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School Social Workers' Perceptions of Compassion Fatigue Syndrome

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Gloria Collazo

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

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MSW, Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, 1998

BSW, Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, 1992

Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Social Work

Walden University

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Abstract

School social workers face domestic violence, trauma, social violence, and mental and emotional health problems in their work context. Indeed, compassion fatigue results from professionals' continuous exposure to these problems. This study explored school social work professionals' perceptions of compassion fatigue. For this, the following questions were explored: the perception of school social workers working for the Puerto Rico Department of Education about compassion fatigue. Whether social workers address the development of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue. Bowen's family systems theories informed the study. The concepts explored in this qualitative study were compassion fatigue, trauma, vicarious trauma, emotional exhaustion, and secondary trauma. Eight semistructured interviews were conducted with school social work professionals to collect the data. Participants were interviewed with questions about perception, definition, coping strategies, academic courses focused on trauma, and other concepts related to compassion fatigue. The development of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue was also explored. Content analysis and member checking documented findings linked to conceptual factors of burnout and compassion fatigue. Recommendations were also provided for employee assistance programs, academia and continuing education, and public policy. To promote positive social change, the findings of this study will serve as a source of information for future research in the field of school social work in Puerto Rico.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this work first to God, who has guided me and has been with me on this academic journey. To you who have not let go of your hand and have sustained me in all the challenges of this process... thank you, God. I want to dedicate this work to my parents, Gloria E. Cartagena, and Luis G. Collazo!! The days were long, the nights that they accompanied me, that they cried with me, that they celebrated each stage overcome...without you, I would not have been able to do it...Thank you, mom, for the coffee, and thanks, dad, for being my reader and primary reviewer of this work! You two have inspired me to give my best and not be afraid of the challenges that life imposes on me. Thanks to my sister Keila for always being my beacon and guide, for not letting me give up when I thought I wasn't going anymore... Thanks to my brother Luis G. because even in the distance, you gave me encouragement and support, just like my brother Dariel.

To my best friend Lida Marta, who, along with my sister Keila, have been the ones who have raised my hands in difficult times, and their love has kept me and sustained me! Love you, sisters!! To two very important people in my professional and personal journey. We began a professional relationship that has become a relationship of friendship and true affection: to you, Dra. Marilú Cintrón, thank you for inspiring me for this work...you were the spearhead to do it...to my dear Prof. Rita Córdova, thank you for rescuing me and for your love and accompaniment!! You two rock! To my special angel Maritza Cotto, thank you for not letting go of your prayers!!

Finally, I want to dedicate this work to my nephews Diego, Marcos, Carolina, Edrian, Mauro, and Holvin Jeriel, my great loves. The sky is the limit!! Pursue your dreams, study, and don't let anyone limit you from achieving what you want! If titi could you too!

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study and Literature Review

Compassion fatigue manifests itself in social work professionals by experiencing secondary stress during the psychotherapeutic relationship. The constant exposure to trauma and the empathy that develops during the therapeutic alliance are elements that predispose these individuals to the development of compassion fatigue (Campos-Vidal et al., 2017). It is a state where professionals experience burnout in the process of helping others, which negatively impacts the services they provide to their clients. The school social worker could begin to present symptoms such as fear, guilt, anxiety, hopelessness, disinterest, inattention, loss of enthusiasm, and apathy (Campos-Vidal et al., 2017). This range of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue affects social workers' professional judgment and work in schools in Puerto Rico. It is a problem that negatively affects direct service with clients, in the case of the school social worker with students and their families.

Puerto Rico Social Work

Social work is a profession historically linked to the development of the social-emotional well-being of people. Social justice, respect for human dignity, self-determination, protection of rights, poverty, trauma, and violence are concepts linked to this profession. School social workers face "traumatic and stressful situations" that leave a positive or negative impact on the professional's emotional health. (Decker et al., 2015, p. 97). Schools are not exempt from having students and families with multiple situations or problems of a family and social nature. Violent actions and students' negative behaviors primarily reflect the social and family crises they are experiencing.

School social work professionals address intervention with participants from a biopsychosocial approach. This approach aims to contextualize humans considering the biological, psychological, and social factors affecting their behavior and mental and emotional health. In this regard, school social workers use biopsychosocial approach to guarantee a holistic student intervention. Working with clients who are suffering is an unavoidable aspect of social work practice, which creates the risk of compassion fatigue (Lewis & King, 2019).

Compassion fatigue, direct and indirect trauma, isolation, and burnout stand out in the literature among the main risks to mental and physical health experienced by social work professionals. There is a predisposition to these risks, mainly when social workers do not cultivate and develop personal self-care (Lewis & King, 2019, p. 97). Beyond achieving and fostering student success, resilient self-awareness and self-education are also imperative that effectively address the risks of compassion fatigue, sacrificial trauma, the reality of professional impotence in the face of significant adversities.

As a secondary effect, compassion fatigue can link to constant listening to traumatic events in the human being. Natural disasters or social and structural violence events are the daily work of social workers in all social and governmental structures. Secondary trauma is the product of working continuously with these problems or disasters in which the social worker has a fundamental role. The challenge to “physiological, psychological, spiritual, and emotional issues” and its “effects on the therapist’s mental health” in the school social work case can adversely affect the therapeutic process with the students (Figley, 1995, p. 1700).

The therapeutic process can be challenging and overwhelming for professionals handling child abuse, poverty, and social inequality. It is inevitable and unavoidable (Lewis & King, 2019) when addressing the risk factors students are exposed to in homes where there is child abuse, domestic violence, mental health, and socioemotional problems. An essential step is to develop educational curricula in universities and in the agency where the professional is trained in developing critical skills to address the indicators of compassion fatigue (Lewis & King, 2019).

Since its inception, school social work in Puerto Rico has played a fundamental and essential role in school education. Initially, the social work was inserted at the secondary schools of the Department of Public Instruction as it was known at that time. School social work played an essential role in supporting the peasantry's education and promoting a better quality of life in vulnerable communities. Social work was characterized by a community approach with a more significant presence at the educational program's secondary level in public education.

Social workers in Puerto Rico work amid sociopolitical and cultural complexity, the economic crisis. The public policies established by the Department of Education affect the development of the professional competencies of social workers in the defense of human rights. The sociopolitical, economic, and culturally complex climate in Puerto Rico affects the influential work of the social worker in defense of Human Rights (Garriga, 2018). The literature raises the "occupational risk of providing services to traumatized populations," a subject that requires study to develop self-care practices and strategies for the school social worker, who has the challenge of working with the

vulnerabilities of the human being with poverty and inequity (Bride, 2004). School social workers are the people who work with students, their families, and teachers to address issues that affect their academic development.

