

## **Cross-Cultural Helping Initiatives and Compassion Fatigue Phenomena**

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Helping professionals engaging in cross-cultural immersion experiences, especially in high-trauma ecologies, are at greater risk for compassion fatigue and other associated problems. Compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma are all stress-related conditions common among caregivers (e.g. professional counselors, medical personnel, first responders) engaging with highly traumatized human populations. Current research identifies specific risk factors salient to such conditions, including: inexperience, overwork, high caseloads, isolation, lack of support and supervision, lack of training, lack of role clarity, marital status, and personal history of unresolved trauma, severity of client problems, time limitations, inadequate resources, and emotional demands of the work as significant risk factors for burnout. Additionally, counselors, social workers, psychologists, and other allied professionals engage in helping roles that commonly intersect with trauma, which often result in the minimization of their own emotional responses.

The authors advocate for the use of ongoing assessment and screening tools to identify helping professionals which are more likely to experience compassion fatigue. There are a variety of brief, but reliable measures that help identify both at-risk and protective features. When used prior to the cross-cultural experiences these instruments can facilitate a before-the-fact orientation and help individuals identify personal strengths and weaknesses. When used again after the cross-cultural experiences, the assessments can identify changes which will inform debriefing strategies, specific insights about the individual, and requisite supports. Ongoing assessment can also identify important protective attributes that, when leveraged, may prevent future problems for both the helping professionals and those being served by them. Such assessments are therefore critical to sustaining quality interventions that lead to increased self-care for treatment professionals. This is particularly true when helpers are

inexperienced or still developing requisite skills and insights about themselves and their individual limitations. By identifying both risk- and protective-attributes in treatment and sustaining quality interventions that lead to increased self-care among professional helpers, the effects of compassion fatigue in cross-cultural contexts can be diminished, while ensuring qualitative delivery of services among traumatized populations. A variety of nuanced terms are used to identify deleterious effects on helping professionals, which are given a general review below. *Compassion Fatigue Phenomena* (CFP) is used as an overarching term throughout this paper to encompass the breadth and depth of the topic.

The purpose of this article is to give an overview of existing assessment and screening tools and techniques that help professionals to offset compassion fatigue in cross-cultural contexts. The authors also present specific action-steps that should follow compassion fatigue assessment in intense trauma-related situations for ensuring quality services.

***Key words:*** *compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, resiliency factors*