WE AREN’T SICK BUT WE AREN’T OURSELVES

Recognizing and Addressing Compassion Fatigue

Stephanie Hogue
January 17, 2020
WHAT BRINGS YOU JOY?
Defining Compassion Fatigue

Compassion Fatigue and Student Affairs

Strategies to Minimize and Address Compassion Fatigue
WHAT IS COMPASSION FATIGUE?
COMPASSION FATIGUE

• Cumulative emotional, physical, and psychological exhaustion felt over time by individuals working in professions that require them to care for and/or work with individuals who have experienced trauma

• Secondary traumatization or vicarious trauma
  • Primary trauma: Trauma we personally experience
  • Secondary trauma: Trauma we are exposed to

• Unique form of burnout affecting those in caretaking professions
BURNOUT

• Emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion due to prolonged or continued stress

• Burnout is not trauma related

• Can occur in any profession

• Burnout does not change your view on the world
“We have not been directly exposed to the trauma scene, but we hear the story told with such intensity, or we hear similar stories so often, or we have the gift and curse of extreme empathy and we suffer. We feel the feelings of our clients. We experience their fears. We dream their dreams. Eventually, we lose a certain spark of optimism, humor and hope. We tire. We aren’t sick, but we aren’t ourselves.”

– C. Figley, 1995
SYMPTOMS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

Physical Symptoms:
• Headaches
• Chronic Pain
• Exhaustion
• Insomnia
• Increased illness
• Weight gain/Weight loss

Emotional Symptoms:
• Apathy
• Hypersensitivity
• Dreaming of your clients/students’ experiences
• Isolation
• Inability to focus
• Depression
• Jaded or cynical worldview
• Depersonalization
CONTRIBUTORS TO COMPASSION FATIGUE

• Heavy caseloads
• Long working hours
• Limited resources

• Personal stress
• Personal characteristics:
  • Highly empathic
  • Natural helper
  • Personal history of trauma
COMPASSION FATIGUE AND STUDENT AFFAIRS
WHO IS EXPOSED TO TRAUMA IN SA?

• Types of Trauma Present on College Campuses:
  • Sexual misconduct
  • Violence
  • Mass shootings
  • Hazing
  • Discrimination and harassment
  • Mental health crises
  • Addiction
  • Natural disasters

• Who is exposed?
  • Counselors and Psychologists
  • Sexual Violence Prevention Centers
  • Centers for Addiction and Recovery
  • Diversity and Multicultural Centers
  • Veterans Resource Centers
  • Residence Life Staff
  • Student Conduct
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO CF IN SA

• Open door policies
• Crazy work hours
• Identity = profession

• Living on campus
• First responders
• Deep connections with students
PROFESSIONAL IMPACTS

- Increased absenteeism
- Decreased work productivity
- Job dissatisfaction
- Decreased employee engagement
- High turnover

“50–60% of student affairs professionals leave the field within the first five years”
- Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006

In a study published in 2016, researchers found that of the individuals surveyed who left the student affairs profession, “53% of participants felt their levels of burnout were high.” - Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, and Lowery, 2016
STRAATEGIES TO ADDRESS & MINIMIZE COMPASSION FATIGUE
# 1 – PRACTICE SELF-CARE

- Sustain your physical well-being
  - Are you sleeping enough?
  - Eating enough?
  - Staying hydrated?
  - Exercising?

- Ensure emotional well-being
  - Therapy
  - Meditation and/or yoga
  - Creative outlets

- Take personal time off

- Set boundaries
# 1 – PRACTICE SELF-CARE (CONTINUED)

• Rely on your network
  • Professional, familial, social

• Do the things that bring you joy

• Whatever you do for self-care, do it consistently
“Anytime we can listen to true self and give it the care it requires, we do so not only for ourselves but for the many others whose lives we touch.”

– Parker Palmer
SELF-CARE ⇒ BUILDING RESILIENCY

• “Resilience is process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress.” – APA

• It is the ability to “bounce back” from an event.

• Resilience is not a personality trait.

• Resilience is a set of behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be developed and cultivated.

• Our exposure to trauma is inevitable. What is important is how we manage it.
# 2 – RECOGNIZE YOUR SYMPTOMS

- Learn your personal symptoms
- Check-in with yourself
- Take the Professional Quality of Life Questionnaire (www.proqol.org)
#3 - LIMIT TRAUMA CONSUMPTION

- Critically assess your media consumption
- Take breaks when necessary
- Find alternatives
# 4 – GENERATE A WORK SELF-CARE LIST

## Proactive Strategies
- Create a comfortable workspace
- Be intentional with scheduling
- Take your lunch breaks
- Delegate tasks

## In the Moment Emergency Kit
- Keep a file of positive or happy images
- Create a specific playlist
- Review thank-you emails/notes
- Take a short break (Walk, meditate, etc.)

I don't know who needs to hear this but take your full lunch break.
WHAT CAN I DO AS A SUPERVISOR?

1. Support yourself
2. Foster open and authentic communication
3. Be knowledgeable and supportive of employee support programs
   • Counseling
   • Well-being classes (meditation, yoga, etc.)
4. Recognize the efforts of your staff
   • Know your employees’ appreciation languages (words of affirmation, tangible gifts, etc.)
5. Provide flexible schedules
   • Teleworking
   • Condensed workweeks
   • Altered hours
ACTIVITY

• Write down three actions to take to address CF
  • Include one action you can implement immediately upon returning to work

• Write how you will hold yourself accountable to completing those actions
“Compassion fatigue is a term meant to identify those of us whose souls get altered by the stories we hold.”

– Dr. Jody Carrington
SOURCES

• *Trauma Stewardship* – Laura van Dernoot Lipsky

• *Compassion Fatigue* – Charles Figley

• [www.compassionfatigue.org](http://www.compassionfatigue.org)

• American Institute of Stress

• American Psychological Association

• *Guidebook on Vicarious Trauma: Recommended Solutions for Anti-Violence Workers* – Jan I. Richardson

THANK YOU!

Stephanie Hogue  🌐 Stephaniekague@gmail.com