


The Price We Pay As Professional Problem Solvers

An examination of Compassion Fatigue

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NC Lawyer Assistance Program
& LAP Foundation of NC, Inc.

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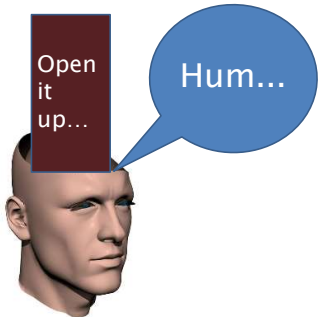


Training Objectives

- Gain an understanding of what compassion fatigue is
- Understand the signs and symptoms
- Understand the contributing factors
- Understand best practices for prevention and mitigation of compassion fatigue


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Open
it
up...

Hum...

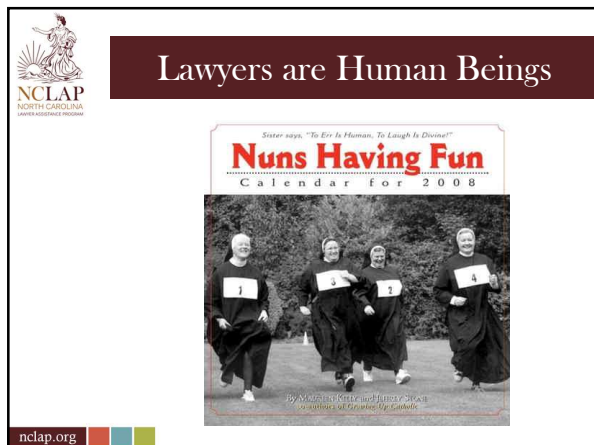
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Fill in the blanks...

- The world is a _____ place.
- Life is _____.
- I am _____ as a human being.
- I want to change _____ about my job.
- I want to change _____ about myself.
- Most often I feel _____.

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Compassion Fatigue Defined

- The cumulative physical/emotional/psychological effects of continual exposure to traumatic or distressing stories/events
- When working in a helping capacity
- Where demands outweigh resources

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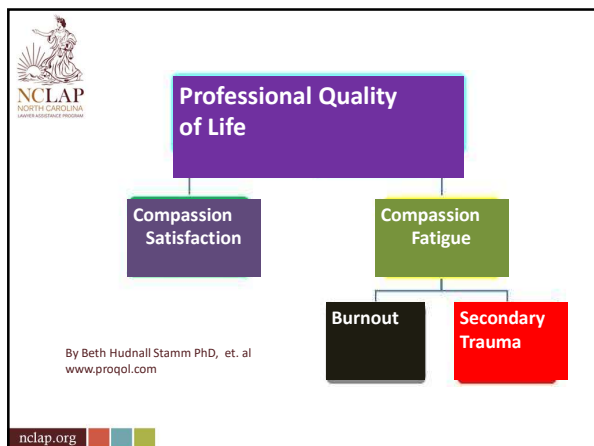


Doing...

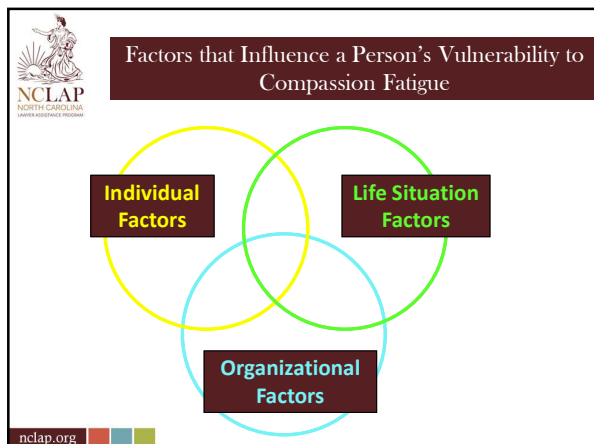
- Too much
- For too long
- With too few resources
- And working with the “big uglies” in life

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Compassion Fatigue Advisory...

- Any person regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, age, occupation.... develop this condition
- Doesn't imply weakness, just "human-ness"
- Is more about "dis-ease" than disease.

