

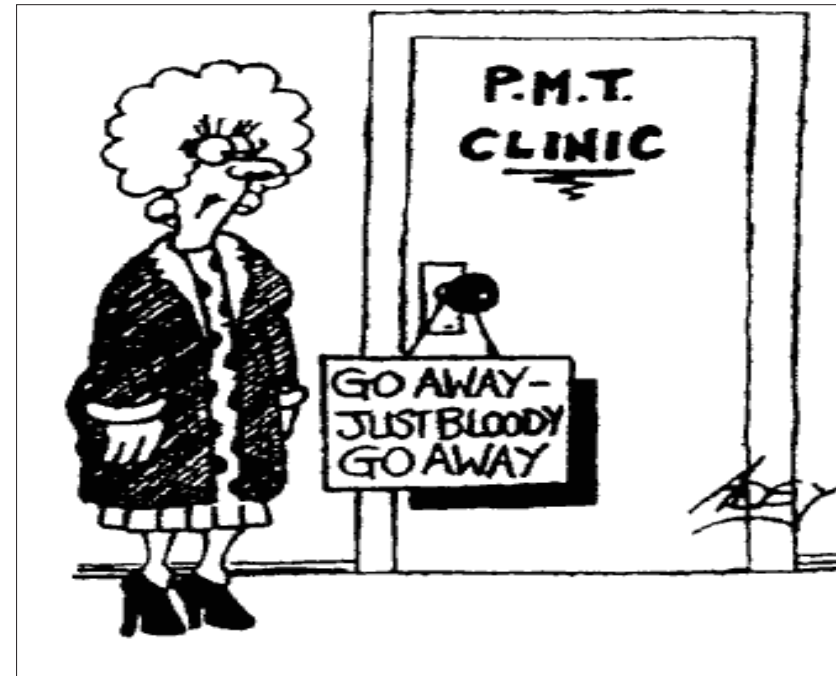
Styles of Humour & Secondary Traumatic Stress Among Mental Health Workers

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INTRODUCTION

Background

- Numerous studies have indicated that sense of humour might have a positive effect on psychological well-being, especially in the face of life stressors such as diagnosis of cancer¹, exams² or a difficult working environment³.
- Conversely, other research suggests that use of humour might be associated with adverse psychological symptoms such as distress⁴ and emotional exhaustion⁵.
- Mental health workers are particularly at risk of being affected by high levels of stress⁶ and secondary traumatic stress⁷.
- Secondary traumatic stress is defined as “stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person” (8, p.10).



Objective

- The present study examines whether there is a relationship between use of different styles of humour and secondary traumatic stress among mental health workers:
 - Whether “negative” (Aggressive & Self-defeating) styles of humour are related to higher levels of secondary traumatic stress
 - Whether “positive” (Affiliative & Self-enhancing) styles of humour are related to lower levels of secondary traumatic stress

METHOD

Participants

- 81 mental health workers (51 women, 22 men, 8 unknown)
- Mean number of years worked in mental health = 9.4, SD = 9.1, (range 0,5 to 36 yrs)

Measures

- Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale⁹ (STSS). Three subscales: Intrusion, Avoidance, Arousal.
- Humour Styles Questionnaire¹⁰ (HSQ). Four subscales: Affiliative, Self-enhancing, Aggressive & Self-defeating style of humour.

Procedure

- Sampling method: purposeful criterion sampling
- Participants recruited within different mental health settings: intensive care, acute unit & community mental health. Workers from private & charity organisations as well as NHS.
- Participation was voluntary and respondents received no remuneration.

RESULTS

Results of Pearson’s r correlation and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis indicate that styles of humour are related to the levels of secondary traumatic stress and that direction of the relationship differs depending on which of the four humour styles is considered.