Selection of the study topic, the perceptions of school social workers on compassion fatigue syndrome, began with searching for studies conducted in Puerto Rico. I conducted the literature review process in university libraries and social work programs in different parts of Puerto Rico. As a result of this search, I was unable to identify research that addresses compassion fatigue. Specifically, in school social work, there appear to be no studies on compassion fatigue that document the adverse effects on the professional's physical and mental health. Among the challenges social workers face in schools are the socioemotional problems of students, domestic, social, and institutional violence, childhood trauma, and child abuse. These problems and challenges can lead to the development of compassion fatigue.

For this work, I used qualitative research methodology to collect data from the experiences of school social work professionals. According to Salgado (2007), the fundamental role of the researcher is to know and understand the reality of the individual from his point of view, from their experience (p. 71). With the application of this methodology, the goal was to collect information about the personal and professional experiences of school social workers who may experience compassion fatigue. The data collected in the study contribute to the development of public policies that favor the creation of better working conditions for the school social worker.

Problem Statement

The research problem focuses on understanding the impact of compassion fatigue on the school social worker's physical, emotional, and mental health. The perception of these professionals will provide valuable information to promote better working conditions for school social workers. Findings of this research have the potential to generate discussion about policies and procedures that could reduce compassion fatigue. In Puerto Rico, no studies have been developed that reveal the impact of compassion fatigue on school social work professionals. However, these professionals are exposed to trauma, crises, suicides, student mental health disorders, child abuse, and domestic violence.

In Puerto Rico, there are 1,126 school social workers for 856 schools and 294,000 students. Social workers from the Puerto Rico Department of Education provide services for about 40 cases for every 350 students in the public education system (Carta Circular 29-2016-2017). Among the multiple responsibilities are the following: visiting homes and interviewing students, parents, and collaterals, as well as performing psychosocial evaluations to identify the needs of students with functional diversity; coordination of psychoeducational workshops; meeting with teachers and professional school counselors; and coordinating services with government and community agencies that provide services to students and their families (Viana- Vázquez, 2014, p. 126). Also, the school social workers collaborate with the school administration to manage crisis events and emergencies in schools. It is imperative to emphasize that there is a social worker in each school of the Department of Education in Puerto Rico. The effectiveness and

responsiveness of school social workers are negatively affected by the diversity and complexity of responsibilities that can affect these professionals' physical, emotional, and mental health.

This study's purpose was to collect the perceptions of social workers in Puerto Rico. For this reason, the information I collected focused on Puerto Rican school social workers. Puerto Rico does not have, neither in the academic nor in the health field, research on the topic of the perceptions of school social workers on compassion fatigue syndrome. This study focused on how school social workers perceive the impact of compassion fatigue on their ability to perform their job duties in the Department of Education effectively. Regarding mental health, I anticipated a link between fatigue and the physical, psychological, and emotional health problems experienced by this professional. School social workers of the Puerto Rico Department of Education have cases of up to forty for every 500 students in the public education system (Carta Circular 29-2016-2017). Social and systematic challenges that social workers have in schools are a factor to consider when studying the effects of compassion fatigue. The work scenario of social workers in schools is demanding and complex, given the multiple tasks and responsibilities they must achieve for adequate and effective case management. They need to have the different intervention skills, intervention models, methodology, and the necessary resources to meet the needs of their students (Viana Vázquez, 2014).

Knowing the dimension of mental and emotional health problems that can develop from compassion fatigue, understanding the syndrome is critical. Compassion fatigue encompasses the concepts of "exhaustion, biological, psychological, and social

dysfunction,” which cause stress in the social work professional (Cuartero & Campos, 2018, p. 277). Compassion fatigue is described in the literature as a type of “secondary traumatic exhaustion or stress” resulting from working with trauma victims (Yi et al., 2018, p. 338). Trauma is a frightening, dangerous, or violent event that human beings may experience. These can occur in childhood and adolescence when exposed to an immediate threat to themselves or a loved one, often followed by severe injury or harm.

The helplessness and the loss of self-sense in the face of what they are experiencing and the inability to defend themselves or protect themselves from such an event has long-term socioemotional consequences for those affected by traumatic events. When the social worker is faced with the trauma of the people they serve, the trauma linked to the individual’s past affects their life, relationships with their environment, and family. Social workers are not exempt from suffering trauma from events related to their life and development as human beings. In a society where children and families experience oppression, discrimination, intra-family violence, and child abuse, the professional social worker is vulnerable to compassion fatigue.

González Procel et al. (2018) stated that “in recent years, phenomena such as domestic violence, crime, accidents, and natural disasters have become more frequent and violent” (p. 488) The educational systems, public or private, are not exempt from the impact of these social and natural phenomena. Students are sometimes at the epicenter of these problems, and the schools have a responsibility to offer and provide support and attention to these students. School social workers are the professionals who serve and deliver these support services.

The historical convergences and divergences of the last decades have radically impacted people's existential reality in all its dimensions. Asynchronous methods make it challenging to recognize the impact of social-historical events on an individual's mood and physical state. To the extent that historical events are extraordinary, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or pandemics, the personnel working in medical and social health areas face more significant challenges in the field of suffering. In a way, it will demand a more substantial challenge from this sector of professionals in managing their emotions and their potential for empathy. More effort is required to mitigate the suffering of people affected by extraordinary events.

The school social worker has the responsibility of providing professional services from a biopsychosocial approach to the crises and problems of students and their families. However, in this process, they face the challenge of being able to differentiate themselves so as not to assume the suffering of the other, the trauma of the other, or the anguish of the other in the psychotherapeutic process. "Empathy and sensitivity" are essential and fundamental elements for social work during psychotherapeutic sessions with children (González Procel et al., 2018, p. 488). It represents an emotional challenge for the professional who works in schools when it attends to boys and girls who have been victims of events of violence such as sexual abuse, child abuse, exploitation, domestic violence in all its dimensions. If there is no conscious and intentional differentiation, these professionals are vulnerable to compassion fatigue. Incorporating the biopsychosocial approach helps develop a clear and complete understanding of this syndrome, given the effect of compassion fatigue on the health of the professional. The

biopsychosocial model helps the professional identify all possible biological, psychological, and social indicators that suggest the presence of compassion fatigue.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

Social work in Puerto Rico occurs in complex and diverse sociocultural contexts. Each school community has its own identity, which reflects the psychosocial particularities linked to the communities of origin of each student. School social workers immersed in schools are exposed to provide services in highly conflictive environments, in communities with a high rate of violence, with various family problems manifesting within schools. This study focused on documenting school social workers' perception of their development of compassion fatigue syndrome given these complexities and challenges.

