabytes of disturbing media involving pornographic images of children. Attorneys must study images very closely, sometimes multiple times, and work with digital evidence experts to determine whether photos and other media meet the specific legal requirements that classify them as child pornography (e.g., age of the children pictured, whether images are photographed or computer-generated). The high percentage of cases involving disturbing media and the task requirements for examination of the evidence result in exposure to disturbing media for the JAG Corps members participating in this study.

Hypotheses

***Hypothesis 1a:** Exposure to disturbing media will be positively correlated with STS symptoms as well as with the emotional exhaustion and cynicism subscales of*

burnout, but negatively correlated with professional efficacy. Measures of exposure include: total number of cases involving disturbing media, average percentage of total cases involving disturbing media, time since first exposure, or time since last exposure to disturbing media.

Hypothesis 1b: *As a supplemental analysis, I will explore which of these exposure variables are the best predictors of STS and burnout.*

Hypothesis 2: *Exposure to disturbing media will be positively correlated with feelings of protectiveness and general distrust of the public.*

Hypothesis 3a: *Defense attorneys will report higher perceptions of social stigma than prosecuting attorneys.*

Hypothesis 3b: *Stronger perceptions of social stigma will be positively related to STS and burnout.*

Exploratory Analysis

I will also examine responses to open-ended questions about work with disturbing media and working as a defense attorney in such cases to evaluate the themes that emerge from these responses.

CHAPTER II

Method

Participants

Participants were United States military JAG officers (defense attorneys, prosecuting attorneys, and military judges) working in either the Air Force or Navy. Ages ranged from twenty to sixty years old, with 82% between the ages of thirty one and fifty. The majority of the participants were male (67%) and married (78%), with 88% having spent at least two years working with the JAG Corps and 63% having worked over five years with the JAG Corps. About half (51%) of participants reported having children under the age of 18. The participants were recruited by a United States Air Force psychologist who was cooperating with implementation of the study. The psychologist identified units in which individuals may have been required to view potentially disturbing media as evidence in investigations and trials. Two participants were removed from all analysis due to outlier scores on the number of cases involving disturbing media. A third participant was removed from all analysis due to only partial completion of survey items. Twenty seven participants successfully completed the survey.

Procedure

Once it was determined which participants were eligible to participate in the study, an electronic link to the survey was sent via email. Two reminder emails were also sent to encourage participation. Participants completed a variety of measures as well as demographic items and qualitative items. All measures were administered through a secure, online survey system through which participants completed both the consent form and the survey.

Measures

Exposure to disturbing media. Participants responded to four items about their exposure to disturbing media, including how many cases they had worked on involving child pornography and other forms of sexual violence, how long ago they were first exposed to disturbing media at work, and, on average, the percentage of their cases that involve disturbing media. Lastly, participants will report how recently they had last worked on a case involving disturbing media. If participants had been exposed to disturbing media, they were asked to leave these items blank. Response scales to these items can be found in the Appendix.

Secondary traumatic stress. Symptoms of STS was measured using the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS; Bride, Robinson, Yegidis, & Figley, 2004). The STSS consists of 17 items grouped into three subscales, Intrusion (five items), Avoidance (seven items), and Arousal (five items). Items are scored on a five-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating “never” and 5 indicating “very often.” Example items include “I thought about my work when I didn’t intend to” (Intrusion), “I wanted to avoid working on some cases” (Avoidance), and “My heart started pounding when I thought about work” (Arousal). For the purposes of this study, and consistent with factor analytic findings by Ting, Jacobson, Sanders, Bride, and Harrington (2005), the subscales were combined into one overall score for STS. Reported reliability for the overall STS scale is .91.

Burnout. Burnout was measured using the Maslach Burnout Inventory- General Survey (MBI-GS; Maslach et al., 1996). The MBI-GS is made up of 16 items measuring

Exhaustion (five items), Cynicism (five items), and Professional Efficacy (six items). Scores on items ranged from 0 (never) to 6 (everyday). Example items from each subscale include “I feel used up at the end of my workday” (Exhaustion), “I have become more cynical about whether my work contributes to anything” (Cynicism), and “I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job” (Professional Efficacy). Internal consistency reliability for this measure ranges from .71 to .90 for each subscale.

