Nurse Educators' Experience of Compassion Fatigue

KELLY A. KUHNS, PHD, RN
LISA A. RUTH-SAHOLZ, DED, RN, CCRN, CEN
Compassion Fatigue

- A form of post-traumatic stress disorder in which caregivers develop a secondary trauma by becoming affected during repeated care of patients experiencing a traumatic event.

- In general, nurses have been noted to be particularly at risk for compassion fatigue, but little research has considered nursing faculty.

- Additional need to examine impact of work environment/empowerment and other factors on compassion fatigue.
Research Questions

- What is the overall experience of compassion fatigue among nursing faculty?
- Is there a correlation between the experience of compassion fatigue and various demographic factors?
- Is there a correlation between the experience of compassion fatigue and workplace empowerment?
- Is there a correlation between the experience of compassion fatigue and religiosity?
Methods

- Mixed methods
  - Survey instruments and open-ended questions

- Email and social media recruitment

- Survey Instruments
  - Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL V) tool
  - Conditions of Work Effectiveness Questionnaire II (CWEQ-II)
  - Duke Religion Index
Findings

- Demographics (n=282)
  - 53.4 average age (SD 9.8, range 25 – 75)
  - 94% female
  - 77% married
  - 57% had administrative responsibilities
  - 67% were not represented by collective bargaining
  - 60% engaged in team teaching
Findings

Tenure Status

- Tenured: 73
- Tenure-track: 87
- Non-tenure track: 17

Academic Rank

- Instructor: 75
- Assistant: 72
- Associate: 46
- Full: 44
- Other: 36

Legend:
- Tenured
- Tenure-track
- Non-tenure track
- Clinical
- Other
- Instructor
- Assistant
- Associate
- Full
- Other
Findings

Salaries

- >$100,000: 48
- $80,000-$99,999: 77
- $50,000-$79,999: 126
- <$50,000: 15
Findings

Frequency of Bringing Work Home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6x/week</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4x/week</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2x/week</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency of Self-Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6x/week</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4x/week</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2x/week</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Question 1 – Experience of Compassion Fatigue

- **ProQOL Scores**
  - Compassion satisfaction score mean 41.9 (22 – 50) – average level*
  - Burnout score mean 21.4 (10 – 36) – low level*
  - Secondary Traumatic Stress score mean 19.5 (10 – 34) – low level*

*Based on cut scores offered by Stamm (2010)
Research Question 2 – Compassion Fatigue and Demographics

- Significant relationship ($p = .046$) between compassion satisfaction and salary

- ANOVA with Tukey’s post-hoc analysis: most significant differences between those making $50,000 - $79,000 and those making more than $100,000 annually ($p = .036$, 95% CI [.12, 5.02]).
Research Question 2 – Compassion Fatigue and Demographics

- Significant relationships between frequency of bringing work home and compassion satisfaction ($p=.001$), burnout ($p=.000$) and secondary traumatic stress ($p=.017$)
  - Significantly lower levels of compassion satisfaction for those that brought work home daily versus those that never brought work home ($p=.004$, 95% CI [-9.25, -1.16]) and those that brought work home 1 - 2 days per week ($p=.029$, 95% CI [-5.27, -.18])
  - Those who brought work home daily had higher levels of burnout than those faculty who reported bringing work home three to four times per week ($p=.001$, 95% CI [1.18, 5.98]), one to two times per week ($p=.000$, 95% CI [1.74, 6.67]), and never ($p=.000$, 95% CI [3.99, 11.83])
  - For STS, the difference existed between bringing work home daily versus rarely (never or one to two times per week), though the pair-wise analysis was not found to be significant
Significant relationships between frequency of engaging in self-care activities higher levels of compassion satisfaction ($p = .013$) and lower levels of burnout ($p = .012$)

- Post hoc analysis demonstrated the differences for compassion satisfaction existed between those that engaged in daily purposeful self-care and those that never engaged in self-care ($p = .037$, 95% CI [.12, 6.59]) and those that engaged only one to two times per week ($p = .005$, 95% CI [.75, 6.36])

- For burnout, the post-hoc analysis suggested the greatest difference existed between those who engaged in self-care daily versus rarely (never or one to two times per week), however, the post-hoc pairwise analysis was not statistically significant.
Research Question 3: Compassion Fatigue and Workplace Environment

- A significant positive correlation was found to exist between compassion satisfaction and perceived access to opportunity ($r=0.144, p=0.02$).

- No significant relationships were found between burnout and secondary traumatic stress and work environment subscales.
Research Question 4: Compassion Fatigue and Religiosity

- Burnout and intrinsic religiosity demonstrated a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.12, p = .05$)

- Largest portion of respondents (34.6%) reported weekly attendance at organized religious activities

- Largest portion of respondents (43.8%) reported engaging daily/more than daily non-organized religious activities

- Moderately high level of intrinsic religiosity: 11.86, SD 3.2, Range 3 - 15
Qualitative Findings

- Three themes identified

- Changing workplace
- Love for teaching despite significant demands of the job and minimal salaries
- Administrative / leadership challenges - “We are heard but not listened to”
Discussion

- Average level of compassion satisfaction and low levels of burnout and secondary traumatic stress

- Impact of salary

- Impact of bringing work home
  - Hyper-connected world!

- Limited relationships between compassion fatigue and work environment
Future Directions

- Larger scale study
- Consider a different work environment scale
- Intervention study potential