This research aimed to collect information on school social workers' perception of compassion fatigue and the emotional needs that derive from it, to investigate and analyze data collected on school social workers' perceptions of compassion fatigue to demonstrate the need to address emergent emotional needs. This study has the potential to promote social change by documenting the impact of compassion fatigue on school social workers in Puerto Rico.

The research questions were as follow:

- What is the perception of school social workers working for the Puerto Rico Department of Education on compassion fatigue?
- How do social workers approach the development of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue?

- If a school social worker experiences compassion fatigue, what strategies, activities, or actions would they minimize these symptoms.
- What are school social workers' perceptions regarding the absence of university courses aimed at preparing social workers on the following topics: compassion fatigue, self-care, vicarious and secondary traumatization?
- What are the agency's strategies where these social workers work to minimize compassion fatigue?

Stress, secondary traumatization, and indirect trauma are predictors of compassion fatigue, which produces “burnout, biological, psychological and social dysfunction,” so this study is relevant for school social work professionals in Puerto Rico (Cuartero & Campos, 2018, p. 275). The following variables were considered: emotional exhaustion, stress due to high caseload, frequent exposure to trauma, inadequate working conditions, and community and cultural context. This study contributes to the development of literature on these issues lacking in the literature in Puerto Rico regarding compassion fatigue.

The perception of school social workers from the Puerto Rico Department of Education on compassion fatigue were studied using the qualitative method. In this study, I selected a sample of eight participants to collect data through virtual interviews and phone calls. The interview process was carried out while considering the security measures for COVID-19 and ensuring confidentiality and transparency.

Key Terms and Concepts

Compassion fatigue: Compassion fatigue occurs due to the “continuous” exposure of professionals to traumatized people (American Psychiatric Association [APA] 2013, p. 125). It is considered a form of indirect trauma experienced by aid professionals and whose impact affects professional identity and disconnect emotionally.

Trauma: Trauma results from adverse experiences experienced during people’s lives, among which are natural disasters, domestic violence, and child abuse. These experiences affect the behavior and emotions of people, causing them to experience “confusion, dissociation and even the loss of a sense of security” (APA, 2013, p. 597).

Vicarious trauma: Vicarious trauma is defined by the emotional transformation of the aid professional by their commitment and empathy with the people who survive traumatic experiences (Tarshis & Baird, 2019, p. 92).

Secondary trauma: This refers to the presence of symptoms related to high exposure to trauma. Symptoms include “sleep disturbance, behavioral changes, and affect job performance” (Cappiccie et al., 2020, p. 893).

Emotional exhaustion: The constant response of the school social work to the trauma and suffering of the individual who is the object of their attention results in compassion fatigue indicators. Wear and emotional and physical exhaustion are characteristics linked to the secondary trauma of the professional. The concepts “secondary trauma, indirect trauma” explain and describe the professional’s response to human suffering (Figley & Ludick, 2017, p. 574).

Compassion fatigue in Puerto Rico has no previous data validating the link between this syndrome and the physical and mental health problems of social work professionals. Adverse effects on the physical and psychological health of the professional are little discussed in Puerto Rico. The lack of literature and access to data on the subject has been absent until recent years. This doctoral study was necessary to understand social workers' perceptions regarding compassion fatigue to promote social change for school social workers in Puerto Rico.

Nature of the Doctoral Project

The sample for this study consisted of school social workers who are currently working for the Department of Education and located in schools throughout Puerto Rico. As part of the procedure for obtaining the study sample, I used phone calls, flyers, and invitation letters to contact the school social workers. The identified professionals were active at the time of the study. This study was also disclosed on the different social platforms used by social workers. Among these are Facebook, Twitter, local organizations that bring together social work professionals.

A qualitative study focuses on studying people and their relationship with the environment, explaining their experiences. This approach facilitated the investigation of each social worker's experience to describe the impact on the development of compassion fatigue. The design of the research was aligned with the theme because it allows the collection of data from the research subject's own experience.

This study had a sample of eight school social workers from the Department of Education. I obtained data from semistructured interviews that I carried out with these

school social workers, who voluntarily answered the questions for this research.

Narrative interview was the methodology used to conduct virtual interviews with the selected participants. The qualitative discussion focused on individual school social workers' experiences regarding compassion fatigue.

Significance of the Study

The contributions of this research lie in the production of new knowledge about compassion fatigue syndrome in school social workers. There is currently no research in Puerto Rico that addresses this issue. This research delved into the perception of these professionals regarding the impact that this syndrome can have and the meaning that they assign to it from their professional role. Building knowledge from the school social workers' own experiences will be essential for developing public policies to implement strategies to prevent compassion fatigue. Sampieri et al. (2018) stated that "qualitative research is based on an interpretive perspective focused on understanding the meaning of the actions of living beings" (p. 9). This doctoral study is essential for the field of practice in social work, given its very nature, by collecting data that arise from each professional's actual experiences and experiences who have constantly been exposed to trauma.

Among the implications for social change is the promotion of better working conditions for school social workers, sensitizing educational agencies to the importance of preventing fatigue compassion. On the other hand, the study promotes the development of evidence-based strategies for professional self-care and in turn provides emotional support resources for those school social workers who experience compassion fatigue.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

I selected systems theory as the theoretical framework for this research project. Patton stated in Laureate (2009), “as you engage in theory, what you’re engaging in is a system for explaining how the world is the way it is” (p. 1). This statement describes the importance of understanding compassion fatigue and systems theory to explain the influence the systems exert on the individual and their relationships. Bowen (as cited in Walsh, 2010) asserted that the nature of healthy human functioning includes one’s acquisition of balance between emotional and rational life. Systems family theory is appropriate to explain the school system’s impact on the social worker. The concepts that emerge from family systems theory will serve as a conceptual guide to analyze the interaction of school social workers with their clients. Concepts such as “differentiation of self” help explain aspects of compassion fatigue syndrome that are linked to the absence of a balance in the therapeutic relationship” (Walsh, 2010, p. 94).

Bowen (as cited in Halevi & Idisis, 2018) referred to the concept of “differentiation of self” as how the individual can maintain an “emotional balance between the sense of self and that of union with others” The differentiation precisely raises the urgent need for social work professionals to be aware of the importance of establishing boundaries in the therapeutic relationship. Halevi and Idisis (2018) referred to the phrase “intellect versus emotion” to illustrate the need to address the importance of differentiation; disengaging emotionally from the traumatic experiences of the children cared for by the school social worker is the main challenge to prevent compassion fatigue (p. 699). González Procel et al. (2018) addressed the concepts “feelings anxiety, fear, and

hopelessness, sadness, depression, hypersensitivity, apathy, difficulty concentrating” as predictors of compassion fatigue of the social worker (p. 489).

