

A Study On The Mental Health Status Of Social Workers Working During This Pandemic Situation At Chennai.

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ABSTRACT: *Mental health is one of the most important factors in an individual's life. It is interlinked with all other aspects such as an individual's physical and emotional health, work life, relationships etc. Any disruptions in one of these aspects can affect all the other factors. It refers to the condition of being mentally and emotionally sound that is characterized by the absence of any mental illness and by adequate adjustment especially as reflected in feeling comfortable about oneself, positive feelings about others, and the ability to meet the demands of daily life (Merriam-Webster 1828). With the present situation of Covid-19 it has taken a toll on most of our mental health. In context of the present situation with shortage of adequate medical utilities, massive spike in Covid-19 cases around the country, as well as the mismanagement of the government regarding this situation, social work professionals along with other professionals have been working continuously to help the people who are in desperate need of help. The amount of work and commitment that this period demands especially in the part of a social work profession can affect their mental health to a great extent resulting in compassion fatigue which in itself is a factor for burnouts making them emotionally drained and helpless. Therefore this study aims to examine the mental health status of the Social Workers working during this pandemic crisis. For this study, the researcher used descriptive and quantitative research method. 50 samples for the study were collected through convenient sampling method. This study will help us to understand mental health aspect of social workers which in turn help us to know more about the difficulties faced by people who are helping and supporting others.*

Keywords: *Mental Health, Social worker, Pandemic, Emotions, Resilience, Compassion Fatigue*

1. INTRODUCTION:

This Covid-19 pandemic has taken a toll on each and everyone's life. This includes diverse outcomes which cannot be justified by words. People are losing their loved ones due to Covid-19, some lost their jobs which forced them into unemployment, laborers and students strained in parts of the country not being able to go their hometowns, health care workers exhausted due to excessive workload as there are shortage of staff, economy of the country has deteriorated and much worse with the second wave of the virus especially in India. This situation itself has shown how much it is important for people to help each other. And it is done so by many social workers. As social workers are working beyond their physical and mental boundaries just to help people in any ways possible, be it by raising funds, managing

resources and providing any information possible to the general public. This requires a lot of energy and time putting in efforts to reach their certain goals to help people. But this involvement of the social workers during this period has diverse effects on their mental and emotional health. It is critical to realize that emotions, thought and action are intricately interwoven and linked. As for social workers this pandemic situation can be mentally and emotionally challenging leading to compassion fatigue, burnout and stress. Therefore in this study the researcher focuses on identifying the factors that affect the social workers mental health.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The role played by social workers during this pandemic situation is vital. Various organizations have come forward to provide help and service to the people in need. This again requires a lot of involvement of social workers or caregivers both physically and mentally which generally is overlooked by many which in turn can bounce back and affect the health of the caregivers resulting in stress, anxiety, burnout etc. one of the most common negative factors were seen among caregivers is the compassion fatigue syndrome. Compassion fatigue in general terms refers to exhaustion both emotional and physical that an individual experiences when overwhelmed by stressors that can affect their abilities to empathize or even feel compassion towards others. It is also referred as secondary traumatic syndrome (STS). This syndrome generates when individuals work directly with victims of trauma, abuse, disaster and illness that puts the caregiver at risks to feelings of helplessness, lack of compassion towards the people in need, work absenteeism, self-dissatisfaction, irritability, outburst of emotions etc. As while working with them a great amount of emotional and mental control is required and the inability to maintain the same can affect the individual to a great deal which can be seen during this period of time. Therefore, the aim of this study is to determine the compassion fatigue of the socialworkers working at Chennai in different organizations amidst this crisis and how they are managing their mental and emotional health.

NEED OF THE STUDY:

At present most of the organizations lack in providing any support or help to the social workers and caregivers in terms of their wellbeing or how to manage and improve their health. This study can provide the researcher with necessary information and knowledge about managing emotions and showing resilience to the factors that can affect one's ability to help others in a positive regard. In addition, the study can also help the organizations as well as the participants to recognize any signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout which they can work upon and grow their ability to deal with traumatic cases and situations with minimum chances of counter-interference and secondary traumatic syndrome.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Social work profession is one of the most physically and mentally demanding profession which requires utmost balance between work and personal life that includes both mental and emotional aspects. Inability to cope with traumatic cases and daily work load has certain consequences. This includes compassion fatigue, burnouts, emotional turmoil and many more affecting one's mental as well as physical health. In a study conducted by Gail Kinman and Louise Grant (2017) on Resilience in Social Workers; Compassion, wellbeing and distress: The importance of caring for the self as well as for others it was found that social workers who found their work more emotionally demanding were at greater risk of burnout and worse mental health with a much poorer work life balance. The study concluded that social workers

