



COMPASSION FATIGUE: IS IT A 'CARING COST' RIDING HIGH AMONG EXPERIENCED TEACHERS OF MENTALLY RETARDED CHILDREN?

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ABSTRACT

The present study is qualitative survey focusing on teachers of mentally retarded children in the schools in Southeast region of Tamilnadu it AIMS at addressing the research questions: Is compassion fatigue and negative carrying cost best owned on teachers of mentally retarded children for a positive service rendered. Does compassion fatigue increases with the increase in the years of experience of teachers of mentally retarded children. The outcomes of this study confirms that negative cost for their positive service rendered to mentally retarded children but does not subscribe to rationalisation formed on the subjective difference between the Healthcare workers and teachers of mentally retarded children that with increase in experience degree for intensity e of compassion fatigue may decrease the differential analysis is established that the degree of compassion fatigue increases for teachers of mentally retarded children with increase in their years of experience



KEYWORDS: Mentally Retarded Children, Carrying Cost Compassion, Fatigue Secondary Traumatic Stress, and Job Burnout

INTRODUCTION :

Teachers are teachers, everywhere and anywhere, irrespective of their qualifications, experience and cadre ranging from primary level to university level teaching. They are a different category of professional. They are restrained in their dealings and self controlled in their speech and actions. They are honest, sincere and always set a space for other's view. They are not after materialistic wealth. They prefer to give, rather than to receive. Their concern and sacrifice for the students crown them with the glory of Godliness. Such a noble variant is a teacher among the human beings.

Though the common characteristics of a teacher are alluring to our eyes, when we look at the teachers of special education through the lens of psychology, they appear to be burdened with the characteristics of their own merit, while discharging their responsibilities. As a teacher is born, the symbolic characteristic 'concern' is also born with him. The 'concern' of teachers of normal schools easily mingles with their students and help them indirectly in their studies, and formation of essential skills and characteristics, without sucking out the entire milk of concern in one time because it is offered periodically for nourishing their spirit. but in the case of special children, especially the mentally retarded ones, the one and only nourishing food for them is the concern of the teacher which has to be fed with added ingredients in the form of 'compassion' minute by minute to maintain, to strengthen, and to brighten the life of the mentally debilitated children to the extent possible. As a result of such ceaseless 'milking' of sympathy, empathy, concern and compassion, the teachers of

mentally retarded children are likely to become 'barren' devoid of anymore compassion to spare with. A teacher fallen into such 'barren state' is said to be in the hold of 'compassion fatigue'.

RATIONALE

Compassion fatigue is a phenomenal occurrence to professionals in charge of healing the critically ailing ones or in the human service of taking care of the aged ones, nearing the end of their life. In the ordinary sense, any human being, aroused by the feeling of sympathy or concern or compassion when started acting to alleviate the sufferings of an individual or a group of people he / she may be drawn very close to the suffering ones to the extent that he / she is likely to forget his / her own health and get immersed in the service of others risking their own lives. This is the greatest sacrifice one can do to a person or persons to lift up them from the fire of suffering, or from the rut of misery so as to help them live the rest of their life in peace and happiness. This sort of selfless life for the betterment of others, when continues for years without expected positive outcomes, calling for more and more involvement and more and more sacrifice, the benevolent souls may run into emptiness or deprivation of needed energy to sustain their spirit of functioning without any lapse. Psychologically, it is analogous to a 'caring - machine' coming to a grinding halt for want of fuel. The human beings who care for the ailing ones, night and day like a machine may grind to a halt when the fuel - compassion exhausts over a period of time. The reward of 'caring' to the sufferers extended by the professionals is their acquisition of 'compassion fatigue', a tedium caused by the loss of compassion. The expected 'reward' for a good service rendered is referred antithetically as the 'cost' of service. It is contrary to the biblical dictum "giving is more blessed than receiving" (The Bible).