In that sense, distinguishing between feelings and thoughts helps the social worker develop an awareness of the importance of developing strategies to differentiate during therapeutic processes. The literature establishes the existence link between a high differentiation of self and the achievement of building emotional relationships without merging (Halevi & Idisis, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to inform about the link between the development of compassion fatigue in school social workers from the perspective of Bowen’s family systems theory. Bowen highlights the differentiation of being as the central concept when explaining how human beings can maintain an emotional balance in situations of conflict or trauma. This approach argues that people can bond with others emotionally without losing their own identity when working with the traumatic stories of their clients (Walsh, 2010, p. 95). The use of the qualitative model facilitated data collection which informed the experiences of school social workers who experienced differentiation and its link to the development of compassion fatigue. In this research, I explored the perceptions about compassion fatigue aligned to the differentiation process within the processes of helping their students.

Values and Ethics

The Code of Ethics of the College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico (CPTSPR, 2017) in canon one deals with the subject of “The social worker as a professional” and in canon two “The professional of Social Work, and the participants.”

Both canons address the importance of the relationship between the professional and the people to whom they provide a service. These canons address the relationship between social work professionals and their clients in the territory of Puerto Rico. They establish the guidelines so that professionals show ethical behavior based on respect for the dignity of the human being and justice.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics (2017) and the CPTSPR agree on the importance of the fundamentals of ethical conduct that result in the participant's well-being. Two moral principles of the NASW (2017) are the basis of this study: commitment to the client (1.01) and deterioration (4.05). The following sections examine the application of social work ethics to current research.

Commitment to the Client

In the practice of social work, commitment to the client is a fundamental tenet of the profession, whose primary objective is individualized attention and the well-being of the client. The client's needs must be satisfied with competence, professionalism, and reliability to guarantee effective services. From this perspective, compassion fatigue compromises social workers' competence because it directly affects their emotions, mood, interpersonal relationships, physical and mental health. It constitutes a challenge fulfilling ethical responsibilities to provide appropriate and informed service because of the experiencing secondary trauma and compassion fatigue.

Impairment

The codes of ethics of both the NASW and CPTSPR refer to meeting the client's needs with professionalism, credibility, and complete self-awareness, where professional

judgment and professional skills prevail. Ensuring compliance with these postulates is essential to achieve the objectives established in the psychosocial intervention provided by social work professionals. The social work professional has difficulty drawing boundaries from the other's pain and trauma and therefore cannot be differentiated from him.

Social workers who suffer compassion fatigue feel anxiety and anguish and even experience physiological symptoms, which puts the development of their skills and their professional judgment at risk (Tejada, 2017). It is essential to recognize when it is imperative to relieve the social worker from providing a service because their therapeutic alliance is compromised, which could interfere with the best professional customer care. Compassion fatigue has the potential to be a determining factor in adversely affecting professional judgment and professional competencies.

Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

A literature review process was carried out by searching for readings, books and journals related to compassion fatigue and social work. I conducted this literature search using the Walden University Library and libraries of different universities in Puerto Rico, such as the University of Puerto Rico, the Interamerican University, and the Ana G. Méndez University. Similarly, I reviewed documents published by the CPTSPR and the NASW addressing compassion fatigue. The selected literature documented and supported the development of this study. It laid the groundwork for the analysis of data from this study.

The concept of compassion fatigue, or empathy, has its genesis in the 1990s and is linked to the trauma that people experience during their life (Alecs niuk, 2015). They arise from not attending on time, known as burnout or secondary traumatic stress of professionals who work with trauma. Knowledge about mental and emotional health problems can develop from compassion fatigue; understanding the syndrome is critical. Compassion fatigue includes the concepts of “exhaustion, biological, psychological, and social dysfunction” that cause stress in the social work professional (Cuartero & Campos, 2019, p. 275). Compassion fatigue is described in the literature as a type of “secondary traumatic stress or burnout” resulting from working with trauma (Yi et al., 2018, p. 338).

Constant exposure to pain, trauma, violence and the human tragedy of students and their families has an emotional impact on the school social worker. This continuous exposure places the social worker in an emotionally vulnerable position, the lack of skills to differentiate themselves from the professional role affects their physical and emotional health. It is a risk to the emotional health of the social worker not to have the skills and abilities to self-care after hearing the stories of trauma and suffering of students and their families. The study’s findings can help improve the working conditions of school social workers by creating the necessary conditions for the self-care of the professionals who experience compassion fatigue. With the use of the data obtained, the agency will have the opportunity to develop self-care guides and protocols for school social work staff and, in turn, identify external resources to help the professional social workers.

Social work in Puerto Rico was one of the most prominent professions of the 20th century. In 1934, Puerto Rico became the first jurisdiction in U.S. territory to regulate

social work practice under state standards (Córdova, 2010). In that same decade, the Social Workers Examining Board was established, and the Graduate Department of Social Work was founded at the University of Puerto Rico (Burgos, 1997). In the 1940s, the Social Work Association Law was approved (Burgos, 1997).

In this research, I examined topics related to the research objective. The problems include the following: (a) compassion fatigue, (b) indirect trauma, (c) trauma, (d) differentiation, and (e) vicarious trauma. Compassion fatigue is the result of “exposure to stress and trauma” the professional experiences emotional exhaustion or secondary trauma “that is a product of active listening” (Caringi et al., 2016, p. 188). Learning about the history of children at school exposes the school social worker to know facts such as child abuse, sexual abuse, violence in all its manifestations, among numerous situations of oppression, discrimination, and inequity.

Trauma

Crisis, trauma, and problems of people indirectly confront the professional with their own emotions, making them vulnerable and able to reduce their ethical and professional response. The difficulty in differentiating themselves from another’s pain, when it triggers their memories of traumatic experiences, places the school social worker in a situation of risk towards their emotional and mental well-being. In Puerto Rico, no research has been conducted to address this issue in school social workers, contributing to the misunderstanding of compassion and fatigue in school social work professionals. These professionals are exposed to trauma, crises, suicides, mental health disorders of

students, child abuse, and intra-family problems. In Puerto Rico, there are 1,126 school social workers, 856 schools, and 294,000 enrollment students.

