

Evaluating Compassion Fatigue, Moral Injury, and Burnout in Victim Services and Partner Organizations: Strategies for Action and Improvement



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Background

According to Gustafsson & Hemberg (2022), prolonged exposure to other people’s suffering can surpass an individual’s ability to cope with emotional stress, leading to emotional, physical, and spiritual exhaustion—commonly referred to as compassion fatigue. Similarly, when individuals experience events that deeply violate their moral beliefs, the long-term impact can be severe, affecting their emotional, psychological, behavioral, spiritual, and social well-being. This phenomenon is known as moral injury (Litz et al., 2009). Over time, the demanding nature of one’s work can lead to feelings of resentment towards friends, family, colleagues, and even those they are meant to help. If left unaddressed, compassion fatigue can escalate into burnout (Letson et al., 2020). These factors collectively indicate that compassion fatigue, moral injury, and burnout (emotional harm) are deeply interconnected.

Project Objectives

- Evaluate the current state of compassion fatigue, moral injury, and burnout among workers at Victim Services and its partner organizations.
- Assess the impact of compassion fatigue, moral injury, and burnout on employee turnover rates.
- Analyze potential differences in compassion fatigue, moral injury, and burnout between various organizational levels, including managers and front-line workers, as well as between sectors in Northern and Southern Ontario.
- Develop an action plan to improve the situation

Context of Study

Victim Services of Nipissing District is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing assistance to individuals who have been victimized as a result of a crime or tragic circumstance. This agency works in partnership with police as well as emergency and other community-based services to ensure victims receive the help they need to assist them in the development of their personal path to recovery. Due to the nature of their work, staff are highly exposed to burnout, compassion fatigue, and moral injury, which contributes to high turnover rates.

Research Methodology

Phase 1

Systematic review and procedural development for data collection

Phase 2

Data collection, data analysis, and creation of tools and guidelines for intervention

Phase 3

Full scale implementation of interventions for partner organizations to lower emotional harm

Potential Outcomes

Potential outcomes of this project can be considered for both the partnering organizations and their clients:

- Comprehensive action plan to improve support staff well being
- Enhance quality care for clients
- Reduce risk of compassion fatigue, moral injury, and burn out
- Increase employee retention rates

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