Other reactions to disturbing media. Participants also completed a set of items developed by Perez et al. (2010) assessing how exposure to disturbing media affects the social relationships and general adaptation of those who work with it. Items were scored on a five point scale, with 1 indicating “strongly disagree” and 5 indicating “strongly agree.” Items were grouped into three subscales: protectiveness, distrust of the general public, and perception of social stigma.

The protectiveness subscale (five items) assessed the extent to which participants felt an increased need to protect children, their own and others, from harm. An example item is, “Since working with the JAG Corps, I have become nervous when my child is around other adults.” The distrust of the general public subscale (six items) assessed the extent to which participants experienced increasingly negative feelings about people in general. An example item is, “I have difficulty trusting other people's motives since I started working with the JAG Corps.” These scales have not undergone a formal validation process, however the reported reliabilities in past research for distrust of the public (.86) and protectiveness (.89) are acceptable (Perez et al., 2010). The perception of social stigma subscale assessed the extent to which participants felt that friends, family, or the general public disapproved of

their work. An example item is, “I am concerned about the way that others (outside of the Navy JAG Corp) perceive me because of the work that I do.”

Demographics. Participants were asked to respond to items indicating their age, gender, marital status, whether or not they have children under the age of eighteen, highest level of education completed, military pay grade, military branch, and tenure in the JAG Corps.

Qualitative questions. Lastly, participants were asked several open-ended questions to further elaborate on their experiences working with disturbing media. Questions included were:

1. What is the hardest thing about your work with disturbing media?
2. What helps you the most in coping with your work with disturbing media?
3. What is the most beneficial thing that the JAG Corps could do to help you cope with the negative aspects of your work with disturbing media?
4. What do you find most difficult when you work with defendants in cases involving disturbing media (or when you worked with them in the past)?
5. When working with an individual accused in a case involving disturbing media (or when you worked with them in the past), what did you find most helpful in dealing with the stressors related to the case?

CHAPTER III

Results

Preliminary Analyses

I first performed a reliability analysis by calculating Cronbach's alpha for each scale. These results are displayed in Table 1. I also examined item statistics for each scale to determine the final item content. Due to low item-total correlations, the one item ("My friends and family object to the work that I do") was dropped from the Social Stigma scale. The removal of this item resulted in better reliability for that scale. All reliabilities and item-total correlations for other scales were acceptable.

Descriptive Results

Descriptive statistics for all outcome variables are reported in Table 1. Correlations between all outcome variables were also calculated, and are reported in Table 2.

According to Bride (2007), STS scores above 49 indicate high levels of STS and scores above 38 indicate moderate levels of STS. The mean STS score for this sample was 36.08, indicating that participants in this sample reported STS scores approaching moderate. However, it is notable that 37% of participants ($N=10$) reported at least moderate levels of STS, and 15% of participants ($N=4$) reported high levels of STS. In addition, mean STS levels in this sample exceeded those of prior studies involving STS among social workers ($M=29.5$; Bride et al. 2004), and slightly exceeded those of STS among law enforcement officers ($M=35.55$; Divine, 2010).

Mean scores for all three burnout scales in this sample are presented in Table 1. Means on the emotional exhaustion subscale (16.77) fell in the high burnout range as identified by Maslach et al. (1996), with means on the cynicism (10.96) and professional

efficacy (28.62) subscales both falling in the high end of the moderate range. It should be noted high scores on the professional efficacy indicate that the participant was not burnt out whereas low scores on this scale indicate the presence of burnout, which is the opposite of the other two scales. These indicate that the legal professionals in this sample are experiencing notable levels of burnout.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for All Outcome Variables

Scale	Mean	SD	Range	Alpha
STS	36.08	13.87	21-72	.94
EMOEXH	16.77	8.40	3-27	.96
CYN	10.96	8.38	1-29	.90
PEFF	28.62	6.29	22-42	.88
SS	9.51	3.24	4-16	.72
Distrust	17.20	5.07	9-30	.86
Protect	18.33	3.65	13-25	.70

