

8-2023

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Relationships Between Burnout, Isolation, Secondary Trauma, and Self-Compassion in Mental Health Providers



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Abstract

Burnout is a common challenge among mental health professionals

It is the main catalyst for professional misconduct (Morse, et al., 2012) and common among mental health professionals (Prime, et al., 2020; Sampiao, et al, 2021; Simionato & Simpson, 2018). COVID-19 increased social isolation, decreased social support, and strained family systems among mental health practitioners increasing risk (Prime, et al., 2020; Sampaio, et al., 2021).

Social distancing also diminished systemic resources and increased reliance on personal resources for coping.

Ongoing vicarious trauma increased, thus fostering burnout (McBride, et al., 2020; Shoji et al., 2016).

Self-compassion is proposed as a possible solution to burnout (McCade et al., 2021; Richardson et al, 2018).

Problem: Does self-compassion reduce burnout among mental health providers?

Methods

Participants: Sixteen OPA members who were licensed Oregon Psychologists

Materials: informed consent, demographic questionnaire, and several psychological scales.

Demographic questionnaire: included age, gender, ethnicity, area of practice, number of years in practice, prior teletherapy experience, current teletherapy practice, confidence in practicing teletherapy, where they received support in transitioning to teletherapy, and whether they work remotely. It also included questions about type of practice (e.g., private, group, hospital etc....), and level of education.

Scales:

The Self-Compassion Scale (SCS; Neff, 2003; Neff et al., 2019)
Professional Quality of Life Scale Version 5 (ProQOL-5; Stamm, 2009)

UCLA Loneliness Scale Version 3 (Russel, 1996)

Procedure: After affirming consent, participants completed the demographic questionnaire and scales.

Completed data were analyzed by SPSS for descriptive statistics and correlations among measures.

Stepwise regressions were also examined

- **Predictors:** loneliness and isolation as predictors
- **Moderators:** mindfulness and compassion satisfaction
- **Criteria:** burnout and secondary traumatic stress

Hypothesis 1: Correlations

Loneliness and isolation predicted burnout, but only loneliness predicted secondary trauma

Self-Judgment positively predicted burnout, while self-kindness and humility negatively predicted burnout

Hypothesis 2

The UCLA Loneliness Scale-3 predicted burnout ($\beta = 0.77, t = 3.46, p = .004$). SCS Isolation did not contribute to this relationship SCS Mindfulness ($\beta = 0.49, t = 2.28, p = .057$) and ProQOL-5 Compassion Satisfaction ($\beta = -0.51, t = -2.08, p = .076$) each approached accounting for significant incremental variance in predicting Burnout. See Table

RESULTS

Scale	Alpha	Burnout	STS	Compassion Satisfaction	UCLA Loneliness
Burnout	.81				
STS	.84	.565*			
Compassion Satisfaction	.92	-.701*	.192		
UCLA Loneliness-3	.97	.859*	.643**	-.591**	
SCS-Isolation	.80	.713*	.282	-.644**	.772**
SCS-Self-Judgment	.74	.639*	-.279	.518	.530*
SCS-Over-Identification	.78	.459	.453	-.349	.507*
SCS-Mindfulness	.88	-.462	.089	.645**	-.370
SCS-Self-Kindness	.95	-.846*	-.293	.681**	-.685**
SCS-Common Humanity	.86	-.684*	-.189	.366	-.673**

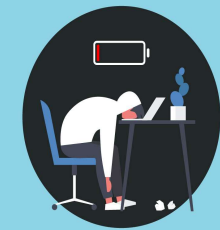
Hypothesis 3

- Isolation predicted secondary traumatic stress ($F_{2,13} = 7.24, p = .008$)
- No other variables added incremental predictive variance.

CONCLUSION

Discussion

- The current study examined the moderating effects of self-compassion on the relationship of loneliness and isolation with burnout and secondary traumatic stress among mental health providers.
- Loneliness was a strong predictor of burnout; isolation did not exacerbate the effect, perhaps due to collinearity; mindfulness and self-compassion showed promise as moderating factors.
- Isolation predicted secondary traumatic stress.
- Mental health providers may be at greater risk of burnout and secondary traumatic stress when lonely and isolated as they often were amidst COVID-19.
- Representativeness and sample size are limitations
- Strategies to minimize loneliness and isolation and to foster mindfulness and compassion satisfaction may be beneficial in



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Presented at: APA, August 2023

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Rodger Bufford, 7/6/2023