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## Telephone crisis support workers' functional impairment related to symptoms of psychological distress before and after completing a shift on the crisis line

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# Telephone crisis support workers' functional impairment related to symptoms of psychological distress before and after completing a shift on the crisis line

## Abstract

Abstract presented at the 2016 Social Sciences Higher Degree Research Student Conference, 11 November, Wollongong, Australia.

## Keywords

workers', functional, impairment, related, symptoms, telephone, psychological, before, distress, crisis, support, line, shift, completing, after

## Disciplines

Education | Social and Behavioral Sciences

## Publication Details

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# Afternoon Session

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**Title:** Telephone crisis support workers' functional impairment related to symptoms of psychological distress before and after completing a shift on the crisis line

**Presenter:** Taneile Kitchingman

**Psychology**

**Location:** 20:2

**Time:** 14.00-14.20

**Background and aim:** Research indicates that frequent empathic engagement with others in distress places helping professionals at risk of experiencing functional impairment related to elevated personal symptoms of psychological distress, including the delivery of sub-optimal care to patients. Recent cross-sectional studies suggest that this is also the case for volunteer telephone crisis support workers. This study builds on existing research by examining telephone crisis support workers' functional impairment related to symptoms of psychological distress before and after completing a shift on a crisis line, identifying mechanisms of impairment at each time point.

**Methods:** A concurrent mixed-methods, repeated measures study was conducted with a representative sample of 124 Lifeline Telephone Crisis Supporters (TCSs). Participants completed three surveys: 1) directly before; 2) directly after; and 3) one week after completing a shift on the national crisis line. Surveys included standardized measures of functional impairment and symptoms psychological distress. A subset of 18 TCSs also participated in a semi-structured interview exploring the impact of their role on their psychological wellbeing and functioning.

**Results:** A significant proportion of participants reported functional impairment related to symptoms of psychological distress. Significant differences in functional impairment and symptom severity were detected, and were associated with different mechanisms, across time points.

**Conclusion:** The results of this study warrant the deliberate management of telephone crisis support workers' functional impairment related to symptoms of psychological distress. Implications for telephone crisis support practice, including the development and/or modification of existing service strategies to optimise the psychological wellbeing and delivery of support to callers, are discussed.

**Biography:** Taneile Kitchingman is a PhD (Clinical Psychology) candidate at the University of Wollongong. She holds a Bachelor of Psychology (Hons I) degree (2012).