A critical statistic reveals that “48% of the US workforce experiences high levels of personal distress associated with job duties” (Gaille, 2017, para.1). Statistical evidence points to a relationship between job stress and the development of compassion fatigue. This statistic is vital to recognize a social crisis of mental and emotional health linked to professionals under high-stress levels at work. The work overload, the multiple responsibilities and duties, and the challenges for those who work with the social, mental, and emotional problems of human beings are factors that point to the development of compassion fatigue and burnout (Gaille, 2017, para.1)

The literature indicates a significant relationship between the professions that direct their efforts to provide helping and psychotherapeutic services to people is central and secondary traumatic stress (Gaille, 2017). In this sense, school social work is developed in the educational system of Puerto Rico from the biopsychosocial approach. This model addresses all the dimensions of the human being and how individuals handle their traumas and problems. From that point of view, the model works with a diversity of situations that affect the proper development of children, adolescents, and young people in schools. The high suicide rate, domestic violence, unemployment in families, poverty, and crime are within the range of social problems experienced by Puerto Rican society. Working with these situations constantly can contribute to the development of compassion fatigue in the social work profession.

Indirect Trauma

The concepts “transfer of beliefs” and “indirect trauma” are present in the therapeutic alliance; they address the processes that occur during the relationship established between the professional and the client, participant, or patient according to the scene where they develop their professional practice as a worker social (Caringi et al., 2016, p. 186). There are two fundamental processes to establish the therapeutic alliance in the psychotherapeutic approach: transference and countertransference. These terms refer to the exchange of traumatic experiences or socioemotional problems between the social worker and their client. When social work professionals use transfer and countertransference, they must be careful that the process complies with the best practices for exchanging experiences or client problems.

Clients’ feelings, affections, and anxieties arise; therefore, a social worker must be aware of their own feelings, beliefs, and vulnerability. Therapists experience indirect trauma by reproducing the trauma of their client. During a psychotherapeutic intervention, the social worker is confronted with the client’s traumatic experience, and it is here that the therapist might experience and develop vicarious trauma. It is imperative to recognize the risk of transferring that traumatized client worldview to the therapist’s reality as an antidote to compassion fatigue. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) highlighted “empathetic engagement with the client’s trauma” and similarly alluded to “transformation in the therapist” as part of the consequences of being empathic (Figley & Ludick, 2017, p. 578). This transformation represents one of the most significant risks to the therapeutic process. Consequently, compassion fatigue syndrome develops due to the

natural empathy born during the client. Empathy can promote a state of emotional fragility, hindering effective therapeutic action.

Emotional Exhaustion

Emotional exhaustion in the school social work profession occurs when a school social worker continually engages as an active listener to the students' problems. By expressing their problems, feelings, sadness, and traumatic experiences with the school social worker, children can contribute to an overwhelming and emotionally draining process for the professional. Bowen (1978, as cited in Halevi & Idis, 2017), stated that "people tend to do everything possible to please others" (p. 699). Human suffering is not alien to social work, which experiences it on several occasions in their context. The social worker constantly works in search of the social and emotional well-being of the human being. School social workers use personal, professional, and even emotional resources to ensure change, transformation, and resilience in students and their families. There is a risk of perceiving the client's trauma from their own experiences during professional action, resulting in an overwhelming process for the social worker.

The professional profile of the social worker fosters deep empathy. Therefore, self-care is vital, and self-awareness is a strategy to prevent compassion fatigue during the psychotherapeutic process. On this topic, Figley and Ludick (2017), pointed out that "detachment refers to the worker's ability to put aside the client's suffering" (p. 583) The context in which school social workers develop their practice makes them vulnerable to attachment and emotional ties with children, given the bond that develops. In their professional role, social workers must develop strategies that require self-discipline and

self-awareness of the traumatic experiences themselves to be effective in the psychotherapeutic relationship.

The constant response of the school social work to the trauma and suffering of the individual who is the object of their attention results in the development of compassion fatigue indicators. Wear and emotional and physical exhaustion are characteristics linked to the secondary trauma of the professional. The concepts “secondary trauma, indirect trauma” explain and describe the professional’s response to human suffering (Figley & Ludick, 2017 p. 574).

Secondary Trauma

Secondary trauma can make the therapist an indirect victim of the client’s traumatic events or socioemotional problems. Ethical principles and professional responsibility in the social work field can also influence the development of compassion fatigue. A sacrificial and oppressive vision of the problem of poverty, the lack of social justice, and the lack of equity in society is undeniably overwhelming and emotionally and physically exhausting. Resilience is a concept used by social work and mental health professionals to explain how humans cope with trauma. This concept alludes to the ability of human beings to overcome traumatic experiences and circumstances in their lives. Horwitz (1998 as cited in Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015) identified the “importance of minimizing exposure to trauma-related experiences in the workplace by improving resilience”. Institutions are responsible for implementing self-care practices for the social worker who constantly attends to traumatic events and the social and psychological problems of the human being.

Compassion fatigue can be a real challenge to the professional's mental state. Unquestionably, agencies must be proactive in acting on behalf of those professionals who work with the tragedy, with whom nobody wants to work. The resilience capacity of the school social worker will be essential to face the reality of experiencing fatigue through compassion.

For this study, it is essential to highlight the possibility of biases that may arise during the investigation, affecting validity and ethics. According to Rodríguez-Funes (2019), internal validity is obtained by controlling tendencies that affect the study's validity (p. 183). The gaps that may occur are a lack of knowledge about the subject and formal education on compassion fatigue.

Summary

In summary, I reviewed the challenges of compassion fatigue for school social workers from the Puerto Rico Department of Education. I examined the sociopolitical conditions that affect Puerto Rican society and the impact of these challenges on public schools in the country. This study focused on understanding school social workers' perception of compassion fatigue.

I used a qualitative design to explore how social workers view the impact on their physical and mental health of continually listening to other people's problems, traumas, crises, and needs. This narrative study was designed to reveal the professional's vulnerabilities and narrate their experiences. Systems theory was used as a frame of reference to understand the findings generated from this study. This study identified

possible gaps associated with school social workers' knowledge of compassion fatigue.

The following section will work with the research design from a qualitative approach.

Section 2: Research Design and Data Collection

In the first section of the study, I presented information about what compassion fatigue is. In this next part, I will deliver the design for the development this research.

The following questions were central to the development of this research:

1. How do school social workers perceive and approach compassion fatigue when hearing trauma stories in the school system?
2. How does hearing the stories of trauma victims affect the emotional and mental state of the school social worker?

These questions were used to inquire about the risk of experiencing compassion fatigue, given the constant exposure of school social workers to the participants' traumatic experiences. These school social work professionals work in the Education Department of Puerto Rico. In Section 2, I discuss the qualitative approach of this study, including the research design, methodology, data analysis, ethics, and procedures used for this research; finally, I provide a summary of Section 2.

