Preventing Burnout: Understanding the Impact of Compassion Fatigue

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The Concept of Compassion Fatigue

**Compassion (Stress) Fatigue:**

- A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain (Adams, Boscarino, & Figley, 2006).

- The **negative aspects** of helping others who have experienced suffering (Hudnall Stamm, 2009)

- **Often experienced by:** emergency workers, first responders, disaster relief workers and disaster site clean-up crews, health care professionals, social service workers, police officers, firefighters, military personnel, clergy, teachers, attorneys, airline and other transportation staff etc.
Work-related traumatic stress (Hudnall Stamm, 2009)

- **Primary traumatic stress:** due to the direct target of an event.

- **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS):** is a negative feeling driven by fear and work-related secondary exposure to extremely or traumatically stressful events due to a relationship with the primary person.

- **Vicarious traumatization:** a special form of countertransference stimulated by exposure to the client's traumatic material.
  - A transformation in the self (and world view) from empathic engagement with traumatized clients and their reports of traumatic experiences. (Courtois, 1993).
Elements of Compassion Fatigue

• The symptoms of **Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS)** are usually rapid in onset and associated with a particular event.
• Symptoms may include:
  • Being afraid
  • Having difficulty sleeping
  • Having images of the upsetting event pop into your mind
  • Avoiding things that remind you of the event
Elements of Compassion Fatigue

• **Burnout:**
  • Physical and emotional exhaustion
  • Frustration and anger
  • Cynicism
  • Depression and hopelessness
  • Lowered sense of self-efficacy that is attributable to work-related stress.
  • The negative feelings of *burnout* usually have a *gradual onset*. 
Elements of Compassion Fatigue

• **Factors in workplace** that promote **burnout** include:
  • Lack of control over responsibilities
  • The feeling that your efforts do not make a difference
  • Work overload
  • Lack of recognition
  • A non-supportive work environment.

• **Burnout** can result in increased absenteeism, reduced productivity, and risk of illness.
Elements of Compassion Fatigue

• Both **Burnout** and **Secondary Traumatic Stress** share **negative** affect.

• **Burnout** is about being **worn out**.

• **STS** is about being **afraid**.
Compassion Fatigue

• **Compassion fatigue** can take a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional toll on people who experience it.

• Common **symptoms** of compassion fatigue include:
  • Chronic physical & emotional exhaustion
  • Depersonalization
  • Feelings of inequity toward the therapeutic or caregiver relationship
  • Irritability
  • Feelings of self-contempt
  • Difficulty sleeping
  • Weight loss
  • Headaches
  • Poor job satisfaction

“The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.”

Dr. Naomi Rachel Remen

https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/psychpedia/compassion-fatigue
Compassion Fatigue

• Compassion Fatigue is **not** a diagnosis.

• People can experience negative effects of secondary exposure **without** developing a psychological disorder such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

• However, people may have a **diagnosable level** of PTSD or some other mental, emotional, or physical disorder that is likely linked to their experience of compassion fatigue. (Pearlman & Carnigi, 2009; Stamm & Figley, 2009; Stamm, Figley & Figley, 2010).

• An individual’s **schemas and beliefs, support systems, history of trauma and illness, and personal situations** also impacts their level of compassion fatigue and satisfaction.
Compassion Satisfaction

- **Compassion satisfaction** is about the pleasure you derive from being able to do your work.
- The positive aspects of helping
  - Pleasure and satisfaction derived from working in helping, care-giving systems.
- May be related to:
  - Providing care
  - To the system
  - Work with colleagues
  - Beliefs about self
  - Altruism
Compassion Satisfaction-Compassion Fatigue Model

Professional Quality of Life

Compassion Satisfaction

Compassion Fatigue

Burnout

Secondary Trauma
Measuring Compassion Satisfaction & Compassion Fatigue: The *Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL)*

- A 30 item **self-report** measure of the positive and negative aspects of caring.
- **Screening tool** for stress-related health problems.
- The ProQOL has shown to be a **valid measure** of Compassion Satisfaction and Compassion Fatigue.
- Used for individual use to **create awareness** on where to put one’s energy to **increase resiliency**.
- **Organizational planning:** to help organizations find ways to maximize the positive aspects, and reduce the negative aspects, of helping.
- **Supportive Supervision:** used as information for discussions.
- Compassion Fatigue has **two subscales:**
  - **Burnout**
  - **Secondary Trauma**
Mitigating Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

- We can learn to manage on a psychological level and enhance our self care and coping skills.
- The organizations that employ us can be a positive resources through the provision of education, job supports, and sensitive supervision.
The Organization

- Organizational culture: norms, values, meaning systems and traditions (Caringi and Lawson, 2009)

- Organizational climate: structure, policies, leadership, and reward systems (Caringi and Lawson, 2009)

- Organizational justice – a term coined by Greenberg in 1987. It has to do with employee perception of the decisions agency makes along with how the agency behaves. Does the agency appear to be fair and to promote equity?

- Perceived organizational supports
Studies Concerning Organizational Impact on Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

“The Impact of Organizational Culture on Employees’ Job Burnout” by Kheirandish, Farahani and Nikkhoo (2016).

- Burnout is associated with organizational culture

“Frank just up and exploded. I hope I never get that burned out.”
Studies Concerning Organizational Impact on Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

Human Services Context

- An important pioneer in social work studies on the effects of organizational culture in the field of mental health is Charles Glisson, PhD, University of Tennessee. Although his work focuses on mental health organizational culture, the ramifications are relevant to all areas of human service practice.
- Glisson and colleagues developed a measure of mental health organizational culture that is the proprietary property of the University of Tennessee Children’s Mental Health Research Center. This measure is called the OSC (Organizational Social Context). It took 30 years to develop and has been used in numerous studies.
- The result of Glisson, et al. corpus of work shows that OSC scores are related to: burnout, staff turnover, quality of service, use of evidence-based practice. My own work has found a correlation between OSC scores and measures of client satisfaction with agency workers’ care.
Studies Concerning Organizational Impact on Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout


- Although this research is specific to the field of HIV, the findings of organizational culture and burnout do span many areas of practice.

