Compassion Fatigue in Animal Care Employees

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SHELTER STATISTICS

- ~6.5 million companion animals enter U.S. shelters yearly
  - ~1.5 million are euthanized (23%) (ASPCA, 2017)
COMPASSION FATIGUE

- “A state of exhaustion and dysfunction as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion and all that it evokes” (Yu, Jiang & Shen, 2016)
- Interchangeable with vicarious traumatization and secondary trauma (Yu, Jiang & Shen, 2016)
- “The loss of ability to nurture” (Yu, Jiang & Shen, 2016)
CARING-KILLING PARADOX

- Take care of animals then kill them (Reeve, et al., 2005)
  - Healthy, friendly, unwanted animals
- Contradiction between the perfect occupational self and reality (Reeve, et al., 2004)
- Attachment to animal makes euthanasia more difficult (Reeve, et al., 2004)
WORK RELATED STRESS & TURNOVER

- Euthanasia-related stress
- Public scorn
- Burnout
- Turnover

(Reeve, et al., 2005)
PREVIOUS RESEARCH

- No physiological measures
- All interviews/surveys
- No intervention

**Data Collection Method**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Number of Studies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-Structured Interviews</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Discussion</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Open-ended interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life Grid, Interview</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
4 EXPERIMENT STUDY

1. Is “caring” necessary for the occurrence of compassion fatigue, or is killing sufficient?

2. Is actual killing necessary?

3. What is the impact of live release rates and the importance of choice?

4. Separating out work stress and death stress
EXPERIMENT 1: METHODS

Pre
- Salivary cortisol
- Blood pressure

During

Heart rate variability

Post
- Salivary cortisol
- Blood pressure
- IES-R
- PROQOL
- Additional Questionnaire
### IMPACT OF EVENTS SCALE-Revised (IES-R)

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Below is a list of difficulties people sometimes have after stressful life events. Please read each item, and then indicate how distressing each difficulty has been for you during the past seven days with respect to the (date). How much have you been distressed or bothered by these difficulties?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Any reminder brought back feelings about it</td>
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<td>2. I had trouble staying asleep</td>
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<td>3. Other things kept making me think about it</td>
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<td>4. I felt irritable and angry</td>
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<td>5. I avoided letting myself get upset when I thought about it or was reminded of it</td>
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<td>6. I thought about it when I didn’t mean to</td>
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<td>7. I felt as if it hadn’t happened or wasn’t real</td>
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<td>8. I stayed away from reminders of it</td>
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<td>9. Pictures about it popped into my mind</td>
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<td>10. I was jumpy and easily startled</td>
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<td>11. I tried not to think about it</td>
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<td>12. I was aware that I still had a lot of feelings about it, but I didn’t deal with them</td>
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<td>13. My feelings about it were kind of numb</td>
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<td>14. I found myself acting or feeling like I was back at that time</td>
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<td>15. I had trouble falling asleep</td>
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<td>16. I had waves of strong feelings about it</td>
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<td>17. I tried to remove it from my memory</td>
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<td>18. I had trouble concentrating</td>
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<td>19. Reminders of it caused me to have physical reactions, such as sweating, trouble breathing, nausea, or a pounding heart</td>
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<td>20. I had dreams about it</td>
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<td>21. I felt watchful and on-guard</td>
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<td>22. I tried not to talk about it</td>
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</table>

**Total IES-R Score:**

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**AVD:** 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 17, 22

**HYP:** 4, 10, 15, 18, 19, 21
MONTHS ON THE JOB AND ANIMALS PER MONTH

- **Animal shelter**
  - Months on the Job: Approximately 300
  - Animals per Month: Approximately 100

- **Veterinary**
  - Months on the Job: Approximately 100
  - Animals per Month: Approximately 50

- **Meat Science**
  - Months on the Job: Approximately 200
  - Animals per Month: Approximately 200

Staff Type: Animal shelter, Veterinary, Meat Science
IMPACT OF EVENT SCALE-REVISED SCORE

The graph presents a comparison of the Impact of Event Scale-Revised Score across different staff types. The y-axis represents the Impact of Event Scale-Revised Score, ranging from 0 to 70, while the x-axis categorizes staff types into three groups: Animal shelter, Veterinary Staff Type, and Meat Science.

- **Animal shelter** shows a high Impact of Event Scale-Revised Score, with a cluster of data points indicating a significant range.
- **Veterinary Staff Type** has a lower Impact of Event Scale-Revised Score, with a single data point that is lower than the Animal shelter group.
- **Meat Science** also has a lower Impact of Event Scale-Revised Score, with a small cluster of data points, indicating less variability compared to the other groups.
BURNOUT SCORE AND SECONDARY TRAUMATIC STRESS SCORE

Burnout Score

- Animal shelter: [25, 30]
- Veterinary Staff Type: [20, 25]
- Meat Science: [15, 20]

Secondary Traumatic Stress Score

- Animal shelter: [25, 30]
- Veterinary Staff Type: [20, 25]
- Meat Science: [15, 20]
COMPASSION SATISFACTION SCORE AND SDANN*
CORRELATION: -0.637
“MODERATE” CORRELATION

Compassion Satisfaction on IES-R
Compassion Fatigue? Maybe...

• Limitations
  • SDANN* requires similar time intervals

• Conclusion
  • Animal shelter employees-high IES-R, moderate compassion satisfaction score
  • Not compassion fatigue!
New concept: MORAL INJURY

Caused by perceived wrongdoing that violates or goes against the individual’s code of conduct and can occur because of one’s own actions or someone else’s actions.

(Litz et al., 2009)
NEXT STEPS

2. Frequent euthanasia

3. Impact of live release rates and choice

4. Work stress vs. death stress
Questions?

Thank you to my participants and the facilities that allowed me to visit!

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