STS= Secondary Traumatic Stress, EMOEXH=Maslach Burnout Inventory Exhaustion Subscale, CYN= Maslach Burnout Inventory Cynicism Subscale, PEFF= Maslach Burnout Inventory Professional Efficacy Subscale, SS= Social Stigma, Distrust= Distrust of General Public, Protect= Protectiveness

Table 2
Correlation Matrix for All Outcome Variables

	STS	EMOEXH	CYN	PEFF	SS	Distrust
STS						
EMOEXH	.60**					
CYN	.51*	.65**				
PEFF	-.12	-.45*	-.69**			

SS	.66**	.39*	.29	-.04		
Distrust	.55*	.26	.23	.09	.57**	
Protect	.34	.52*	.25	-.20	.05	.25

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1a predicted that exposure to disturbing media would be positively correlated with STS symptoms as well as with the emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy subscales of burnout. Measures of exposure included: total number of cases involving disturbing media, percentage of total cases involving disturbing media, time since first exposure, or time since most recent exposure to disturbing media. Hypothesis 1a was not supported (see Table 3). The total number of cases involving disturbing media was negatively correlated with scores on the cynicism subscale ($r = -.34, p < .05$), indicating an opposite relationship of that predicted. Total number of cases involving disturbing media was also negatively correlated with professional efficacy ($r = -.34, p < .05$), which was also the opposite of the predicted relationship between those two variables. None of the other exposure variables were significantly correlated with any of the negative outcome variables, although there was a moderate effect size for total number of cases and emotional exhaustion, as well as for total time spent working with disturbing media and emotional exhaustion. Given these results, the supplemental analyses associated with Hypothesis 1b were not performed.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix of Exposure Variables and STS and Burnout

	STS	EMOEX	CYN	PEFF
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TotalNumCases	-.03	-.31	-.34*	-.34*
LongAgo	-.17	-.20	-.03	-.03
Percent	-.03	-.10	-.15	.15
Recent	.04	.20	.05	-.17

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Hypothesis 2 predicted that exposure to disturbing media would be positively correlated with feelings of protectiveness and general distrust of the public. Hypothesis 2 was not supported (see Table 4). None of the exposure variables were significantly correlated with scores on either the distrust or protectiveness scales, though a moderate effect size was detected for total number of cases and feelings of protectiveness.

Table 4

Correlation Matrix of Protectiveness, Distrust, and all Exposure Variables

Exposure Variable	Distrust	Protect
TotalNumCases	-.13	-.24
LongAgo	-.12	-.15
Percent	-.31	-.15
Recent	.16	.01

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Hypothesis 3a predicted that defense attorneys would report higher perceptions of social stigma than prosecuting attorneys. Means and standard deviations are reported in Table 5. An independent samples t-test showed that the mean score for defense attorneys (M

= 10.36) was higher than that of prosecuting attorneys ($M = 8.5$). Results of a one-tailed, independent samples t-test, $t(23) = 1.55, p = .03$, showed that defense attorneys report significantly higher perceptions of social stigma than prosecuting attorneys. Hypothesis 3a was supported.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics for Social Stigma Scale

	N	Mean	SD
Defense	11	10.36	2.77
Prosecuting	14	8.5	3.16

Hypothesis 3b stated that stronger perceptions of social stigma would be positively related to STS and burnout. Hypothesis 3b was mostly supported (see Table 2). Scores on the social stigma subscale were positively correlated with both STS scores ($r = .66, p = .00$), as well as with the emotional exhaustion subscale ($r = .39, p < .05$). Social stigma and cynicism were not significantly correlated. However, results indicate that a relationship does exist between perceptions of social stigma and negative outcomes associated with viewing disturbing media.

