

Compassion

Fatigue

"Compassion Fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper."

Dr. Charles Figley (Figley, 2013)



Figure [1]
(Aces Seniors, 2017)

Studies show that 70% of social workers present symptoms of secondary traumatic stress (STS) and 55% have symptoms of core post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

(Gaille, 2019, Hall, 2009, Bride, 2007)

FIGLEY'S COMPASSION FATIGUE PROCESS

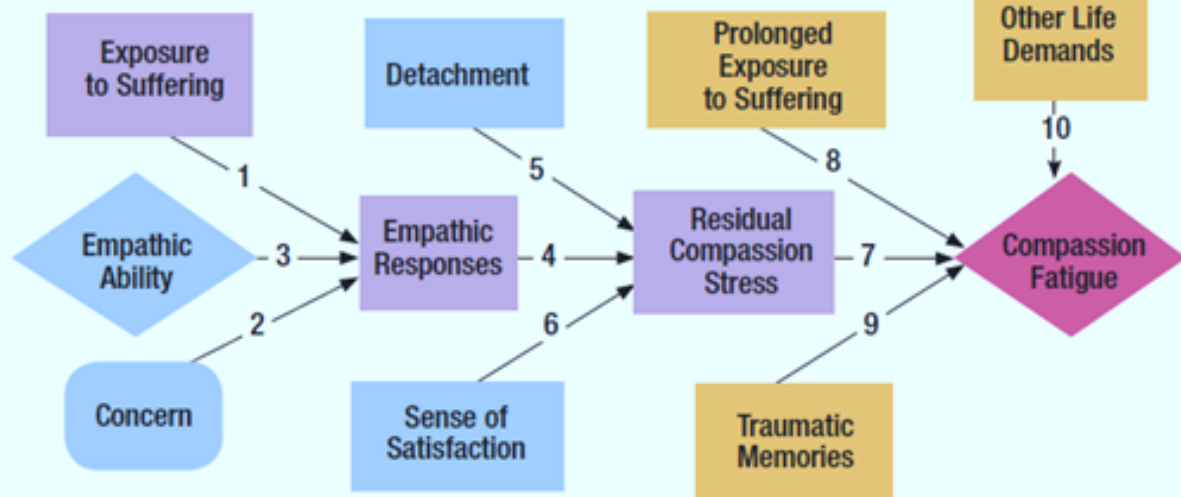


Figure [2]
(JONS, 2018)

The above diagram explains how compassion fatigue occurs. It shows with compassion fatigue, the process of how emotional detachment takes place and the loss of empathetic feelings. This results in the social worker/carer becoming disengaged from the clients' suffering. It illustrates that social workers must first look after themselves before they are able to perform their role efficiently.

How are you feeling?