Disabled ←————→ Top of your game

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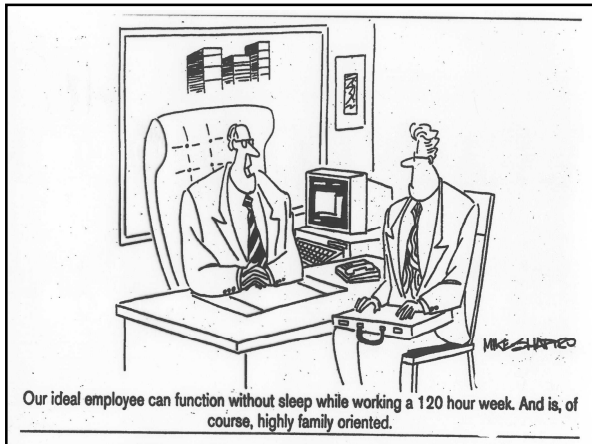
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Typical Attorney Workload

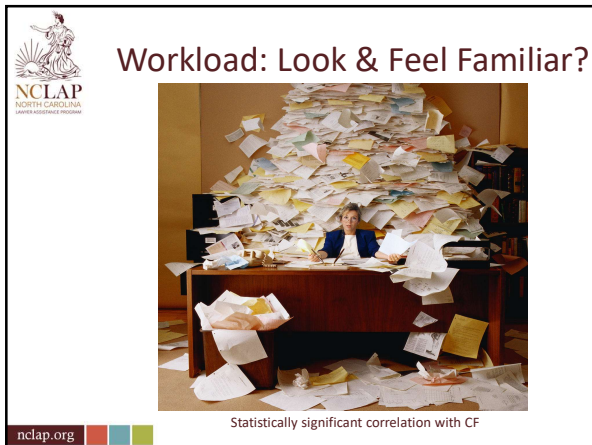
The image shows a person from the waist up, holding a towering stack of multi-colored papers that completely obscures their face and torso. The stack is so high it reaches above their head, illustrating the overwhelming nature of an attorney's workload.

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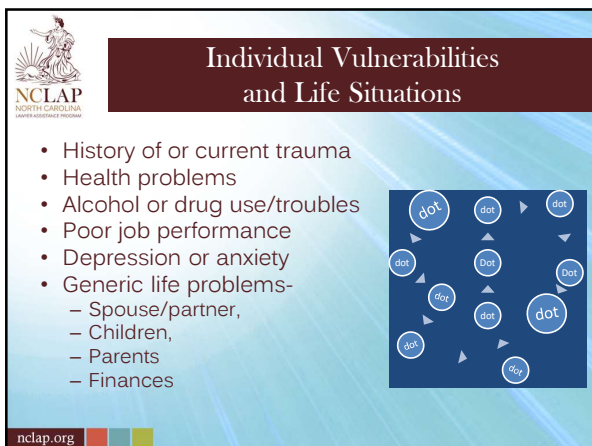
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Organizational Stressors

- Unrealistic expectations
- Unrecognized accomplishments
- Budget cuts
- Eliminating positions
- Performing multiple jobs
- Personalities and politics
- Intense competition (within and without)

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Client Expectations/Stressors

- Unrealistic
- Want it now
- Unhappy, sad, mad, frustrated
- Stress from the pressure
- Stress from the difficult material being reviewed and the workload yet expected to appear and be completely unaffected by it (i.e. not be human)

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Competitive Nature of Stress




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Lawyering - an At Risk Profession

- 2016 Landmark National ABA study
- 44% of lawyers feel they don't have enough time with families
- 54% feel they don't have enough time for themselves
- High percentage of job dissatisfaction ratings

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Problematic Drinking

Most at Risk? Younger lawyers in first 15 years, working in private firms

Problematic Drinking

Highest rate age 30 and under


Age Group	Rate (%)
< 30	32%
31-40	~25%
41-50	~18%
51-60	~15%
61-70	~12%
71-80	~10%

General U.S. population: 6%

Lawyers surveyed: 21%

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Mental Health


Mental Health Symptoms

Lawyers with alcohol use disorders also had highest rates of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Depression
28%

Anxiety
19%

Stress
23%



Lawyers report depression 4X the general U.S. population

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Symptoms Reported

- ▶ Intrusive thoughts
- ▶ Anger/anxiety/fear
- ▶ Sleep disturbance
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Loss of Appetite
- ▶ Loss of empathy
- ▶ Loss of faith in humanity
- ▶ Sense of isolation from others
- ▶ Physical complaints

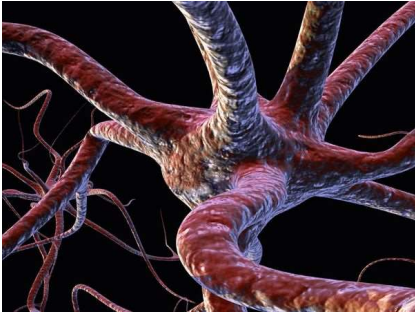
Source: Vrklevski et al. (2008) and Levin et al. (2003) and Jaffe et al. (2006)

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Role of Mirror Neurons in the Brain