Qualitative Results

Lastly, as an exploratory analysis I examined responses to open-ended questions about work with disturbing media and working as a defense attorney in such cases to evaluate the themes that emerge from these responses. Participants were asked seven open-ended questions regarding their work with disturbing media. Eighty-nine percent of participants responded to at least one of the open-ended questions ($N=24$). Two of the questions related to how work with disturbing media affected participants' relationships with

family and friends, and with children specifically. While twenty-nine percent of respondents felt that their work with disturbing media had not significantly affected these non-work relationships ($N=8$), 31% reported feelings of increased protectiveness over their own children. For example, one respondent stated “I’m much more paranoid about people. I would never let my kid go to a slumber party or be alone with a man.” Another respondent commented, “I’m very concerned about my nieces/nephews on the internet.” Four respondents also reported feelings of discomfort around their own children, with comments such as: “Kids kind of bounce all over the place and don’t watch where they’re putting their hands and don’t care if they have clothes on or not. I feel like normal people understand this and find it funny. I don’t. I get weirded out and immediately want them to “put your shirt down” or flip out if they accidentally touch me somewhere. I don’t think that’s healthy for them.” Lastly, three participants reported issues with sexual intimacy as a result of their work with disturbing media, indicating that they had experienced “problems of intimacy at home with my wife” or “a hard time being intimate with my husband.” These open-ended responses were consistent with previous survey results from Perez et al. (2010), in which the most common response was increased protectiveness over loved ones, and children in particular. Themes of discomfort around children as well as sexual intimacy are also consistent with previous qualitative research on work with disturbing media (Burns et al., 2008; Harms, 2011; Holt & Blevins, 2011; Perez et al., 2010; Stevenson, 2007).

Unsurprisingly, respondents most frequently indicated that viewing disturbing media involving abuse, especially of children, was the most difficult part of their work (26%), e.g., “Watching children be brutalized and abused” and “Knowing that the children are victims and being helpless to ‘rescue’ them.” Two respondents stated that viewing video footage

was particularly difficult, and one respondent reported that “Often it is the sound that comes with the movies” that was most difficult for them. Three respondents also agreed that the most difficult aspect of their work was related to being unable to forget what they had seen during the work day. One respondent commented, “You can't "unsee" the images. I hate having to show the images of a sexual assault exam to a victim, but I know they need to see all of it. The first time I go through an interview with a sexual assault victim, I usually have nightmares about the victim's stories that night.” Interestingly, one respondent reported that “The hardest thing is the realization after a long period of time that I've somehow become desensitized to it through so many small steps that I'm not in the same place I was mentally about it before starting this job.” Other response themes included emotional and sleep disturbances, feelings of injustice in the world, and difficulty dealing with the first time viewing disturbing media.

Respondents reported a variety of different coping methods that they employ to deal with their negative reactions to disturbing media. Congruent with previous research ((Jaff et al., 2003; Holt & Blevins, 2011; Perez et al., 2010; Vrkleviskil & Franklin, 2006) the most common coping mechanism (36%) reported was talking with coworkers who understand the issues related to work with disturbing media. Some indicated that they found humor helpful, with one respondent admitting that “My coworkers are good to have around. They are the only people I can talk to about it. Sadly...we make inappropriate jokes to try and make it better. But I could never tell anyone else.” Others focused more on empathizing with someone who understands, e.g., “Generally, talking with others that have also been in the same position. Many of my coworkers are cynical about things but in a weird way that helps. They have been through it as well many times and the fact that others have worked

through these issues helps me work through what I am dealing with.” Another common coping mechanism that has not previously appeared in disturbing media research was related to focusing on the legal aspects of a trial involving disturbing media and bringing sexual criminals to justice. For example, one respondent stated that they coped by “moving the case forwards towards prosecution,” and another by “Recognizing that it is a necessary evil in order to accomplish this type of prosecution and being able to compartmentalize.” Still another individual felt that it was “The hope that someone may be held accountable and some child may be protected/recompensed” that helped them the most in coping with disturbing media-related stressors. Four other respondents indicated that they also engaged in some form of emotional detachment or intentional “forgetting” when coping with viewing disturbing media. Other responses included faith, exercise, alcohol abuse, and time with family.