Poor job satisfaction

Difficulty sleeping

Feelings of self loathing

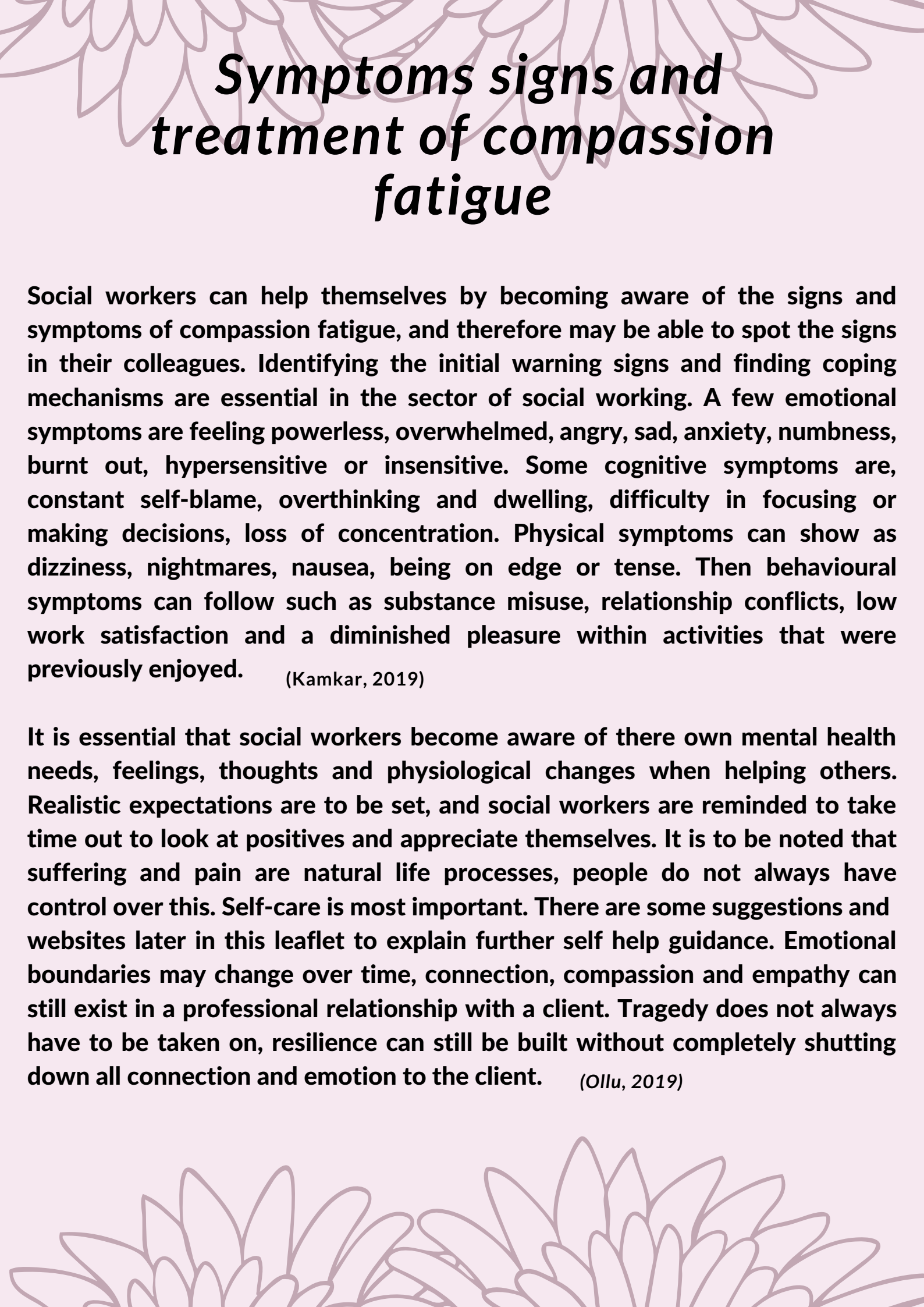
Chronic emotional/physical exhaustion

Withdrawal from social engagement

Irritability

Headaches

Loss of empathy

A decorative pink floral pattern is visible in the top and bottom corners of the page, framing the central text.

Symptoms signs and treatment of compassion fatigue

Social workers can help themselves by becoming aware of the signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue, and therefore may be able to spot the signs in their colleagues. Identifying the initial warning signs and finding coping mechanisms are essential in the sector of social working. A few emotional symptoms are feeling powerless, overwhelmed, angry, sad, anxiety, numbness, burnt out, hypersensitive or insensitive. Some cognitive symptoms are, constant self-blame, overthinking and dwelling, difficulty in focusing or making decisions, loss of concentration. Physical symptoms can show as dizziness, nightmares, nausea, being on edge or tense. Then behavioural symptoms can follow such as substance misuse, relationship conflicts, low work satisfaction and a diminished pleasure within activities that were previously enjoyed. (Kamkar, 2019)

It is essential that social workers become aware of their own mental health needs, feelings, thoughts and physiological changes when helping others. Realistic expectations are to be set, and social workers are reminded to take time out to look at positives and appreciate themselves. It is to be noted that suffering and pain are natural life processes, people do not always have control over this. Self-care is most important. There are some suggestions and websites later in this leaflet to explain further self help guidance. Emotional boundaries may change over time, connection, compassion and empathy can still exist in a professional relationship with a client. Tragedy does not always have to be taken on, resilience can still be built without completely shutting down all connection and emotion to the client. (Ollu, 2019)

**Well-being of Future
Generations (Wales)
Act 2015**

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aids the resilience of everyone in Wales. This includes looking at the mental health and well-being of society to create a thriving and healthy future. This act that has been put in place for all. This does not specifically cater for social workers, but for all public bodies.

