

Exploration of Factors Contributing to Compassion Fatigue in Family Caregivers Providing Care to Older-Adult Relatives

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Introduction

This qualitative research study explored factors contributing to compassion fatigue in family caregivers who assisted paid staff helping to provide care to older adult relatives residing in long-term care facilities.

Compassion fatigue – “debilitating weariness brought about by repetitive empathetic responses to the pain and suffering of others” (La Rowe, 2005).

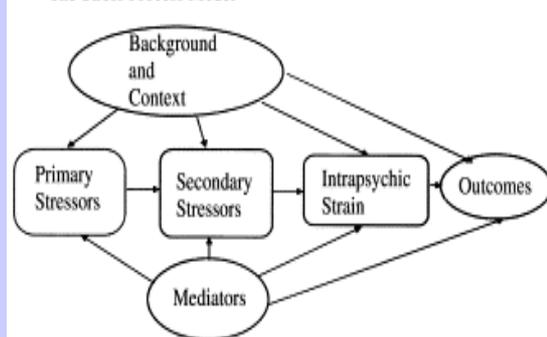


Photographs – Otto F. Mahler

Participants and Method

- **Participants** - Eight family members
- **Data collection** - Observation and conversations
- **Data analysis** - Narrative analysis and poetic interpretation
- **Conceptual Frame** – Stress process model for family caregiving

The Stress Process Model



References

- Pearlin, L.I., Mullan, J.T., Semple, S.J. & Skaff, M.M. (1990). Caregiving and the stress process. *The Gerontologist*, 30(5), 583-94.
- La Rowe, K. (2005). *Transforming compassion fatigue into flow*. Boston: Acanthus.

Themes

1. **Relentless vigilance** - almost continuous state of watchfulness
“I can’t let up. I can’t turn my back for a minute and I get disappointed.”
2. **Consistent inconsistency** - lack of consistency in care provided by paid staff
“One thing I can count on is that things are always done in different ways by different nurses”
3. **Role confusion** - caregiving had an impact on family members’ natural relationship roles with their relatives. Their role as caregiver caused their role as spouse, parent or child to diminish.
“Sometimes I feel more like a nurse than a wife. I wish I could just sit and hold his hand sometimes”

Recommendations

- **Watch** for CF - family caregivers may be predisposed to CF
- **Assess** family members’ desired level of care involvement
- **Determine** reasons for their caregiving
- **Provide** quality care to reduce secondary stressors