Responses to the question of how the JAG Corps could help their legal professionals cope with the negative aspects of working with disturbing media fell consistently into three categories: providing supportive services, providing training in preparation for work with disturbing media, and offering stress-reduction options. Providing supportive services was the most common response, with 27% ($N=5$) respondents indicating a desire for increased availability of or access to counseling. Several participants also expressed concerns about confidentiality, pointing out that “Currently, the military provides mental health assistance, but it is not confidential so I personally would never use it.” One respondent felt that counseling services “...would have to be mandatory, because if we ever volunteered it would reflect poorly on us and our careers.” Sixteen percent of respondents ($N=3$) expressed a desire for training prior to beginning work with disturbing media, e.g. “Training and

developing child pornography experts who are experienced at handling such difficult cases.” Lastly, 22% of respondents indicated a desire for stress relief options, such as “A pass day upon completion of such a case,” some resource available for those who would like to decompress, or “tools to cope with stress such as military one source which we regularly talk with clients about.”

The attorneys and judges in this study differ from all previous studies on work with disturbing media in that their exposure to disturbing media includes a human component that other occupations do not: personal interaction with the accused. Although both prosecuting attorneys and judges have some minimal exposure to the defendant, I was particularly interested in the experience of the defense attorney who must work closely with defendants accused of crimes involving disturbing media. Two open-ended questions addressed the difficulties and the coping methods used for dealing with stress related to working with these defendants. When asked which aspects of this work were the most difficult, three strong themes emerged. Difficultly working with defendants they believed were guilty of crimes related to disturbing media due to feelings was a concern for 50% ($N=4$) of respondents, e.g. “If I believed they were guilty, I frankly despised them on a personal level.” Equally as many respondents ($N=4$) felt very differently towards these clients, indicating that they found the lack of understanding about sexual abuse and the possibility of rehabilitating sexual criminals the most difficult part of working with defendants. Responses included comments such as, “Although I hate child porn, I don't believe they should go away for years of prison or be labeled as sexual offenders. So few people understand these issues, and the system treats them harshly with no way to weed out monsters from people who are struggling with their own person abuse issues,” and “In my experience, most defendants I

have been fortunate enough to work with have been recalcitrant and were not 'evil' people. Just people with a problem that left some hope of being rehabilitated." Lastly, two respondents expressed concern for their clients in that, "Many of my CP (child pornography) clients have been actively suicidal."

When asked what they found most helpful in dealing with the stressors related to a case when working with an individual accused in a case involving disturbing media, respondents fell into two broad categories: emotional detachment, often through focusing on the legal aspects of their job, and healthy outlets such as exercise and social support. Sixty seven percent ($N=6$) of respondents indicated some kind of emotional detachment or focus on the law. Example comments included: "I think my role as an ADC is to provide zealous [*sic*] representation. There is a separation between what I do and what I believe in my heart," and, "For me, it was just business. I did my job to the best of my ability and let the chips fall where they may." Fifty six percent ($N=5$) of respondents took a different approach, listing healthy outlets for stress such as "Keep up normal friendship associations and activities" and "Physical exercise." Lastly, one respondent reporting that her preferred coping method was "Keeping in mind that every person has problems - whether it's drugs, lying, stealing, cheating, or addictions to pornography. As a defense counsel, I was very mindful not to make judgments on any accused's criminal actions - including possessing, viewing, making this type of disturbing stuff."

Upon further examination, responses to the previously mentioned questions regarding difficulties and coping methods when working directly with those accused of disturbing media-related crimes revealed an unexpected pattern. In order to examine this, I first indicated whether their response to the first item generally confirmed that they struggled

with working with the accused or whether they did not. I then indicated whether their response to the second item indicated an emotionally detached or law-focused coping strategy, or whether it indicated a healthy coping strategy. Lastly, I paired responses to these two items by participant to see if any patterns between struggles/doesn't struggle and detached or law-focused/healthy responses existed. Indeed, a pattern began to emerge. Respondents who struggled less working with the accused reported coping methods tended to indicate healthy outlet coping strategies versus emotional attachment. However, respondents who indicated a more negative, emotional response towards their accused clients tended to report using coping mechanisms that involved emotional detachment, often through a focus on the law. Although few concrete conclusions can be drawn from exploratory, qualitative data such as this, these results do suggest a potential relationship between stress, emotional response, and coping mechanisms for defense attorneys worked with those accused of crimes involving disturbing media. It could be inferred that respondents who indicated that a lack of understanding from others around their defendant's situation and overall hopeful attitude towards their defendant's future seem to be struggling less with the human interaction component of working with the accused than those who indicated a more negative, emotional response. Potential explanations and future directions for this finding will be explored further in the discussion section of this paper.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

Exposure to disturbing media at work has been associated with a number of negative outcomes, including STSD, burnout, and increased feelings of protectiveness over others and general distrust of the public. Unfortunately, many legal professionals experience significant exposure to disturbing media, with some spending hours carefully and repeatedly examining up to several terabytes of photos and video evidence in preparation for a case involving child pornography or sexual violence. The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of viewing disturbing media on the attorneys and judges of the United States Military JAG Corps.