It implies that 'by giving what we have to others, we will get it manifold in return'. That is, for every little act of goodness, we are sure to receive abundant blessings from heaven. Contrary to all these, psychology asserts that by giving forth compassion ceaselessly, for long, one is sure to be bestowed upon a negative feature - compassion fatigue (Sabo, 2006; Figley, 2012). On the basis of this, - the occurrence of negativity in the life of the professionals who are an embodiment of positive characteristics - the Researcher associated the life and work of the teachers of mentally retarded children with those professionals of Health Care Workers and conceptualized the current problem focusing on the teachers of mentally retarded children, as stated in the research topic (R.Portia, 2015).

Subsequent to the rationale for the problem identified, the Researcher was led by the thinking that the formation of compassion fatigue in teachers of mentally retarded children might depend on their length of experience. As in other professions, in teachers' job, especially in mentally retarded schools, the beginners may stumble here and there for want of adequate exposure to field reality and maturing to face and overcome the suddenly shot up strange and threatening situations. The fear of failure or losing the name or violation of professional ethics or such of those feelings may cripple the life and worth of the individual. Therefore, the flow of compassion is likely to be interrupted and as such it may quicken the process of developing compassion fatigue. The disappointments felt by the teachers in the beginning of their career may become a strong source for formation of compassion fatigue. Therefore, the Researcher rationalized that more the teaching experience of teachers of mentally retarded schools the lesser would be their 'compassion fatigue' (Davis, Kimberly, C; Palladino, John, M, 2011; Tepper, Erica, L; Palladino, John, M, 2015; Naig, Liss, Ann, 2010; Hoffman, Shari, et al, 2007; Fiona, Cocker; Nerida, Joss, 2016; Jaikrit, Bhutani, et al, 2012; Zhang, Ying-ying, MD, et al, 2018).

NEED FOR THE STUDY

1. The review of studies has shown that many of the researches have made use of qualitative data obtained through interviews or from the assessments of supervisors or by direct / indirect observation. In the current study, the Researcher has planned to make use of the 'Compassion fatigue scale' standardized by Charles Figley (1995) adapted by Gentry, et al, (2002); and then adapted by Richard, E

Adams, et al, (2006) and now translated by the Researcher into Tamil with subsequent testing of its reliability. It will fulfill the need for employing a standardized instrument for generating valid data.

2. The adoption of the data collecting instrument in the language (Tamil) of the teachers will greatly facilitate the understanding / respondents yield a more objective and accurate information corresponding to their burnout and secondary traumatic stress to account for their compassion fatigue.

3. On completion, the study would give the degree or level of the compassion fatigue, of teachers of mentally retarded schools related to their length of teaching experience. Therefore, the outcome of the study would help the school management and the special education authorities to design interventions or plan for modifying the process and the procedure being followed presently in the mentally retarded schools to aid the suffering group or groups to minimize or overcome the problem of compassion fatigue.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION

Compassion Fatigue: **Compassion fatigue** is a condition characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion leading to a diminished ability to empathize or feel [compassion](#) for others, often described as the negative cost of caring. It is sometimes referred to as **secondary traumatic stress (STS)**. According to the Professional Quality of Life Scale, burnout and secondary traumatic stress are two interwoven elements of compassion fatigue

By this the researcher means the score obtained on COMPASSION FATIGUE SCALE, the adapted form of Richard C. Adams, et al. (2006) from the revised version of Gentry, et al (2002) of Charles Figley (1995) Compassion Fatigue Scale.

METHOD ADOPTED FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Having understood of the background of the problem and also what necessitates to undertake a study on the felt problem, the Researcher finds the **Survey method** of research to be beneficial to realise what is intended.

OBJECTIVE

- To identify the status of *compassion fatigue and its dimension, burnout and secondary traumatic stress* of **teachers** working with mentally retarded children in the South East region of Tamilnadu in terms of Length of teaching experience.
- To verify the **significance of difference** in *compassion fatigue, burnout and secondary traumatic stress* of **teachers** working with mentally retarded children in terms of Length of teaching experience.