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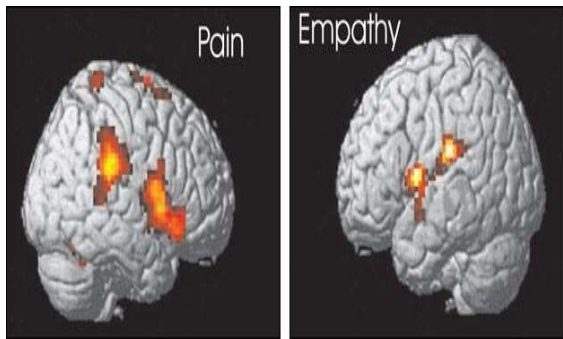


Empathy

- Experience the experiences of someone else (Shane, 2008)
- Enduring those same experiences and emotions (Lydia Lytle Gibson)
- Empathy is involuntary: a shared emotion- this is hardwired into the brain (L. Gibson)
- *Human beings who spend time with other human beings who are empathetic tend to feel better*









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Hand		Foot	
Pain	No Pain	Pain	No Pain
			
			

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Brain Chemistry

- Reptilian Brain (instincts)
- Limbic Brain (emotion, memory)
- Frontal Lobe (reason)

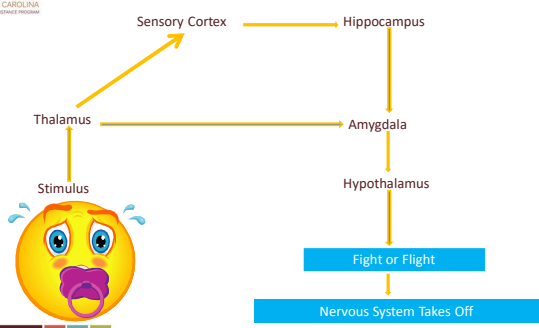
- These work together, while we think, something else is going on.

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The Fight or Flight Response




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graph TD
    Stimulus --> Thalamus
    Thalamus --> SensoryCortex[Sensory Cortex]
    Thalamus --> Amygdala
    SensoryCortex --> Hippocampus
    Amygdala --> Hypothalamus
    Hypothalamus --> FightOrFlight[Fight or Flight]
    FightOrFlight --> NervousSystem[Nervous System Takes Off]
  
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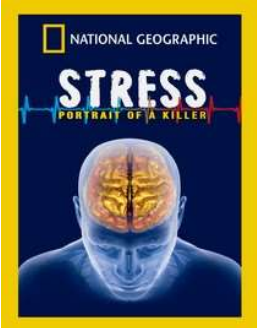


Stress: Portrait of a Killer

This movie sheds wonderful insight into the propagation of illness in today's society via the inner workings of the human stress response.


Only 50 minutes long.

Available on You Tube.



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Impact on Primary Assumptions

- The World is Benevolent
- The World is Meaningful
- The Self is Worthy

Source: Bulman, Shattered Assumptions

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Impact of Continual Exposure...

- Shattered assumptions about basic beliefs in our world for safety, security, trust, justice
- The world is not a good place, there is no meaning; pessimism, depression, irritability, sickness
- Heightened awareness of vulnerability and the fragility of life-increased anxiety/anger/...

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One Attorney Says...

- "I think this happens to everyone whether they admit or not or show it or not. It is inevitable with that kind of caseload that one will at least at times go bonkers. This wears on all of us and on some of us more than others. We see colleagues severely affected all the time. I think the practice leaves scars. Some make it better than others, obviously, but everyone suffers..... "

--criminal lawyer

Source: WisLAP Program permission granted

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JUDGES SPEAK OUT
Some of the things 10 Canadian judges and 6 U.S. judges said about their jobs.

“I have a terrible, intense, exclusive obligation of children because I keep not believe and my job as a judge is probably needed repeat again being swept away by the pressure evidence I have to confront.”

“For me to be elected in a small community where you are known by a number of the town, the neighborhood and every year.”

“In 1976 of our work involves legal work in my neighborhood. It was not in fact, we’re not the changing ground for emotional and financial issues and the other very professional families I feel I can have a great mother with a judge.”

“I always take work home. On the weekends I work, I’m not, we’re back to work if I don’t go to the courtroom. The goal of court is to be in my courtroom.”

“I really prepared for the inclusion of the problem. It didn’t matter, but you include to be here about the way the change over friends and family.”

“I have a constant, except in the majority of new books. It was to make what you say, how you appear, where you appear.”

“The sheer volume of work has a much greater impact on providing people and how the work is done and the increasing indifference to them.”

Zimmerman, (2002). Trauma and Judges. Canadian Bar Association Annual Meeting

“Cases of horrible, sexual, predatory exploitation of children haunt me. I keep my balance and my job as a judge by profoundly guarding myself against being swept away by the gruesome evidence I have to confront.”