Summary of Findings

I found that the legal professionals in this study were experiencing substantial STS, with mean scores slightly exceeding those of previous disturbing media studies sampling from law enforcement officers. Participants were also were experiencing substantial burnout, with scores on emotional exhaustion falling in the high range and scores on cynicism following closely behind. Participants in this sample also followed a trend seen in previous samples involving work with child pornography in that, despite high levels of emotional exhaustion and cynicism, their scores on professional efficacy were relatively high. While it is clear that the legal professionals in this study are undoubtedly experiencing negative, stress-related outcomes, I was unable to predict STS and burnout with the exposure to disturbing media variables used in my survey. Only one significant correlation was found between negative outcomes variables and exposure to disturbing media, and it was the opposite of the

relationship that I predicted; the total number of cases involving disturbing media was negatively correlated with scores on the cynicism subscale.

There are a few possible explanations for the lack of significant relationships between exposure to disturbing media and negative outcomes. One clear disadvantage is that the sample size for this particular study was quite small, which makes identifying significant relationships more difficult. Another explanation is that exposure levels were perhaps not high enough among the participants in this sample to detect significant differences; the majority of participants (75%) reported that only 1-20% of their cases involved work with disturbing media. This is clearly an important consideration when interpreting the results of this study, as overall exposure in this sample is quite low. A second possibility is that a better method of defining and measuring exposure exists that was not used in this study. Qualitative results suggest that viewing disturbing media videos is the most difficult part of working with disturbing media, as well as sound. These results are consistent with past studies on effects of disturbing media (Stevenson, 2007); perhaps the format of disturbing media material should be considered in the future as an exposure variable to predict negative outcomes.

Thirdly, it is possible that some mediating or moderating variable exists in the relationship between exposure to disturbing media and negative outcomes that I did not discover in this study. Previous studies on the effects of viewing disturbing media have identified social support, particularly from co-workers, as an effective buffer against negative, stress-related outcomes (Morales, 2010; Perez et al., 2010). Qualitative results from my sample were also consistent with these findings. Talking with coworkers who understand the issues related to work with disturbing media was the most commonly

reported coping method, with explanations including themes of empathy, humor, and unwillingness to tell non-work loved ones because, “I don't want them to have the same images in their heads that I do.” Social support was not examined as a moderating variable in this study, which may explain why no relationship between exposure, STS, and burnout was found. Regardless, the moderately high STS levels found in a sample as small as this do suggest that attorneys and judges are experiencing secondary traumatic stress at a higher rate than other professionals. Future research should focus on identifying predictor variables for STS and determining if exposure to disturbing media may still be one of them.

Similar to the analyses involving STS and burnout, I failed to find a significant relationship between exposure to disturbing media, feelings of protectiveness, and general distrust of the public. Many of the previously mentioned explanations apply to these non-significant results; small sample size, low overall exposure, inappropriate measures of exposure, and unidentified buffering variables all provide potential explanations. Despite being unable to predict distrust and protectiveness with my exposure variables, I did find that feelings of distrust were strongly correlated with both STS as well as perceptions of social stigma. These results suggest that perhaps trusting others and feeling trusted, or accepted, by others are related constructs that may suffer as a result of exposure to traumatic events, even when that exposure is secondhand. In addition, feelings of protectiveness were positively related to the emotional exhaustion subscale of burnout. Although the relationships between the negative outcomes of STS, burnout, social stigma, protectiveness, and distrust cannot be fully understood based on this study, it is clear that these relationships warrant future research.