Research Design

This study sought to identify the perceptions of school social workers about compassion fatigue syndrome in the Department of Education in Puerto Rico; these professionals offer their services to students between the ages of 5 to 21 years. The specific research question was: What is the perception of school social workers working for the Puerto Rico Department of Education on compassion fatigue?

The nature of this study is qualitative. I used semistructured interviews or this approach. The purpose of the semistructured interviews was to know the impact on the

physical, emotional, and mental health of the professionals when working with the child and adolescent population that experiences trauma. Identify eight professional school social work volunteers to be interviewed about their perception of compassion fatigue for this study. Among the problems or traumas that students present and that are the object of attention by school social workers are the following:

- victims of child maltreatment
- structural, gender and community violence
- discrimination
- poverty, and oppression
- intellectual disability, mental disorders, physical and cognitive development problems
- victims of bullying
- within the wide spectrum of situations that occur in the school context

The purpose of this project was to investigate school social workers' perspectives on the effects of compassion fatigue due to frequent exposure to trauma in their work in schools. Understanding the extent of compassion fatigue syndrome in school social workers will serve as a platform for promoting a dialogue with the agencies than developing public policies to address this problem.

Methodology

Participants

This study population was school social workers employed in the Puerto Rico Department of Education. The sample consisted of eight school social workers from the

Puerto Rico Department of Education, whom I contacted through the social work organizations in Puerto Rico and other organizations such as the CPTSPR. Various means of communication were used, such as emails, social networks, phone calls, flyers. As part of the participant identification process, I sent a letter the CPTSPR to request collaboration to promote the study through their official networks and communications. Interviews were conducted virtually using the zoom videoconferencing platform to comply with COVID-19 prevention physical distancing measures.

The following criteria were considered to choose the sample of participants: years of employment, the number of students assigned, level of the school, and community context.

Instrument

A semistructured interview was the instrument used to obtain the perceptions of school social workers about compassion fatigue syndrome. Questions in these interviews (see Appendices A and B) were directed at learning about school social workers' experiences facing various challenges within the school. Knowing the challenges of social workers in the Puerto Rico Department of Education, whose enrollment is nurtured by students from families with diverse social backgrounds, thoughts, customs, and beliefs, is vital to this study's objective. The fundamental concept to explore was compassion fatigue.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a crucial component for qualitative research that seeks to understand and know human beings' social and emotional situations in their natural

environment. It is an intentional and systematic analysis for interpreting the data obtained (Ravitch, 2016, p. 217). The data analysis was used to analyze the interviews carried out with the study participants, contextualizing that the qualitative research is nourished by observations and narrations of the researcher and the participant (Hernández et al., 2014).

Organizing the data required categorizing the information according to the participants' concepts, themes, and perceptions. After this process, a report was made for data analysis. The NVivo software program was used to analyze the data collected in the semistructured interviews. One of the virtues of NVivo is its ability to encode a text's content, which facilitates the location of readers by words, phrases, or themes (Hernández et al., 2014).

A good investigation dispels doubts with the use of the scientific method and ensures the validity and reliability of the results (Hernández et al., 2014, p. 101). These methods are the essential foundation in data collection to address the rigor of study: (a) credibility, (b) validity, (c) transferability, (d) external validity, (e) dependability, (f) reliability, (g) confirmability, (h) objectivity, and (i) trustworthiness.

Ethical Procedures

For the purposes of this study, the researcher must abide by ethical procedures governing the profession to ensure purity, validity, confidentiality, and rights of participants. In the same way, it is governed by the processes and the established rigor, requesting the approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Walden University (n.d.) and complying with all the requirements. I provided the study participants with access to information about the study before they participated. The study's objectives and

the methodology to collect the data were disclosed. Participants were oriented about the format of the semistructured interview.

Each participant gave their consent verbally and in writing. In the same way, they were guided about their rights as participants from an ethical perspective and the requirements of the IRB of Walden University (n.d.). According to the Walden University Researcher Support Center (n.d.), no part of the research process involving participants can occur before IRB approval. Thus, I obtained approval from Walden University's IRB before engaging with any participant. I ensured that the informed consent contains the rights of the participants to avoid any risk of harm to them. Each participant will participate voluntarily and have their right to confidentiality guaranteed. They were able to clearly express if they did not wish to participate in it (Ravitch, 2016 p. 360).

Information about the study was disclosed to participants before they committed to participate. I also ensured that the interviews occurred within an ethical framework and guaranteed each participant's privacy. According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), ethical behavior should be reflected in respect for the participants and the responsibility to demonstrate ethical behavior (p. 85). I obtained information on school social workers through the CPTSPR. Phone calls, email, and social networks were used to communicate with potential participants. I kept the information provided in password-protected digital files to comply with the standards of privacy and confidentiality of data from this study.

Summary

Section 2 contains the research design and data collection process carried out in this study on school social workers' perceptions of compassion fatigue syndrome. I included information corresponding to the research design, methodology, data analysis, and ethical procedures. Each section contains information about the participants and the instrument used, which was the semistructured interview. I also explained the importance of informed consent and disclosure to each participant, including the right to decide whether to participate in the study. The participation of school social workers was voluntary and free of prejudices that threaten their privacy. In Section 3, the findings of this study are presented.

Section 3: Presentation of the Findings

This qualitative study aimed to examine the perceptions of school social workers about compassion fatigue syndrome in Puerto Rico. In the present study, I discussed how school social workers define the concept of compassion fatigue and their perception of managing physical, emotional, and mental symptoms stemming from this syndrome. The following questions guided the process to examining the concept of compassion fatigue; what is your perception of compassion fatigue in school social workers? how do social workers approach the development of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue: physical, emotional, and mental?, if a school social worker experiences compassion fatigue, what strategies, activities, or actions would they minimize these symptoms? what is your perception regarding the absence of university courses aimed at preparing social workers on the following topics: compassion fatigue, self-care, vicarious and secondary traumatization? what are the agency strategies where you work to minimize fatigue compassion?.

In Section 3, I provide a summary of the data collection process and findings from individual semistructured interviews with a description of the process of data collection. The results are presented by topic in light of the findings. The section also includes a summary the validation procedures, or problems encountered when conducting the study also demographic data.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data collection occurred between July 6 and 11, 2022, in Cayey, Puerto Rico. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I conducted the interviews online via Zoom, a

videoconferencing platform (<https://zoom.us>). To guarantee the privacy and confidentiality required by the interview process, I conducted these interviews in my private residence, specifically in an office room. Interviews with participants were recorded for review and analysis prior authorization from participants for academic and research purposes. Eight interviews were conducted, which lasted approximately 30 to 40 minutes each. These interviews were conducted in Spanish, as it is the main language of the participants. Each volunteer met the requirement to be a school social worker and reside in Puerto Rico. The participants reside in different geographic areas of Puerto Rico: two from the south, one from the east, and five from north. After the completion of the interview process, the transcript was sent to each participant for validation. All participants answered via email validating the content of the transcripts.

