

Compassion Fatigue in Students Completing Fieldwork: Annotated Bibliography

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Barlow, C., & Hall, Barry L. (2007). "What about Feelings?": A Study of Emotion and Tension in Social Work Field Education. *Social Work Education*, 26(4), 399–413.

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Barlow, Hall, and Barry interviewed 70 Canadian undergraduate social work students and 35 field instructors to understand how upsetting field experiences were being perceived and managed by the students. The study focuses on the emotional impact of field work on students and on sources of tension for students and between students and their instructors. Students were asked to describe distressing experiences in their field placements and reflect on how they were emotionally impacted. They were also asked about how they resolved the situations and where they turned for assistance, as well as whether classroom learning had prepared them for fieldwork. Lastly, students were asked whether or not their experiences had made them reconsider social work as a career. Field instructors were about what kinds of experiences students might find upsetting, as well as what stressors instructors had informed students of, what assistance was offered to students when in distress, and what reasons instructors believed students may have for not seeking help. Instructors were also asked to gauge how the classroom had prepared students for fieldwork.

Barlow, Hall, and Barry report student and field instructor views on five themes: client circumstances, perceptions about competency, management of potentially violent situations, student and field instructor relationships, and agency climate. They find many sources of tension within and between these views. Many students faced confusion and alienation due to their field instructors being comfortable in situations which they found distressing, and the rules for emotional expression being unclear. All but two field

instructors interviewed did not identify themselves as a source of distress for students, whereas one third of the students interviewed identified their instructors as such.

Similarly, fear of conflict with instructors was a main motivation in students staying silent about their distress. Another source of tension is that safety was often left unaddressed in field placements, despite both students and instructors citing it as a source of distress. Students face additional tension when personal values must be set aside for the job, as well as when rules of practice are unclear.

This study identifies several areas in which students' and field instructors' perceptions and understanding of fieldwork related distress differ. Additionally, it determines how severe these discrepancies are. The findings of this study are integral for understanding the differing expectations students and field instructors have surrounding distressing field experiences, and therefore surrounding secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue as experienced by students in fieldwork.

Hernandez-Wolfe, P. (2018). Vicarious Resilience: A Comprehensive Review. *Revista de Estudios Sociales; Bogotá*, 66, 9–17.

<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.7440/res66.2018.02>

Hernandez-Wolfe's review provides a summary of the quantitative and qualitative research on vicarious resilience within a ten year span, as well as offers suggestions for future research. They first summarize the beginning research into vicarious resilience as a result of observations made during research on professionals' management of vicarious trauma while working with torture survivors. The first studies of vicarious resilience as a concept occurred within this same area of work with torture survivors.

Hernandez-Wolfe defines vicarious resilience as “the vicarious learning process which allows for the impact of clients whose positive adaptation stems from their ability to cope with adversity”. This concept is essentially another way in which the therapeutic relationship can be reciprocal, whereby therapists learn from and change with their clients. Conversely, vicarious trauma consists of the negative effects of working with trauma survivors, including effects to therapists’ feelings, cognitions, memories, self-esteem, or sense of safety. This cumulative secondary traumatic stress and accompanying compassion fatigue can often present symptoms similar to PTSD.

A Vicarious Resilience Scale was developed based on many studies of vicarious resilience. The elements examined by the scale are changes in life goals and perspectives, client-inspired hope, increased recognition of the clients’ spirituality as a therapeutic resource, increased self-awareness and self-care practices, increased consciousness about power relative to social location, increased capacity for resourcefulness, and increased capacity for attentiveness to the clients’ narratives of trauma.

Research into self-care has shown that it can prevent the symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout: irritability, insufficient sleep, doubts about one’s therapeutic effectiveness, concerns about the size and intensity of one’s caseload, and episodes of depression and anxiety. Self-care can help prevent impairment in the field, which can present itself as isolation, neglecting meals or breaks, and putting clients’ needs first. This can thereby prevent poor professional judgment, ethical breaches or boundary violations, and inappropriate emotional involvement. Similarly, emotional self-awareness can reduce stress and burnout in professionals.

Hernandez-Wolfe suggests more research should be done on how vicarious resilience develops in groups and communities, and on how helpers are affected by discrimination suffered by their clients.

This synthesis of research is vital to this project as it provides insight into the balance between vicarious trauma, self-care and emotional awareness, and vicarious resilience.

Kaplan, J. (2019). Self-Care as Self-Blame Redux: Stress as Personal and Political. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal; Baltimore*, 29(2), 97–123.

<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.1353/ken.2019.0017>

Kaplan's article examines the current literature on solutions to poor public health outcomes in areas of severe poverty and economic inequality. Several studies and commentaries have shown that poverty and economic inequality are direct causes of poor public health, and yet those same studies and commentaries have concluded that the solutions for improving public health outcomes reside strictly in the areas of psychotherapy on the individual level or biomedical approaches to various health conditions on the community level. No researchers or experts suggested public policy change in order to alleviate poverty and inequality. Kaplan argues that such literature is proof of social problems requiring social and political change to solve being redefined as an individual's problems that should be solved through individual effort. Furthering this point, Kaplan discusses multiple pieces of literature which claim that, because individuals have some control over the organization of their lives and their perception of the world, the individual is then responsible for their sources of stress.

