

Telling Stories of Trauma: The Impacts of Interpreting Museum Collections and Exhibitions



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Exposure to traumatic material may result in stress for museum workers who are involved with the collection and care of items in a museum or relating difficult narratives to visitors of the museum. The goal of this study is to quantify the psychosocial factors in a museum setting and the effects of exposure to potentially traumatic material. Only a small percentage of the participants reported not encountering a situation while performing their job that they consider to be emotionally disturbing or traumatic in nature. Recalling accounts of individuals who have been victims of crime, discrimination, etc. is the situation most frequently reported to be disturbing in nature. Nearly two thirds of participants stated that they have taken action to address the effects of stress they are experiencing on the job. Very few participants seek help from an employee assistance program. Talking with a therapist/psychologist or a friend are the most common methods of dealing with stress experienced at work. An understanding of the stress and psychological trauma experienced by museum workers will help aid in the development of intervention strategies to improve the working conditions of museum workers.

Biography:

Dr. Mark Wilson is a clinical assistant professor for the Occupational & Environmental Health Sciences and the Biomedical Sciences programs in the School of Health Sciences at Purdue University. He received a B.S. and M.S. in industrial hygiene from Purdue University, a Doctor of Chiropractic (D.C.) degree from National University of Health Sciences., and a Ph.D. in Public Health, with a concentration of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences, from the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Holly Cusack-McVeigh is a Professor of Anthropology and Museum Studies at Indiana University Indianapolis (IUI). She holds appointments as a Public Scholar of Collections and Community Curation and as a Professor of Native American and Indigenous studies. Her research focuses on cultural heritage, repatriation, and toxic heritage. She has worked in the cultural heritage and preservation fields for decades, supporting Native American and Indigenous communities in Alaska, the continental US, Canada, Haiti, New Zealand, Peru, and South Africa.