who tend to be perfectionist in their work are more prone to burnout compared to other Social workers who maintain a good job control and receive positive support from around them. They tend to have much better work life balance and good mental health and are less likely to experience burnouts. In another study done by Austin Taylor Kines (2016) he summarized that social workers appear to be potentially more burned out and have less feelings of personal accomplishment compared to other human service workers. As burnout can be the result of group of factors such as job dissatisfaction, excessive work demands, work-life conflicts, lack of self-kindness and mindfulness, these factors in turn affects the mental health of social workers (Gail Kinman&Louise Grant, 2017). Workplace on the other hand plays a greater role in a social workers mental health. As limited latitude in decision making from the organisation, work pressure, lack of attention given to the workers needs, undervalued at workplace all these contribute to poor job satisfaction and burnout amongst most of the social workers (Sherrill Evans et al., 2006). However social workers with above average emotional intelligence and potential tend to have a balanced and efficient work life control enabling them to maintain their emotions and confirm resilience to factors affecting their mental health. But in context with the present situation it has become too much to deal with. According to Robert Sanders (2020) in his article about Stress, anxiety and social care worker's mental health during Covid-19 he mentioned that as social work profession already being a stressful occupation and with Covid-19 crisis the situation is exerting unprecedented pressure on health and social care service providers. Resulting in moral injury especially from experiencing hopeless cases and above all giving fake assurance to the patients' family members despite of knowing what the outcome may be, these incidents on a daily basis is affecting their mental health for a long-term period as well as stress and burnout. He discussed on the lack of uncertainty around organisational supports, fear of spreading infection at work and home to family members, fear of being exposed to Covid-19, lack of access to up-to-date information and communication and above all not having rapid access to testing if they themselves develop symptoms due to lack of equipment, all these factors puts the social workers at risk to anxiety.

OBJECTIVES:

The main objective of the study is to assess the mental health status of Social Workers who are working in this Covid-19 Pandemic Situation at different parts of Chennai City. The main objective can be divided further as follows,

1. To find out if there are any symptoms of compassion fatigue among social workers
2. To examine how social workers are managing their emotions at stressful situation
3. To know how social workers are balancing their mental health and bouncing back to healthy state of mind.

2. METHODOLOGY:

Research Design:

For this study the researcher has adopted Descriptive Research Design. As to describe and get an in-depth understanding of the mental health status of the social workers working during this pandemic crisis at Chennai. This quantitative research design can help the researcher to analyze the compassion fatigue among the social work professionals as well as investigate their ability to show resilience to stressful situations and managing emotions.

Sampling Technique:

This study concentrates on the social work professionals working at Chennai under different organisations. The size of the sample consists of 50 participants collected through convenient sampling method.

Tool for Data Collection:

The tool for this study is a 5-point likert scale set of questionnaire designed by the researcher to determine the compassion fatigue, emotion management and resilience level of the respondents. It is a close-ended questionnaire and has been combined and modified from 3 scales i.e. The Compassion Fatigue Assessment Tool, Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (EIQ, Managing Emotions) and Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). The items are selected in accordance to the research topic respectively. The data was collected through Google forms and the responses were collected within a time range of 5days.As for the scoring pattern the respondents are to choose from the scale of 1-5 respectively, varying from item to item according to which the results would be analyzed.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

This present study was designed to examine the mental health status of the Social Work Professionals working during this pandemic crisis at Chennai. It was also to assess any sign of compassion fatigue as well as how they are managing their emotions and showing resilience to factors affecting their mental health.

Table 1 depicts that majority (74%) of the respondents belong to the age group of 22-25 with an average working experience of less than a year in the field of Social work profession. There are 20 females, 2 Trans and 28 male as respondents in this study. As seen in Table 1 most of the respondents have an income of 10,000-20,000/month. The study mostly has collected its data specifically from mid and south Chennai and the respondents work under various different fields such as CD, Medical & Psychiatry, counselling, shelter homes, as project co-ordinator etc.

Table 1
 Demographic Details frequency of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Demographic details			
1	Age	22-25	26-29	30-33
	<i>Frequency</i>	37	6	7
2	Gender	Female	Trans	Male
	<i>Frequency</i>	20	2	28
3	Working experience	Less than ayr	1-3 yrs	4-7 yrs
	<i>Frequency</i>	19	20	11
4	Income	10,000-20,000	20,000-30,000	30,000-40,000
	<i>Frequency</i>	34	14	2

The results in Table 2 depict the mean values of compassion fatigue. The results obtained from the study indicate that 48% of the respondents do not harbor any resentment about their role as Social worker and 40% of the respondents never tend to avoid any interactions with people in need and colleagues when possible. From table 2 it can also be seen that 40% of the

respondents do not lose sleep over worry however another 40% of the respondents do tend lose their sleep over worry sometimes. Also 32% of the respondents sometimes secretly feel good when their procedures are cancelled. Overall, it can be said that the respondents' attitude and thoughts towards their work is above average whereas at the same time it can also be said that some of the respondents do show certain signs of compassion fatigue as seen in table 2.