- The results found that team work and peer support significantly decreased the experience of burnout.
“Exploring Individual and Organizational Factors Contributing to Compassion Satisfaction, Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Burnout in Domestic Violence Service Providers” by Kulkarni, Bell, & Hartmann (2013)

The study used a web based survey of domestic violence service providers to measure their perception of the organizational factors of workload, control, reward, sense of community, fairness, and organizational values. The results of these were correlated with outcome measures of burnout, secondary traumatic stress & compassion satisfaction.
Studies Concerning Organizational Impact on Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

“Secondary Traumatic Stress and Licensed Clinical Social Workers” by Caringi, Hardiman, Devlin, & Stanick (2017)

✓ These researchers focused on predicting how certain organizational factors and peer support affects rates of secondary stress.
Studies Concerning Organizational Impact on Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

What do study respondents recommend that organizations do to mitigate their stress?

- job sharing
- Working in team settings
- Case staffing teams
- Supervision groups
- Work improvement teams
Studies Concerning Organizational Impact on Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

“Indirect Trauma: Implications for Self Care, Supervision, the Organization, and the Academic Institution” by Carolyn Knight (2013)

- Describes the manifestations of secondary traumatic stress, vicarious traumatization and compassion fatigue

- What about burnout? Knight does not overtly consider this, but those who research this topic agree there is a lot of overlap between secondary stress, vicarious traumatization, compassion fatigue, and burnout. On one hand secondary stress, vicarious traumatization & compassion fatigue can cause burnout, and on the other hand they are manifestations of burnout.
Studies Concerning Organizational Impact on Secondary Stress, Vicarious Trauma and Burnout

Knights overview of organizational research:

- Organizational support appears to lessen the impact of secondary stress, vicarious trauma, and compassion fatigue while a lack of support does the opposite. When workers suffer these phenomena, clients also suffer.

- Education on secondary stress, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout does indicate that such interventions increase workers’ sense of mastery which enables effective coping.
Knight’s Implications for Supervision

- Supervisors need to encourage supervisees to discuss the affect their work is having on them and empathically screen for signs of secondary stress, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout.

- The challenge in regard to the above “affective check-in” by the supervisor, is the need to maintain appropriate boundaries. This is about supervision and not about therapy.

- Supervisors should be prepared to help supervisees understand what they are experiencing and to identify appropriate coping strategies.
Knight’s Implications for Organizations

- Regularly schedule group sessions
- Mentor new workers
- Encourage supervision that takes account of affective issues and supports workers
- Structure team meetings to include an emotional check-in
- Provide education about secondary stress, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout
- Provide wellness education
- Assign cases so that challenging ones are evenly distributed
How do I know my organization is doing well?

- Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Organizational Assessment developed by Ginny Sprang, Brian C. Miller, Leslie Ross, and Kimberly Blakshear
How do I know my organization is doing well?

- Get the “Secondary Traumatic Stress-Informed Organizational Assessment”:
  
  www.uky.edu/CTAC
Coping with Compassion Fatigue

- Organizational strategies
- Self-care strategies

Serving from an empty vessel is not selfless. It is foolish and self-destructive.

-Eleanor Brownn
Post-traumatic growth

• Stressors can lead to personal growth in:
  • **Self-efficacy**: one's belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task (Bandura).
  • Increased ability to **relate to others**: Benefits of social support & pro-social behavior (Atzil et. al., 2017; Luks, 1993).
  • Greater **appreciation** for life.
  • Increased sense of **spirituality**.

• Trauma survivors sometimes report positive **outcomes** as well: (Koss & Figueredo, 2004; Husain, 2012; Le Brocque, Hendrikz, & Kenardy, 2010).
Caring for Yourself in the Face of Difficult Work

Our work can be overwhelming. Our challenge is to maintain our resilience so that we can keep doing the work with care, energy, and compassion.

10 things to do for each day

1. Get enough sleep.
2. Get enough to eat.
3. Do some light exercise.
4. Vary the work that you do.
5. Do something pleasurable.
6. Focus on what you did well.
7. Learn from your mistakes.
8. Share a private joke.
9. Pray, meditate or relax.
10. Support a colleague.

For more information see your supervisor and visit www.psychosocial.org or www.proqol.org

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SWITCHING ON AND OFF

It is your empathy for others helps you do this work. It is vital to take good care of your thoughts and feelings by monitoring how you use them. Resilient workers know how to turn their feelings off when they go on duty, but on again when they go off duty. This is not denial; it is a coping strategy. It is a way they get maximum protection while working (switched off) and maximum support while resting (switched on).

How to become better at switching on and off

1. Switching is a conscious process. Talk to yourself as you switch.

2. Use images that make you feel safe and protected (switch off) or connected and cared for (switch on) to help you switch.

3. Find rituals that help you switch as you start and stop work.

4. Breathe slowly and deeply to calm yourself when starting a tough job.
Meditation Exercise

When you own your breath, nobody can steal your peace.
Managing Compassion Fatigue

- **Youtube:** How to Manage Compassion Fatigue in Caregiving
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7keppA8XRas

- **Youtube:** Drowning in Empathy: The Cost of Vicarious Trauma
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zsaorjlo1Yc