Conversely, Kaplan also discusses literature that recognizes chronic stress as one of the social determinants of health, and therefore as an issue with a solution rooted in social

policy. Yet these same pieces of literature often still suggest personal steps toward self-care alongside sweeping policy change. So many websites and blogs currently promote self-care as a way to reduce stress and prevent burnout that Kaplan is able to determine several tropes within the suggested behaviors: mindfulness practices such as meditation, exercise, a healthy diet, treating oneself with gifts, and taking naps. These elements of self-care are so commonly promoted that they have received criticism as another form of blaming and further burdening individuals.

While this article is not strictly about self-care in relation to compassion fatigue, it is an important viewpoint on the concept of self-care, especially in light of the audience this pamphlet hopes to reach. Students entering fieldwork are still completing college courses and must still contend with the economic inequality discussed by Kaplan, as well as disparities as the result of membership in a minority community. In this context, it is important to educate students as to how they can advocate for policy change on the governmental and agency level that will decrease the likelihood of compassion fatigue and burnout and more adequately address secondary traumatic stress.

Lambert, S. F., & Lawson, G. (2013). Resilience of Professional Counselors Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. *Journal of Counseling and Development : JCD; Alexandria*, 91(3), 261–268. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2013.00094.x>

In their study, Lambert and Lawson examine the posttraumatic growth and resilience to secondary trauma of professional counselors that assisted those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Lambert and Lawson use a survey conducted 4 years after the hurricanes to measure respondents' posttraumatic stress response and professional resilience, as well as rates of compassion satisfaction and burnout in the sample. Finally,

they measure counselors' self-care practices during their deployment and in the last 30 days before taking the survey. The counselors surveyed were split into two groups for comparison: survivor volunteers (those that were personally affected by the hurricanes), and responder volunteers.

Lambert and Lawson found that the two groups scored similarly to each other for rates of moderate to serious mental illness, and the study's overall sample fared favorably when compared to rates of mental illness in Katrina survivors generally. The sample's scores for compassion satisfaction and burnout were comparable to each other, as well as to scores from a general national sample. Conversely, counselors in Lambert and Lawson's sample presented more than twice the rate of compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress than did the general national sample. Lambert and Lawson concluded that all professional counselors involved in the sample were at similar risk for compassion fatigue, regardless of whether they were directly affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but that those directly affected had significantly higher levels of posttraumatic growth. Their findings indicate a modest positive relationship between self-care activities while counselors were deployed and their posttraumatic growth, as well as a modest negative relationship between self-care activities and burnout, compassion fatigue, and secondary traumatic stress.

This study is vital to this project as it examines the process by which helping professionals are influenced by working with trauma survivors, and how that process can be adaptive or maladaptive to professionals' mental health. This study shows that self-care has influence over which direction the process will travel; self-care activities help

combat the effects of secondary traumatic stress and help prevent burnout and compassion fatigue, while promoting posttraumatic growth and compassion satisfaction.

Rich, T. M. (2017). The Value of Adjuncts: A Study of the Intrinsic Factors Impacting Field Seminar Instruction. *Field Educator; Boston*, 7(1).

<http://search.proquest.com/socscijournals/docview/1924835030/C68083480EB347C0PQ/8?accountid=39473>

Rich's study explores what factors influence job satisfaction of adjuncts teaching social work field education seminars. Through qualitative interviews, Rich explores the lived experiences of adjuncts teaching social work field education, finding three themes for job satisfaction among his 12 participants: professional development, enhance the social work profession, and work with emerging social workers. Participants reported great support from their universities by being included in staff meetings, being given resources for forming seminar courses, and being provided opportunities to complete their Continuing Education Units for their licensure. Participants expressed the desire to promote the social work profession to their students by providing ways to enhance their well-being. Participants expressed the need to share with their students their experiences with managing heavy caseloads, self-care and burnout, relationship building with colleagues and workplace culture, flexibility in interdisciplinary work, and professionalism, especially in the form of being honest with colleagues and clients and of asking supervisors' and colleagues' advice. Finally, participants reported viewing students as emerging colleagues, and students' admiration for the field as what keeps adjuncts teaching. Adjuncts expressed a commitment to forming professional relationships with their students. Additionally, participants encouraged students to

discuss their personal life, expressing that students need to be able to share their thoughts and emotions in a professional way to future colleagues. Adjuncts also were motivated to reevaluate their own social work practices by students' questions and discussions of theory.

This study provides an important viewpoint to this project: that of the field education liaison. Professors of field education seminars are integral to a student's fieldwork experience, and are a key resource for students' learning about self-care and burnout. The adjuncts in this study expressed a wish to create a safe space for students to discuss their thoughts and emotions, preparing students for doing so in a professional setting such as supervision. This is an integral step in learning how to take care of oneself within their work environment, as well as personally.