HYPOTHESIS

- The status of *compassion fatigue and its dimensions, burnout and secondary traumatic stress* of **teachers** working with mentally retarded children in the South East region of Tamilnadu in terms of Length of teaching experience is **moderate**.
- There is **no significant difference** in *compassion fatigue and its dimensions, burnout and secondary traumatic stress* of **teachers** working with mentally retarded children in terms of Length of teaching experience.

POPULATION

All the **teachers** working in the schools for mentally retarded children in the South East region of Tamilnadu – Sivagangai, Virudhunagar, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli and Thoothukudi revenue districts form the population of the study.

SAMPLE

The sample of the study is formed of **100 teachers** working in the schools for mentally retarded children in the South East region of Tamilnadu.

RESEARCH TOOLS

The research instrument “*Compassion Fatigue Scale*” (CFS) used in the present study is the one adapted by Richard E. Adams, Charles R. Figley and Joseph A. Boscarino (2006), from Gentry et al (2002) revised version of Compassion Fatigue Scale of Figley (1995).

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES

Following are the statistical techniques that are used in the present study for the purpose of analysis of data:

- ✓ Arithmetic Mean and Standard Deviation.
- ✓ ANOVA is used to find the significance of difference among more than two means.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

HYPOTHESIS 1

The level of compassion fatigue of teachers in schools for mentally retarded in terms of length of experience is moderate.

Table 1
Level of compassion fatigue of teachers in schools for mentally retarded in terms of length of experience

Experience	Dimension	N	Low		Moderate		High	
			N	%	N	%	N	%
Low	Job Burnout	31	9	29.03	12	38.70*	10	32.25
	Secondary Traumatic Stress	31	8	25.80	12	38.70*	11	35.48
	Overall Compassion Fatigue	31	9	29.03	12	38.70*	10	32.25
Moderate	Job Burnout	37	11	29.72	11	29.72	15	40.54*
	Secondary Traumatic Stress	37	10	27.02	14	37.83*	13	35.13
	Overall Compassion Fatigue	37	11	29.72	15	40.54*	11	29.72
High	Job Burnout	32	8	25.00	10	31.25	14	43.75*
	Secondary Traumatic Stress	32	9	28.12	8	25.00	15	46.87*
	Overall Compassion Fatigue	32	8	25.00	10	31.25	14	43.75*

** indicates the level of compassion fatigue*

HYPOTHESIS 2

There is no significant difference in compassion fatigue of teachers working in schools for mentally retarded in terms of length of experience.

Table 2
Difference in compassion fatigue of teachers working in schools for mentally retarded in terms of length of experience

Variable	Teaching Experience	Mean	Calculated 'F' Value	'p' Value
Job Burnout	Low	57.00	4.91	0.00**
	Moderate	60.78		
	High	66.42*		
Secondary Traumatic Stress	Low	31.70	9.34	0.00**
	Moderate	36.53		
	High	40.37*		
Overall Compassion Fatigue	Low	88.70	7.28	0.00**
	Moderate	97.31		
	High	106.81*		

** significant at 0.01 level

FINDINGS

1. On computing the level of *Compassion fatigue* among teachers with regard to their length of experience, it is observed that the teachers with **few years of teaching experience** are **moderate** in their overall *Compassion fatigue* (38.70%) and also **moderate** in the dimensions *Job burnout* (38.70%) and *Secondary traumatic stress* (38.70%).

In the case of teachers with **moderate level of teaching experience**, the overall *Compassion fatigue* is found to be **moderate** (40.54%) along with its dimension *Secondary traumatic stress* (37.83%). However, the majority (40.54%) of them are found to be **high** in the dimension *Job burnout*.

On studying the teachers of **long years teaching experience**, the overall *Compassion fatigue* is found to be **high** (43.75%), along with its dimensions *Job burnout* (43.75%) and *Secondary traumatic stress* (46.87%).