I also predicted that defense attorneys would report higher perceptions of social stigma than prosecuting attorneys. This proved to be true for the attorneys in this sample, a finding which many have important implications for future studies in this area. Research on social stigma and dirty work suggests that defense attorneys who work with those accused of crimes involving disturbing media may face more severe perceptions of moral, physical, and social taint than their fellow prosecuting attorneys (Ashford and Kreiner, 1999; Bandes, 2006; Krieger, 1999; Murray & Royer, 2004). Given the findings from Hypothesis 3a, results of Hypothesis 3b are particularly concerning for defense attorneys; social stigma was positively correlated with both STS as well as emotional exhaustion among participants in this sample. Future research should attempt to better understand the nature and direction of these relationships and investigate whether perceptions of social stigma may hinder the ability of defense attorneys to cope with the stressors related to viewing disturbing media at work.

The qualitative data collected in this study was quite consistent with past research studies on work with disturbing media. Common negative reactions to work with disturbing media included increased feelings of protectiveness over loved ones and children, decreased distrust in others, discomfort around one's own children, emotional disturbances, and issues with sexual intimacy. Unsurprisingly, participants also reported that observing the sexual abuse, especially of children, and then being unable to forget what they had seen was the most troubling part of their work with disturbing media. This responses support a growing pool of research that those who work with disturbing media do pay a price, and that researchers must continue to seek a better understanding of how these individuals are affected.

Many of the coping methods reported by participants were also congruent with previous research, such as talking with co-workers, emotional detachment, faith, exercise, and alcohol. However, another common coping mechanism that has not previously appeared in disturbing media research was related to focusing on the legal aspects of a trial involving disturbing media and bringing sexual criminals to justice. Interestingly, this theme was also expanded upon in other open-ended questions related specifically to the human side of working with defendants accused of sexual crimes. Six out of nine respondents report using some form of emotional detachment, many times a focus on the law, as a coping mechanism to deal with the stress of working with defendants. Not only this, but a pattern emerged for participants who also reported the most difficult aspects of working with these defendants. Respondents who seemed to struggle less in working with the accused (i.e., those with an overall hopeful attitude towards their defendant's future) tended to utilize healthy coping methods, such as exercise and social support. However, coping responses for respondents who seemed to struggle more in their work with the accused and indicated a more emotional, negative response towards their defendants tended to favor the emotional detachment/focus on the law approach. Some potential explanations for this finding are discussed below.

As a professional group, attorneys are encouraged to remain detached from the cases they handle (Vrklevskil & Franklin, 2006). It has been suggested that those in the legal profession have a general discomfort or lack of experience in dealing with the emotional demands of working with clients (Bandes, 2006; Silvers, Portnoy, & Peters, 2004). Indeed, much of the literature investigating emotional adaptation among attorneys to date can be found in psychology or clinical law publications as opposed to legal journals. Bandes argues

that this is representative of a long-standing professional philosophy of the legal system being built around rational, moral, and ethical questions that leave little room for the consideration of human emotions (2006). Krieger (1999) notes that even as early as law school, students express the understanding that they are expected to detach from their own ethical beliefs and intimate emotions if they are to remain objective and effectively practice law. Not everyone agrees with this view; Murray and Royer (2004) argue that some level of emotional engagement with the client is necessary in order to earn their trust and confidence, build a working relationship, and effectively represent them in court (2004). However, the separation of the head and heart in the legal system endures.

Several theories have been proposed to explain the emotional detachment encouraged among legal professionals from their work. Bandes (2006) suggests that perhaps acknowledging the emotional aspects of being a lawyer contradicts the very essence of the law as disciplined, rational, and rigorous. Some attorneys may fear that treading into the murky waters of human emotion in the courtroom may be seen as weak or unprofessional (Bandes, 2006; Caplan, 2012). Another contributing factor may be a gap in coursework addressed by law schools. Although content on stress associated with legal work and the emotional toll of working with clients is often included in curriculum, Caplan (2012) argues that most schools fail to educate law students in coping techniques and resources for dealing with these stressors. Regardless of the root of the problem, the traditional idea of attorneys as detached and emotionless may be unsuitable for legal practices involving consequences of human suffering, resulting in negative outcomes for both the attorney as well as the client (Murray & Royer, 2004). If defense attorneys feel as though a professional precedence of silence prevents them from discussing the emotional aspects of their work with the accused,

they may fail to benefit from an essential form of social support and therefore be ill-equipped to effectively cope with the stress of viewing disturbing media. Future research should focus on collecting quantitative data regarding emotional detachment among lawyers as a coping mechanism, and the extent to which it may or may not be maladaptive for their well-being.