Pearson’s r correlation coefficients between HSQ scales and STSS Total

Weak but statistically significant correlation between STSS Total and Aggressive ($r = 0.284, N=81, p<0.01, 1\text{-tailed}$) & Self-defeating ($r = 0.222, N=81, p<0.05, 1\text{-tailed}$) humour styles.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis with STSS Total Score as criterion (Chart 1)

- Model was significant by ANOVA ($F_{4,76} = 2.664, p < 0.039$) and accounted for 7.7% in the variance of Total Secondary Traumatic Stress Score (Adjusted R Square = 0.077)
- No single predictor was significant

Variance of STSS Total Score

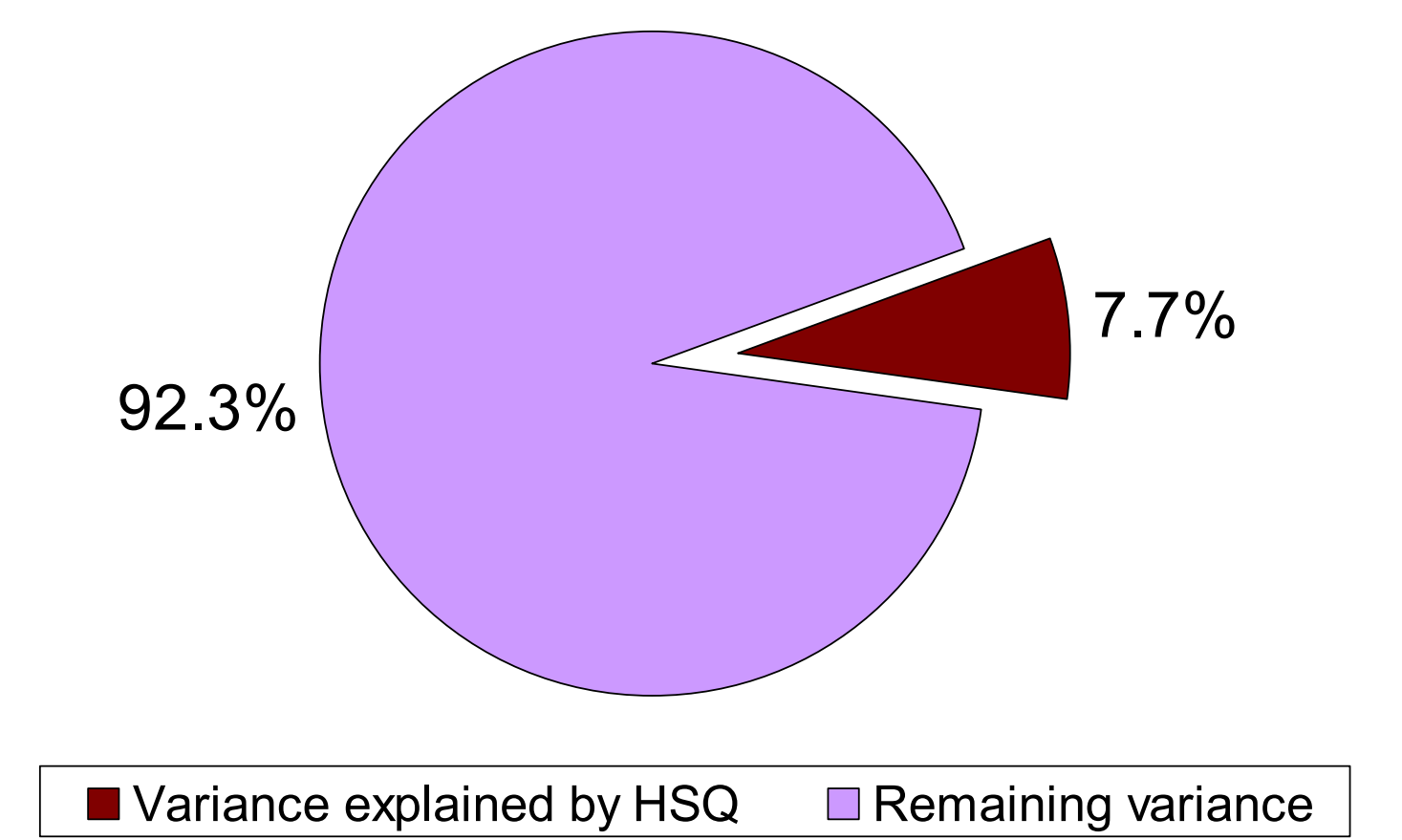


Chart 1

Variance of Intrusion

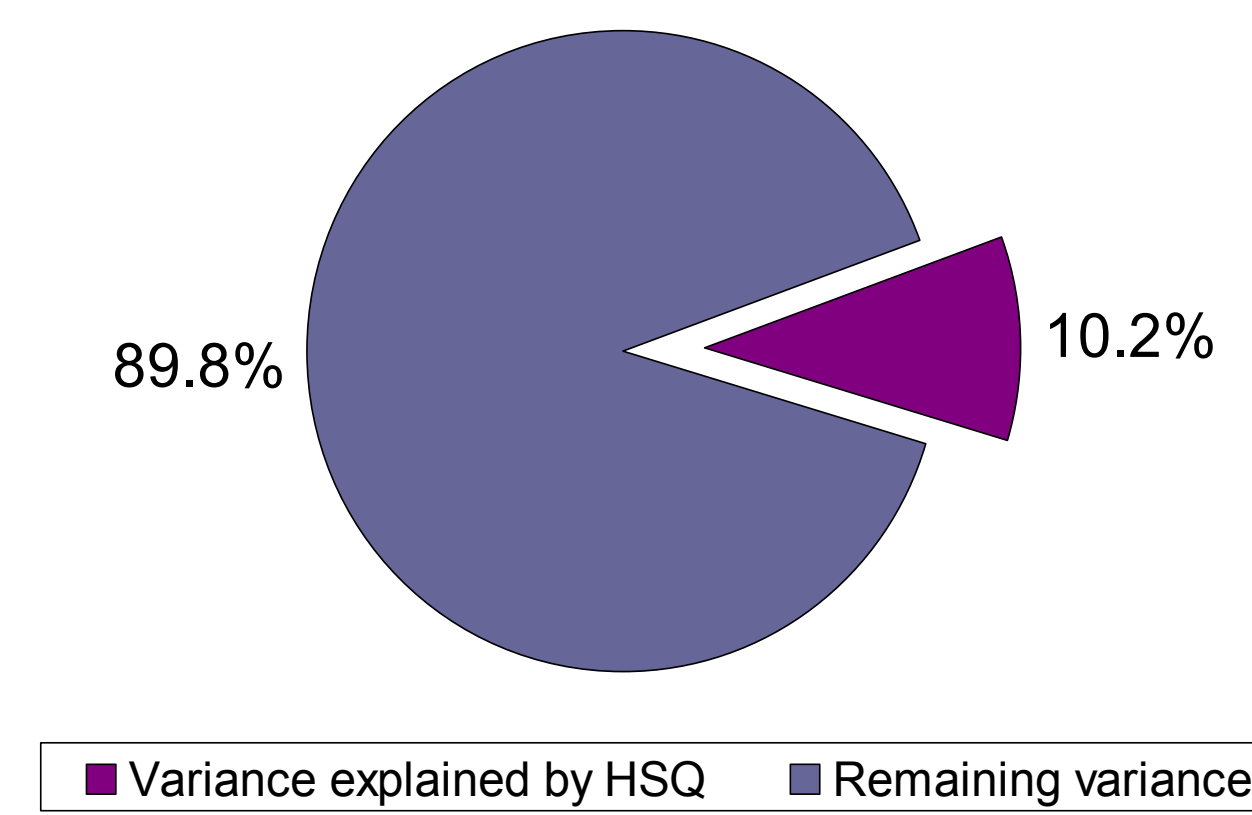


Chart 2

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Intrusion as criterion (Chart 2)

- Model was significant by ANOVA ($F_{4,76} = 3.275, p < 0.016$) and accounted for 10.2% of the variance of Intrusion (Adjusted R Square = 0.102)
- Self-enhancing style of humour was the only significant predictor (-0.258)
- In line with predictions the sign of the Standardised Coefficient Beta was negative

