

## Implications of Self-Care for Clinical Social Workers

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# IMPLICATIONS OF SELF-CARE FOR CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKERS

Researchers: KateLyn Costa and Joelle Cote-Powell, under the guidance of Dr. Adam Quinn, PhD, MSW, Faculty Member



## Abstract

- Recent research has shed light on the impacts of burnout on mental health practitioners and the benefits of self-care practices both in their workplace and personal lives.
- Clinical social workers in Cumberland County, Maine, were surveyed to assess the current level of self-care and the effects this has on clinical social workers and their clients.
- The research hypothesizes the need for a stronger emphasis on self-care among clinical social workers.
- An increased focus on self-care in social work may directly impact the quality of care clinical social workers are able to provide to their clients.

## Introduction or Background

- Recent research shows that LCSWs are at risk of secondary traumatic stress, burnout, and compassion fatigue due to varying aspects of their work (Shepherd & Newell, 2020; Bloomquist, Wood, Friedmeyer-Trainer, & Hea-Won, 2015).
- The research also shows that self-care has a moderating effect for the development of negative compassion outcomes and significantly decreased burnout, STS, and increased compassion satisfaction (Mott & Martin, 2019).
- There is often talk of the importance of self-care in the social work profession, there is also a high burn-out rate among social workers (Lee, Miller, & Bride, 2020), and attention must be placed on self-care in the field (Miller et al., 2019a).
- This research aims to provide a much needed understanding of how LCSWs can implement self-care, the frequency of which LCSWs engage in self-care, and how this impacts their well-being and the impacts on client treatment.

## Hypothesis

What might be the effects of self-care on social work professional practitioners' well-being?

## Methods

- Quantitative research project
- Measurement tools:
  - Demographic questions
  - Likert type scale survey including:
    - Self-care assessment
    - Workplace satisfaction
- Qualtrics survey design (32 questions)
- Non-random sample based on availability
- Emailed survey to:
  - Email list from the Maine Licensing Board of LCSW's in Cumberland County

## Results

- Overall, respondents reported participating in self-care activities and habits
- The highest activity reported (99.56%) was problem solving when they had challenges at work.
- The lowest, but still significant, activity reported (57.27%) was reporting engaging in spiritual practices.
- The great majority (73%) or more reported having a positive experience in their workplace.

## Discussion

- This research revealed that the majority of respondents engaged in self-care and were satisfied with their work. This is not congruent with previous research that showed that social workers did not predominantly engage in self-care (Miller et al., 2020).
- It is postulated that the majority of respondents in this research have worked in private practice for more than 10 years in contrast to new social workers who may work in large agencies, hence the workplace satisfaction and attention to self-care.
- Limitations identified which may account for this discrepancy in results are:
  - Sample made up of predominantly females, 88.03%
  - Respondents working in private practice and unrepresentative of social workers working in agencies.
  - Quantitative analysis does not seem to be efficient in understanding the relation between self-care and workplace satisfaction in social workers.

## Descriptive statistics of self-care practice for Clinical Social Workers

COLOR KEY		0 - 29.99%	30% - 49.99%	50%+			
#	Survey Item	Total N=237	I do this well	I do this ok	I barely or rarely do this	I never do this	This never occurred to me
1	I engage in physical activities	230	46.96%	40.00%	11.30%	1.74%	0.00%
2	I laugh	230	69.57%	27.83%	2.61%	0.00%	0.00%
3	I engage in spiritual practices	228	24.12%	32.89%	25.00%	16.67%	1.32%
4	I get adequate sleep for my body	229	42.79%	49.78%	6.55%	0.87%	0.00%
5	I spend quality time with people I care about	230	50.87%	43.91%	4.78%	0.00%	0.43%
6	I participate in activities that I enjoy	230	47.83%	47.83%	3.91%	0.43%	0.00%
7	I accept help from others	230	22.61%	57.39%	18.70%	1.30%	0.00%
8	I engage in physical intimacy	228	27.63%	42.11%	21.05%	7.89%	1.32%
9	I take action to meet my emotional needs	230	41.74%	47.39%	10.00%	0.87%	0.00%
10	I take small breaks throughout the work day	229	39.30%	40.61%	15.72%	3.93%	0.44%
11	I seek out professional development opportunities	230	49.13%	43.91%	6.52%	0.43%	0.00%
12	I take vacations	230	40.43%	40.43%	16.52%	2.61%	0.00%
13	I acknowledge my successes at work	230	33.48%	54.78%	10.00%	1.74%	0.00%
14	I problem solve when I have challenges at work	229	68.56%	31.00%	0.44%	0.00%	0.00%
15	I reserve work tasks for designated work hours (for example, paperwork, emails, work-related colleague contact)	230	43.04%	36.52%	16.52%	3.91%	0.00%
16	I attend to feelings of being overwhelmed with my work	230	36.52%	49.57%	11.74%	2.17%	0.00%
17	I seek out colleagues I find supportive	230	58.26%	34.35%	6.09%	0.87%	0.43%

## Descriptive statistics of Workplace Satisfaction for Clinical Social Workers

COLOR KEY		0 - 29.99%	30% - 49.99%	50%+			
#	Survey Item	Total N=237	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often
1	I feel run down and drained of physical or emotional energy.	228	4.39%	21.93%	50.88%	18.42%	4.39%
2	I have negative thoughts about my job.	228	9.65%	44.30%	34.21%	10.09%	1.75%
3	I am harder and less sympathetic with people than perhaps they deserve.	227	24.23%	54.63%	18.94%	1.76%	0.44%
4	I am easily irritated by small problems, or by my co-workers and team.	228	20.18%	46.49%	31.58%	1.75%	0.00%
5	I feel misunderstood or unappreciated by my co-workers.	223	43.05%	37.22%	16.59%	2.69%	0.45%
6	I feel that I have no one to talk to.	225	52.89%	27.11%	17.78%	1.33%	0.89%
7	I feel that I am achieving less than I should.	226	32.74%	31.42%	28.32%	5.75%	1.77%
8	I feel under an unpleasant level of pressure to succeed.	225	36.89%	33.78%	20.44%	5.78%	3.11%
9	I feel that I am not getting what I want out of my job.	225	31.11%	34.22%	23.56%	8.89%	2.22%
10	I feel that I am in the wrong organization or the wrong profession.	226	55.75%	23.01%	16.37%	2.65%	2.21%
11	I am frustrated with parts of my job.	227	7.05%	29.96%	44.49%	12.33%	6.17%
12	I feel that organizational politics or bureaucracy frustrate my ability to do a good job.	226	20.35%	18.14%	34.96%	16.37%	10.18%
13	I feel that there is more work to do than I practically have the ability to do.	226	14.16%	25.66%	33.19%	15.93%	11.06%
14	I feel that I do not have time to do many of the things that are important to doing a good quality job.	226	16.37%	32.30%	34.07%	11.50%	5.75%
15	I find that I do not have time to plan as much as I would like to.	226	13.27%	28.32%	36.73%	14.60%	7.08%

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