Table 2
 Percentage of responses and Mean of each scale of Compassion Fatigue $N=50$

Sl. No.	Compassion Fatigue	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	It stresses me too much to work in direct contact with people.	26%	32%	30%	8%	4%
2	I lose sleep over worry.	40%	12%	40%	4%	4%
3	I tend to experience anxiety when interacting emotional people.	10%	40%	38%	12%	-
4	I feel I have unhealthy attachment with people	36%	34%	22%	8%	-
5	I harbor resentment about my role as caregiver.	48%	12%	36%	4%	-
6	I feel a reduced sense of accomplishment	34%	24%	30%	1%	-
7	I tend to avoid interactions with people in need and colleagues when possible	40%	24%	20%	4%	6%

8	I feel secretly happy when a procedure is cancelled.	30%	18%	32%	8%	12%
	Mean of each Scale	33	25	31	8	3

their emotions. As 44% of the respondents rarely lose their temper on others and 34% of the respondents can frequently alter their frame of mind or mood. According to the results 32% of the respondents can retaliate to any bad situations quickly. However it can also be seen that 26% of the respondents are not able to hide their strong feelings and emotions and make it obvious in general. Similarly 22% of the respondents are affected by stressful situations or people even after their working hours. As from the overall results as seen in table 3 more than half of the respondents are able to think clearly even under difficult situations but on the other hand a little less than half of the respondents are overwhelmed when they experience strong emotions that can clearly affect their ability to take accurate decisions at work as well in their personal lives affecting their mental health.

Table 3 Percentage of responses and Mean values of Managing Emotions (N=50)

Sl. No.	Managing Emotions	Does not apply	Applies rarely	Applies half the time	Applies frequently	Always applies
1	I can 'reframe' bad situations quickly	12%	22%	32%	30%	4%
2	I tend to hide my feelings and emotions rather than making it obvious	26%	-	22%	34%	18%
3	Others cannot tell what kind of mood I am in	8%	42%	8%	20%	22%
4	I lose my temper at other people	34%	44%	8%	14%	-
5	Difficult people do not annoy me	30%	38%	14%	18%	-
6	I can consciously alter my frame of mind or mood	14%	20%	24%	34%	8%
7	I do not let stressful situations or people affect me once I have left work	22%	32%	16%	18%	12%
8	I do not worry about work or life in general	18%	32%	8%	38%	4%
9	I can suppress my emotions when I need to	-	36%	34%	18%	12%
10	Others often do not know how I am feeling about things	-	26%	14%	34%	16%
	Mean of the Scale	17	30	18	25	10

Table 3 depicts the results obtained in respect to the management of emotions by the respondents. The results in table 3 indicate that most of the respondents are good in managing

MAIN FINDINGS:

After discussing and analyzing the results of the study, the following findings can be drawn:

- Based on the 50 respondents it can be said that more than half ($m=33$ & $m=25$) of the Social workers are not affected by compassion fatigue and are in a good mental health state. Even during this situation, the social workers have been able to maintain their wellbeing while providing productive services to the people. However, a little less than half ($m=31$, $m=8$ & $m=3$) of the respondents show signs of compassion fatigue according to the results. Many social workers as according to the results are seen to have inadequate sleep, feel resentful towards their role and even avoid interactions and procedure with the people. This can greatly affect the quality of service they provide to the people as the social workers themselves struggle to maintain a good mental health.
- As regarding the management of emotions on the part of the social workers towards their work, most ($m=18$, $m=25$ & $m=10$) of the social workers possess above average potential to manage their emotions in terms of any stressful situations. They can think and act clearly even under stressful situation taking accurate decisions. However, results also show that a little less than half ($m=17$ & $m=30$) of the respondents find it difficult to cope up when encountered with stressful situations and tend to make hasty decisions that can not only affect the clients but to themselves as well.
- As for the resilience of the Social Workers towards stressful encounters it is seen that they have normal to high resilience. The social workers are above average in balancing their mental health and the ability to bounce back or recover from any stresses is quite good.

4. SUGGESTIONS:

- Social workers as individuals should prioritize self-care and compassion for themselves. Such as building a healthy work life balance and sense of job control as well as setting boundaries between personal and work life.
- Government should impose effective course of actions and policies in support of the Social workers' mental health.
- Organisations employing Social workers need to develop healthy work environment, introduce workshops on evidence based strategies, regulate frequent self-assessment sessions and initiate recreational activities.

5. CONCLUSION:

The mental health status of the social workers, according to this study, has seen to be in a good state. They are as well in an above average position in managing their emotions during this time of crisis. However it can also be stated that some of the respondents do share certain amount of compassion fatigue and are facing difficulties in managing their emotions as being under stressful situations. However, as the response to the study is limited to 50 respondents it cannot be generalized for whole of the social workers working in Chennai and if the same study is to be conducted with the same respondents again, the result would be varied as assessing mental health status is not concrete condition. This brings us to the point that more studies should to be done to assess the mental health of the social workers especially during the time of crisis. This gives way to more research in this field of Study.

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