Chart 3

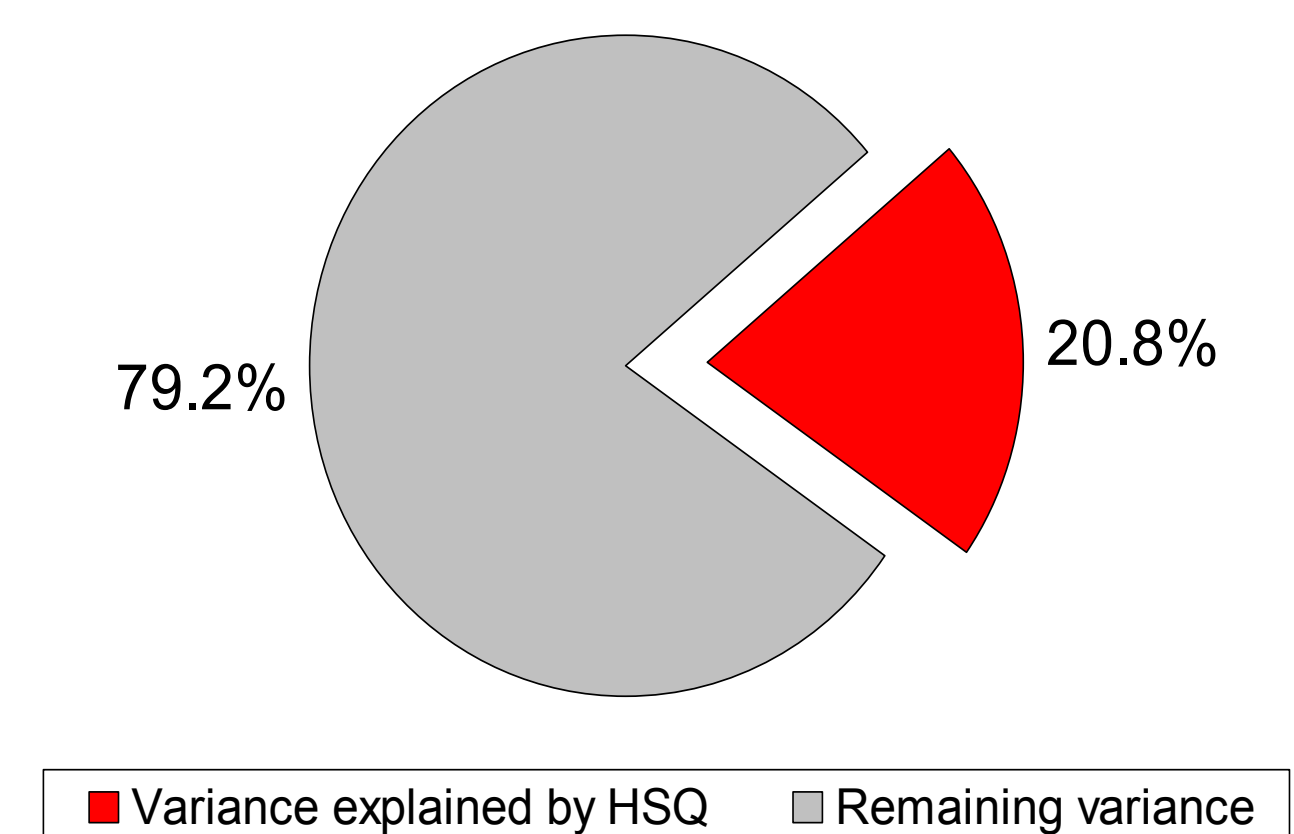
Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Avoidance as criterion

- With Avoidance as criterion the overall model wasn’t significant by ANOVA ($F_{4,76} = 1.211, p = .313$).

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Arousal as criterion (Chart 3)

- Model was significant by ANOVA ($F_{4,76} = 6.245, p < 0.001$) and accounted for 20.8% in the variance of stress Arousal
- 2 significant predictor variables: Self-enhancing and Aggressive humour style
- Aggressive style of humour was the highest predictor (0.356), followed by Self-enhancing (-0.235)
- The negative sign for Self-enhancing and positive sign for Aggressive humour was in line with the expectations.

Variance of Arousal



DISCUSSION

- Self-enhancing style of humour might serve as protective factor preventing the increase of Arousal and Intrusion
- Self-enhancing humour by style helps to process negative information through Cognitive Reinterpretation: humour exaggerates and amplifies potentially traumatic life events to the point of absurdity and therefore puts the situation back into perspective
- Aggressive humour style is related to higher levels of Arousal
- Relationship between the humour and stress is more complex than previously thought:
 - Does the inclination to use the Aggressive or Self-defeating style of humour contribute to the increase in the levels of stress?
 - Does the use of Aggressive and Self-defeating humour serve a regulatory function in stress reduction?

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