Limitations

A clear limitation of this study is that I was only able to collect survey responses from 27 participants. A sample of this size limits the analyses that I was able to conduct and also the power of those that were conducted to uncover significant relationships between the variables I investigated. A larger scale study with greater numbers of legal professionals who work with disturbing media is needed to better understand the effects of viewing disturbing media at work, and provide more confidence in the results of this study. A second limitation of this study was that overall exposure to disturbing media was lower among participants than anticipated. This lack of variability in the exposure variables inherently results in difficulty identifying differences in negative outcomes based on exposure to disturbing media. Future studies should strive to include more legal professionals with more varied experience in working with disturbing media.

Additionally, there are a few methodological limitations to this study. The first is that data was collected through self-report measures, which may have resulted in inaccurate survey responses. Secondly, control groups were not available to isolate the effects of exposure to disturbing media. Future studies should include attorneys who work in similar conditions and environments but do not work at all with disturbing media material in order to rule out attorney-specific factors that may be resulting in substantial levels of STS and

burnout, as well as the other negative outcomes examined in this study. Additionally, a longitudinal design for studies involving exposure to disturbing media would be ideal; understanding how STS, burnout, and changing perceptions of social stigma, distrust, and protectiveness over time would shed light on the nature of the relationships between these variables in a way that the cross-sectional design and correlational results of this study cannot. Lastly, while measures for feelings of protectiveness and distrust have been used in past studies and display reasonable reliabilities, these scales have not been formally validated. In addition, the scale used to measure social stigma in this study used a combination of items that had not been formerly grouped together as a subscale. Future studies should work to refine and develop these scales to more accurately and completely capture the nature of these constructs.

Practical Implications

Qualitative results related to coping with disturbing media may prove to be useful to the JAG Corps and other legal entities in better supporting attorneys and judges who working with disturbing media. Respondents expressed a desire to have access to both training services prior to starting their work with disturbing media, as well as support services once their work had begun. Drawing from qualitative data related to the most difficult aspects of working with disturbing media, mandatory training courses could be offered to prepare new JAG attorneys for their work by warning them about the types of images and videos they may have to view, discussing how viewing disturbing media may impact their relationships with others, and teaching positive coping strategies. Training could also prepare attorneys for the social stigma that is attached to work with disturbing

media, focusing on ways to cope with such perceptions and navigate the topic of work in social situations. These training sessions could also outline the benefits of seeking counseling to deal with negative reactions to disturbing media.

Secondly, support systems such as counseling and stress management services could be developed drawing again qualitative data results. A key theme that appeared throughout comments in this study was a concern about confidentiality; it seems clear that many JAG attorneys would be much more comfortable accessing mental health services if such services were mandatory, or if they could be sure that it would not reflect poorly on their military career. Potential strategies to address changing attitudes towards accessing mental health services and confidentiality within the military goes beyond the scope of this paper, but the JAG Corps could consider requiring some counseling from all JAG attorneys. Doing so would encourage those who could really benefit from such services but do not due to fear of it reflecting poorly on their careers.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effects of viewing disturbing media on a sample of attorneys with the United States Military JAG Corps. Although negative, stress-related outcomes such as STS and burnout could not be predicted based on exposure to disturbing media, the legal professionals in this sample reported substantial levels of both STS and burnout. Furthermore, defense attorneys reported significantly higher levels of perceptions of social stigma than prosecuting attorneys, which was in turn related to higher levels of STS, emotional exhaustion, and cynicism. Qualitative results supported many findings from past research related to work with disturbing media, and hinted at a relationship between difficulty working with those accused of crimes involving disturbing media and coping

methods for dealing with that stress. Further research in this area is critical to better understand the effects of viewing disturbing media at work, and develop coping resources for those affected by performing this work.

CHAPTER V

References

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