Recruitment for this research began on July 2, 2022, after I received approval from the Walden University IRB (Approval No. 06-29-22-0470348). I started the disclosure process with the publication of a promotional sheet on my Facebook page, which was shared for 2 weeks to contact the largest number of volunteers. After publishing, I began receiving messages and emails from school social workers interested in participating in the study. I telephoned the eight school social work professionals who volunteered to confirm their interest in participating in the study. In addition, it was corroborated that they met the eligibility criteria: to be school social workers and to reside in Puerto Rico.

I sent a copy of the informed consent in Spanish via email to each person who volunteered. Informed consent is intended to provide additional information about the

study and guarantees of confidentiality. Each volunteer had the opportunity to review the informed consent document carefully prior to acceptance. They were instructed to respond via email whether or not they accepted consent. After the volunteers affirmed their informed consent via email, I proceeded to coordinate with each one the date on which they were available to conduct the interviews. I sent a Zoom link to each participant to get started with the interviews, making time available during the period from July 6 to 11, 2022, based on the availability of each participant. At the beginning of the interviews, I gave the opportunity to each of the participants to discuss any questions or concerns about the study. In the same way, each participant was guided that the interviews would be recorded, and they agreed so we proceeded to record them.

Validation Procedures

Validity and Reliability

The validation process is a fundamental part of the research by ensuring the rigor and validity of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 186). I used a participant validation strategy known as members checks. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), member checks are processes by which researchers “check in” with participants about different aspects of the research to see how they think and feel about various aspects of the research process and the parts of the data set that pertain to them (p. 200). To use this strategy, I sent each participant the transcript of their interview so that each one could verify and validate it with the rigor required by the investigations. All eight participants answered in the affirmative via email and validated the transcripts. Credibility is a vital element during an investigation, as it has the potential to contribute to a serious, credible,

and reliable study. Each participant was guided about the methodology for the development of the interviews and the rigor that characterizes this study.

Ravitch and Carl (2016) stated that to establish credibility, researchers must implement verification strategies, among which is the verification of members (p. 186). Member verification is a strategy in which each participant takes an active role in confirming and validating the content of the interviews they offered to the researcher. It is of the utmost importance and relevance that participants confirm through content verification the reliability of the study, and the value of their contribution to this study. The members checking strategy has the characteristic, as Creswell (2014, p. 251) pointed out, of determining the accuracy of qualitative findings, which in turn helps determine the issues that arise from the collected data. These topics will guide the analysis of the findings of this study that will be discussed in the findings section. The results were organized by topic using words or phrases noted in the collected data. Each participant approached the questions from their own experiences and perspectives.

Limitations

The limitations found were not significant. However, it is important to highlight the challenges that exist with virtual interviews, although they are a very useful tool. Some of these limitations are associated with internet connectivity; sometimes I had to stop the interviews because the participants lost their connection. Despite this, it was possible to conduct the interviews and record them, and the participants were willing to wait for the internet connection in the cases where the interruption occurred.

Findings

This section contains the analysis of findings associated with data collected from participants' responses to research questions. I conducted this study with the purpose of knowing the perception of school social workers regarding compassion fatigue. After reviewing the transcripts of the interviews conducted, I identified the main topics that were analyzed for this study. These topics are discussed in this section as well as a presentation of the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

To begin the discussion of the findings from this study, I present the demographic data of the participants (see Table 1). Eight school social workers working in different schools in Puerto Rico were interviewed. Notably, four of the eight participants had 20 to 30 years of experience exercising the profession. Another important fact is that all participants were female; there were no male volunteers. As for age, half of the participants were in the range of 40 to 49 years. Of the eight participants, five are from the northern area.

Table 1*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

Characteristic	No.
Age	
30-39	1
40-49	4
50-59	3
Gender	
Female	8
Male	0
Geographic area	
North	5
South	1
East	1
Central	1
Years of service as a social worker	
10-20	3
20-30	4
30-40	1
Years of service as a school social worker	
10-20	3
20-30	4
30-40	1

The following results are based on interviews conducted between July 6 to July 11, of 2022. The research question was: What is the perception of school social workers working for the Puerto Rico Department of Education on fatigue compassion? The data collected during the research are divided by topics to facilitate the analysis of the findings. The questions used for the interviews addressed the following topics: demographics, perceptions about compassion fatigue, physical, emotional, and mental symptoms, academia, strategies for minimizing symptoms, and access to support services by your employer. Table 2 lists the study's primary themes and subthemes.

Table 2*Main Themes*

Theme	Subthemes
Theme 1: Compassion fatigue	Definition Symptoms
Theme 2: Strategies for working with compassion fatigue	Coping strategies Employee Assistance Programs Academy

Theme 1: Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is the central axis and theme of this study. Understanding and knowing how the participants perceive the development of this syndrome is what this research pursues. Compassion fatigue has the potential to adversely impact the practice of the profession because of its link to constant exposure to trauma. The empathy that manifests itself in the relationship of school social workers with the children and families they serve on a daily basis can certainly produce emotional exhaustion in these professionals. This emotional exhaustion is pointed out by Campos-Vidal et al. (2017). The professional relationship is built on our ability to empathize with the client and our psychophysiological ability to understand our client cognitively and emotionally. As a preamble at the beginning of the analysis, I want to emphasize that the profession of social work has historically been nuanced by a sacrificial sense in the face of the struggle for human rights and social welfare of the families with whom we work. This thought has percolated for years in the profession. For this reason, an expression made by one of the participants caught my attention. Participant B expressed that “I like to help others, to look for alternatives,” and it is precisely this thought that can make the social work

professional vulnerable to experiencing compassion fatigue. The sense of absolute self-giving that this commentary contains has an impact on the psyche of professionals who have a responsibility to work every day with the trauma and problems of students and their families.

Conceptual Definition

Interview questions: How do you define the concept of compassion fatigue?