2. On testing the significance of difference in *Compassion fatigue* among teachers of few, moderate and long years of teaching experience, it is found that the teachers with long years of **teaching experience** are **significantly higher** than the teachers of few years of **teaching experience**. **Statistically** No significant difference is observed between teachers of long and moderate years of teaching experience.

The dimensions *Job burnout* and *Secondary traumatic stress* of teachers with **long years teaching experience** are **significantly higher than** the other category of teachers with Few Years of **teaching experience**. However, teachers with moderate level teaching experience are statistically the same with those of long years of teaching experience.

DISCUSSION

The current research has recorded (Table.1) that the level of compassion fatigue of teachers of mentally retarded children in the schools in the south east region of Tamilnadu with the few years of teaching experience (1 – 5 years) was **moderate**, with 38.70% of teachers falling under this category.

Though it has come out as per the alternate hypothesis of the Researcher, the rationalization of the Researcher, regarding the formation of compassion fatigue in teachers of mentally retarded children is different. That is, the teachers with a **few years** of experience are likely to have more compassion fatigue than those with **moderate** and **long years of experience**. Therefore, the stated finding is in contrast to the rationale formed by the Researcher in tune with findings of Perkins, Elizabeth, B; Sprang Ginny (2013); David, Kimberly, C; Palladine, John, M (2011); Sprang, Ginny, Craig, Carlton; Clerk (2011). The **moderate** level compassion fatigue of teachers of **few years** of experience (1 to 5 years) may be attributed to its constituents – *job burnout* and *secondary traumatic stress* which are reported to be comfortably **moderate** with 38.7% each falling under the respective category.

Similar condition appears to be prevailing in the case of teachers of **moderate years** of experience (6 – 10 years) in the schools of mentally retarded children, as 40.54% of teachers have come under this category. However, it is contrary to the rationalization of the Researcher, that the compassion fatigue will down with increase in experience. Moreover, in the teachers of **moderate years** of experience, the compassion fatigue is reported to be on increase. While the constituent *secondary traumatic stress* has struck **moderate** with 37.83% falling under that category, the other constituents *job burnout* is found to have jumped to '**high**' level with 40.54% of the sample occupying this position. It is a clear sign that the level of compassion fatigue starts rising when the teachers are in the middle or at the fagend of the **moderate years of experience** (6 – 10 years). That is, though the overall level of *compassion fatigue* is moderate for teachers with **moderate years of experience**, the constituent *job burnout* is reported to be at its worst, striking '**high**' with a very large percentage of the sample falling under this level; while *secondary traumatic stress* is also almost '**high**' with 35.13% falling under high against 37.83% at **moderate** level with a marginal difference of around 2.5%.

Focusing on teachers of **long years of experience** with 11 and above years, it is astoundingly revealed that they are '**high**' in overall compassion fatigue (43.75%); '**high**' in *secondary traumatic stress* with 46.87% of the sample under this category and **high** in the dimension *job burnout* with 43.75% fallen under this level. Over and beyond the percentage analysis the differential analysis (table .2) has confirmed the significant difference among the mean scores obtained for compassion fatigue for teachers of a few years of experience, moderate years of experience and long years of experience in their overall compassion fatigue, and in respect of the dimensions – *job burnout* and *secondary traumatic stress*. Thus it acknowledges the fact that compassion fatigue – the 'caring cost' phenomenon is not a sudden outburst in the beginning of the career of teachers in mentally retarded schools; rather a slow growing feature with the advancement of experience, and as the subjects are about to complete a decade in the same field, it is known, that compassion fatigue will have grown to the extent of strangling the professional life of the teachers in the mentally retarded schools. It may be stated that the experts in the field of special education may spare sufficient time to find ways and means of assisting the teachers of this category to come off fresh and energetic to go further with renewed strength after a decade of service to the mentally retarded children.

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