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Impact on Lawyers

- Powerlessness
- Indecisive/Anxious
- Alienate from others



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Fill in the blanks


- The world is a _____ place.
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- I want to change _____ about myself.
- Most often I feel _____.


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So slow, is it even moving?




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That which is to give light must endure burning.....



Victor Frankl

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Rather slow and insidious....
then increases... then overwhelming.....



Burning




Uncomfortable



Overwhelming

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So what happens?



We crash.

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Visible Results

- Strong correlation with what is known as “Disruptive Behavior”
 - Intimidation, Anger and Lashing Out
 - At opposing counsel
 - At support staff
 - At associates
- “Kick the dog” syndrome
- Spouse/partner and kids take the brunt of the frustration
- Withdraw from clients and colleagues
- Enter the grievance and discipline process

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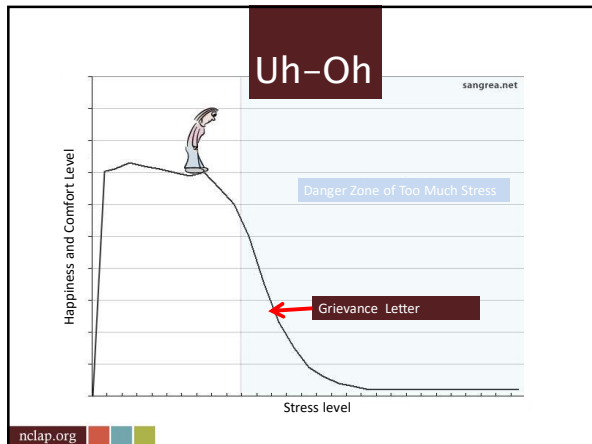


Most common client complaints & grievance notices

- Lack of communication
- Apathy (improper advocacy)
- Lack of Diligence
- i.e. “I just don’t care anymore.”

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Who most at risk?

- Criminal or family law attorneys/judges*
- High caseloads; long work hours
- High % exposure to graphic evidence, 911 tapes, photos, videotapes, victim impact statements
- Serving clients who have high levels of distress
- Little if any education on the subject of CF
- Little support from peers-isolation

* Personal injury, workers comp, bankruptcy, wills, trusts and estates

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There is Hope for all of us...




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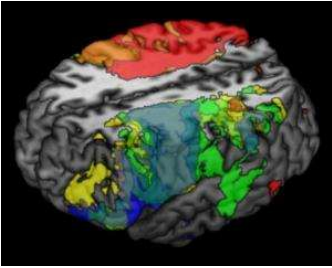
The things that cause the things that cause the things.....



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Talking and Connections Help the Brain



What Individuals Can Do

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Understanding Triggers



Emotional triggers are events or personality types that cause an intense emotional response.

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Understanding Triggers

- Different for each one of us
- Examples:
 - Double Bind
 - Abuse of vulnerable populations
 - Disrespect from colleagues/judges/clients/people
 - Unfair, unjust realities of life and the system
 - The line at your door


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Typical Responses to Triggers

- ▶ Anger,
- ▶ Depression, withdrawal
- ▶ Anxiety; work harder
- ▶ Stop caring, looks like burnout but is really a defense mechanism
- ▶ Physical complaints, headaches, stomach problems, back pain, fatigue
- ▶ Coping mechanisms that hurt more than help



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Research-based suggestions for improving mood, increasing life satisfaction and mitigating stress

- Recognize the **risks** for yourself
- Find a way to **debrief** distressing material
- Work on **self awareness** every day
- Take an **inventory** of how balanced your life is-be intentional about balancing it out
- **Evaluate** your tension reducing behaviors
- Be **intentional** about **protecting** yourself

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How Many are You Spinning?...



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Becoming Happier

- Spin fewer plates:
 - Squeeze in less.
 - Resume hobbies and activities that bring you joy and trigger the good stuff in the limbic brain

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Becoming Happier


- It is the obvious:

Sleep
Exercise
Eat

What do you do at the end of the day to transition out of work?
If nothing, admit that. Then change it.

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Becoming Happier

- Don't deny negative emotions [fear, sadness, anxiety] – move toward them and accept them.
- Identify and speak with a close person (or people) who you trust to share your internal experience.

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Becoming Happier

- It is not state of status or bank account – “state of mind” is what matters most.
- While we may be paid well, money does not trigger the mirror neuron stimulus we (all humans) need to translate into better emotional health in our bodies and psyches.

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Becoming Happier

- Intersect pleasure and meaning → interests are central.
- Express Gratitude
- Try making a gratitude list every morning of 3 things you are grateful for. Do it for a few months and see what you notice. It will change your life.

Adapted from T. Ben-Shahar

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If you need to reach us

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Thank you!

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