

Triggered: A Qualitative Approach Exploring Compassion Fatigue amongst Mental Health Providers in Saint Louis, MO and Beyond

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Amides Covid-19 pandemic, there is an increasing demand for mental health providers. Prior to the pandemic behavioral health business were working to address the shortage of mental health providers. Such demand places these providers at risk of developing compassion fatigue (CF). This study presents insight to providers' previous experience of CF and how their organization responded long before the coronavirus outbreak. Compassion fatigue (CF) has been described as an empathic strain and general exhaustion that has developed from dealing with people that are in distress over time. CF causes physical and emotional exhaustion that affects an individual ability to feel empathy and compassion for others. This study seeks to gain an understanding of how behavioral health organizations address CF and burnout. The study used a mixed method with a quantitative survey (n= 138) and qualitative semi-structured interviews involving ten mental health providers presently working with distressed clients or clients known to have experienced distress. The study found providers are (i) more willing to disclose their CF with coworkers rather than leadership (ii) providers attitudes towards their relationship with leadership (supportive vs. unsupportive) determiners their willingness to discuss CF experiences, (iii) providers felt remorseful for disclosing to leadership, providers advocated for the utilization of external support system (e.g. clinical supervision or life coach) to process CF. Lastly, providers felt their organizations lack addressing and implementing policies and procedures to reduce CF. The findings provide useful insights into the providers' experiences of CF, more specifically, their response to how they managed their CF with a lack of support from organizations, and how they used resilience to combat CF. The research provides clear direction for future research at the organizational, clinical education, and interpersonal levels.