According to research there are not many policies in place currently to support the caregiver themselves. However, for social workers/caring staff there is a volunteer ran initiative by the NHS Called Mindful Employer. This initiative looks at supporting employers with education on how to assist workers with mental health issues and the recovery of effected staff. See resources page for link to website. (Dpt.nhs.uk, 2019)

"The cost of Caring" "bearing the suffering of clients" and is "the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced or suffered by a person"

(Figley, 1995, p.7)



Figure [3]

(Cartoonstock, 2019)



Positive outcomes for those that are affected by compassion fatigue

There is a counterbalance to compassion fatigue it is called compassion satisfaction. Most social workers begin their careers hopeful that they are going to make a difference in society. However, as statistics show that 70% of social workers are currently feeling STS and compassion fatigue symptoms. This highlights that compassion satisfaction is with social workers at the beginning of their career but as time goes on, they lose the sense of achievement in which they once first endeavoured. Therefore, compassion satisfaction becoming a sensation in which the caregiver then needs to find once more. This can be achieved through self-care from the start of the career and throughout. Compassion satisfaction itself is the gratification one develops from successfully performing in their role. For example, getting a high sense of achievement from helping others in their line of work or making a positive impact on those who are being cared for or even society itself.

(Gaille, 2019, ProQOL, 2019, Hall, 2009, Bride, 2007)

Dr. Charles Figley created the compassion fatigue process diagram to enable caregivers to understand the importance of self care. Also, it acknowledges what leads to compassion fatigue, and more importantly how to prevent it.



Self care surgestions

**Find Time for
yourself daily**

**Engage in
hobbies
out of
work hours**

**Try journalling
or keeping
a diary**

**Keep personal
and work life
separate and
balanced**

**Get enough
rest and sleep**

**Eat healthy
food and
exercise
regularly**

(GoodTherapy.org, 2019, Morton, 2019)

Useful websites for more information

www.compassionfatigue.org

www.healthycaregiving.com

www.facebook.com/compassionfatigue

www.proqol.org

www.greencross.org

www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/caregiver-stress-and-burnout.htm

www.emmottsnell.co.uk/blog/compassion-fatigue-and-professional-resilience

Information on Mindful Employer: www.dpt.nhs.uk

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PICTURES

Figure 1:

Aces Seniors (2017). Compassion Fatigue, Burnout and Self-care. [image] Available at: <https://aceseniors.org/web/compassionfatigue2017/> [Accessed 31 Oct. 2019].

Figure 2:

Cartoonstock (2019). Compassions Cartoon. [image] Available at: <https://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/c/compassions.asp> [Accessed 31 Oct. 2019].

Figure 3:

JONS (2018). Compassion Fatigue Process. [image] Available at: <http://www.jons-online.com/issues/2018/december-2018-vol-9-no-12/2152-fighting-compassion-fatigue-and-burnout-by-building-emotional-resilience> [Accessed 1 Nov. 2019].

Rationale

The purpose of this leaflet is to expand social workers knowledge on compassion fatigue and to spread awareness of the importance of self-care when caring for others and possible avenues for support.

The reasoning behind this leaflet is to inform social workers of the policies in place to help, and to signpost them to support or self-care. The title is in bold large letters to grab the attention of a passer-by. I placed a clear statistic on the front of the document also in bold, to draw attention to the reality of the chosen topic (Gaille, 2019, Hall, 2009, Bride, 2007).

The background shade for the entire leaflet was a pale soothing lilac (Artitudes Design, 2017). I used black bold font in 'Lato Heavy' for all the text as it clearer for the readers to view. I chose the flowers in the background as I find them calming to look at and captivating (Ikei et al., 2014).

The images I have chosen are all relevant to point I am trying to make. Beginning with the front cover, in Figure 1 the wooden doll is on fire representing being burnt out, also wedged between rocks which represents no room to breathe and the weight of the world (Aces Seniors, 2017). In Figure 2 I have used a diagram of Figley's compassion fatigue process so the reader can easily understand the process of what causes compassion fatigue at a glance (JONS, 2018).

The feelings are all within blue and green bubbles, research shows these are calming colours (Cherry, 2019). I chose this to represent the bubbling of emotions within a person. In Figure 3 I have chosen a cartoon with a statement on. This emphasises the point that is being portrayed by the quote I used next to the picture (Cartoonstock, 2019). Finally, I placed deep lilac hearts in circles behind the text points of the self-care section, this was to express the importance of self-love.

The content of the leaflet has covered seven sections significant to compassion fatigue and a form of direction to take if needed. This leaflet would be suitable for staff rooms in doctor's surgeries, hospitals or any establishments in the caring sector, as it is aimed for those who care for others.