Smith, M. (2014). Compassion Fatigue in Social Work Students. *Field Educator; Boston, 4(1)*.
<http://search.proquest.com/socscijournals/docview/1561345737/abstract/28B12ACB61BA40DEPQ/17>

In this essay, Smith synthesizes various definitions of compassion fatigue, including in her definition the influences of burnout and secondary traumatic stress, as well as the common symptoms of compassion fatigue. Smith also cites multiple studies that have found that students are at greater risk for burnout than helping professionals and at similar risk for compassion fatigue. She describes current recommendations for intervention by various studies, which include both individual, and organizational methods for intervention and prevention.

Smith goes on to describe her own fieldwork experience, expressing that her supervisor was knowledgeable surrounding compassion fatigue, and they therefore were able to

prevent many of its symptoms through thorough exploration of feelings in supervision. However, Smith discovered that many of her classmates either did not know what compassion fatigue was, or thought it took several years to develop. Many were surprised to find they showed symptoms. Smith suggests the use of compassion fatigue workshops for students prior to entering fieldwork, as well as for field supervisors and liaisons. This essay was integral to the project because of its viewpoint. Smith writes from the perspective of a student entering fieldwork with no knowledge of compassion fatigue, which is the audience this pamphlet intends to reach.

Tremblay, M. A., & Messervey, D. (2011). The Job Demands-Resources model: Further evidence for the buffering effect of personal resources. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology; Auckland Park, 37(2)*, 1–10.

<http://search.proquest.com/socscijournals/docview/876595124/abstract/9F12B2B70DC84A0APQ/1>

In this study, Tremblay and Messervey examine the role of compassion satisfaction as a personal resource and as a buffer in the relationship between job demands and job strain. For this study, 122 military chaplains completed a questionnaire made up of scales measuring role stressors, compassion satisfaction and job strain. Compassion satisfaction was found to moderate the relationship between the role stressor of role overload and symptoms of anxiety and depression. It did not, however, moderate the relationship between the role stressors of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role insufficiency and symptoms of depression and anxiety. Tremblay and Messervey conclude from this that those who believe they will not be able to accomplish the workload expected of them are more likely to experience job strain when they have a low personal level of compassion

satisfaction, and less likely to experience job strain when they have a high personal level of compassion satisfaction. They suggest that workplaces should foster compassion satisfaction in their workers as a way to lessen job strain and form a protective factor to adverse working conditions.

This study lends a new and understudied viewpoint to the conversation on self-care and compassion fatigue. Compassion satisfaction as a protective factor is something that can be developed on a personal and organizational level. This lends credence to the stance that self-care is not only a personal pursuit, but is also the responsibility of agencies in tandem with the helping professionals they employ. While this area needs further study, it is plausible that action on the organizational level can positively impact those suffering from compassion fatigue, and aid in its prevention.

Wood, A. E., Prins, A., Bush, N. E., Hsia, J. F., Bourn, L. E., Earley, M. D., Walser, R. D., & Ruzek, J. (2017). Reduction of Burnout in Mental Health Care Providers Using the Provider Resilience Mobile Application. *Community Mental Health Journal; New York*, 53(4), 452–459. <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.gvsu.edu/10.1007/s10597-016-0076-5>

In this pilot study, Wood et al. examine the usability, acceptability, and effectiveness of a free provider resilience app designed by the National Center for Telehealth and Technology in reducing provider burnout and compassion fatigue. 30 mental health providers were given pre- and post-study questionnaires in order to measure usability, acceptability, and effectiveness after 1 month of the app's use. Despite this sample being relatively psychologically healthy, their average scores on the compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress portions of the questionnaire (this study employed the Professional Quality of Life scale, or ProQOL) decreased from the average range to one

point above the low range. This indicates there may be a significant treatment effect in a less healthy population. The majority of the participants in this study rated the app's usability as "excellent" and reported finding the app appealing, planning to use it in the future, and being willing to recommend it to a friend.

Wood et al. suggest that future studies involving this app have a larger sample size including more participants with a significant level of burnout and compassion fatigue, a control group design, and additional measures of burnout to the ProQOL.

This pilot study gives insight into new ways to engage in emotional self-awareness and self-care through the use of technology. Participants reported that certain aspects of the app, such as burnout and resilience ratings and a countdown clock indicating how long participants had gone without a break from work were highly beneficial. The study's authors suggest this may be because these features are designed to increase awareness of one's emotional state and level of burnout and may motivate individuals to improve their self-care actions, thus reducing burnout and compassion fatigue. Such a modern tool may benefit students entering fieldwork by allowing them to increase their emotional awareness, making them aware of their emotional patterns. The app can also help students determine their risk for burnout and compassion fatigue while simultaneously working to prevent it. The provider resilience app is currently available for free on iOS and Android, making it fairly accessible to current students.