To understand the perceptions of school social workers we must begin by knowing how they define compassion fatigue from their perspectives and experiences. The analysis of the findings shows that the participants of this study link compassion fatigue as a process where the professional experiences wear and tear due to empathy, vicarious trauma, physical and emotional exhaustion, extreme tiredness, depression, crying, physical discomfort, sadness, anguish, frustration, and physical pain. It is important to highlight at this stage of the analysis that, among the school social work professionals interviewed, a conceptual and interpretative confusion permeates between burnout syndrome and compassion fatigue syndrome. Campos-Vidal et al. (2017) referred to burnout syndrome as the response to chronic work stress. For example, it is what Participant E, manifested when defining compassion fatigue as “giving everything in your work and trying to solve the greatest possible situations.” According to Jacob and Lambert (2021), burnout is a pathological condition in response to prolonged occupational stressors. The definition that this participant presents is directly associated with the challenges of the structural and administrative dynamics they face in their work scenarios.

On the other hand, participants link compassion fatigue to trauma. According to Participant F, “compassion fatigue is the cumulative effect they experience due to continued exposure to trauma.” The participants agreed that compassion fatigue has a direct relationship with trauma processes, the eight participants allude to trauma, empathy, vicarious traumatization as a predominant factor that affects professional management. Participant A, highlighted that “after Hurricane Maria, the earthquakes and the Covid-19 pandemic is when the Department of Education has offered them training to work with trauma.” It is important to note that Puerto Rico has experienced various events, such as Hurricane Irma and Maria in 2017, which caused great destruction in the country. Hurricane Maria left great consequences on the emotional health of people in Puerto Rico, including children and youth who were exposed to this traumatic experience. Rodríguez-Funes (2019) revealed the findings of a study conducted by the Medical University of South Carolina after Hurricane Maria, which documented that “7.2% or 6,900 of public-school students suffered post-traumatic stress after the events experienced” (par. 3). For this reason, school social work professionals in the country had the responsibility to work with the post-traumatic effects of Hurricane Maria in schools. This exemplifies the complexity that participants express in addressing the issue of the adverse impact of these nature events as well as the pandemic on their participants.

Participant H, stated that “it is a concept that is not known much because it is not talked about much, however, she understands it as that fatigue, wear, that exhaustion that can be physical, emotional or mental at the time of the interventions with the participants where empathy is present”. This definition again concurs with the issue of the impact on

the socio-emotional health of professionals. Exhaustion and burnout persist in the definitions of seven of the eight participants as characteristic of those who experience compassion fatigue. Cuartero and Campos (2018), state that hearing stories of child abuse, emotional crises, the anguish of others continuously in the daily context of social workers produces physical and mental fatigue. When analyzing the content of the interviews in the same way, concepts such as fatigue, vicarious trauma, stress, tension persist, I noticed a constant in these descriptors of symptomatology. They are concepts that are directly linked to the development of compassion fatigue.

Symptoms

Interview question: How do social workers approach the development of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue: physical, emotional, and mental?

Compassion fatigue, as defined and perceived by the participants, is a state of physical-mental exhaustion resulting from work overload. An important finding of the interviews is that seven of the eight participants describe compassion fatigue as a state in which the professional experiences burnout that affects their work execution. According to the statement, the eight participants agree on the description of symptoms experienced by school social workers and are as follows: headache, high blood pressure, agitated heart, stomach pain. Participant C stated that “compassion fatigue has physical and psychological components that can generate headaches, muscle aches, extreme tiredness, drowsiness or sleep problems, lack of appetite” and this description permeates throughout the interviews. On the other hand, Participant G expressed the following: “in general terms presents symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, muscle spasms.” In this way, she

described what in her opinion compassion fatigue is. In each of the interviews, the view about the impact on social and emotional physical health of compassion fatigue prevails.

Participant G argued that “social workers approach the development of symptoms in a variety of ways.” According to this participant, “the approach will depend on each person, some are irritated, upset, others become aggressive, or extremely passive, others have physical symptoms such as migraines and muscle spasms.” This symptomatology reflects the impact on the physical health of the professional. On the other hand, Participant H highlighted that “these professionals experience despair, anxiety and worry to such an extent that they seek to use their sick leave or take advantage of the state insurance fund.” This is an example of the impact of compassion fatigue on the professional practice of school social workers. They feel unable to carry out their work.

The nature of the work that school social work professionals do puts them in a vulnerable position to the development of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue. During the development of the therapeutic alliance between the practitioner and the participant there is a transfer of information and traumatic stories that have the potential to affect the emotional state of the support professional. Campos Aguerre (2016) stated that “work in the educational field with children and adolescents is demanding, both physically and emotionally” (p. 2). Trauma has an adverse effect on the emotional health of the professional given the constant exposure to the trauma experienced by their students and is a precipitating factor for the development of this syndrome. For example, Participant A pointed out that “one engages emotionally and sentimentally with those children, with families and their needs.” The emotional demand involved in listening to

victims of violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence, as Participant H said, “exceeds the capabilities of the professional.” Along the same lines, Participant F stated that “the spectrum of physical and emotional symptoms are related to the process of vicarious traumatization.”

Theme 2: Strategies for Working with Compassion Fatigue

Interview question: If a school social worker experiences compassion fatigue, what strategies, activities, or actions would they minimize these symptoms?

This topic addresses the help and self-care strategies that study participants have identified to address the symptoms of compassion fatigue. Self-care as well as professional help resources are part of the tools that school social workers have to deal with this syndrome. In addition, there are employee assistance programs as an alternative within the agency for which they work. According to Cuartero and Campos (2018), “as a phenomenon inherent in the helping process, compassion fatigue is not preventable” (p. 276). Preventing this syndrome is one of the challenges that social workers may encounter school social workers are challenged to practice self-care in order to recognize the indicators of compassion fatigue in their early manifestations. The participants focused their comments on various strategies of self-care and seeking professional help to work with this syndrome, a product of empathy and exhaustion, which arises from the therapeutic relationship with students and their families.

Coping Strategies

Participant F made an interesting approach by expressing “the first thing to do is to define what is happening to you, what is causing you those symptoms to know if it is

compassion fatigue or burnout”. Certainly, it is a statement that leads to reflection on the knowledge and understanding of social work professionals regarding the differences between both syndromes, since they do indeed have a similar symptomatology. During this research, confusion has been identified regarding the concepts of burnout and compassion fatigue. For example, Participant G defines compassion fatigue as “being physically and emotionally burdened by a lack of resources, tools, and strategies to get the job done.” Indeed, the absence of these resources has the capacity to produce “emotional charge” as the participant points out, however, this is linked to the development of burnout since they are structural and administrative deficiencies that affect the social worker.

Social work professionals as well as their participants are susceptible to having situations, problems, traumatic experiences in their personal life. Along these lines, Participant F also expresses “it is necessary for the person to identify what is happening within their life process?” also states “that the strategies will vary according to the expression of the symptomatology”. We find significant and important these two components that this participant highlights: the processes of life and the manifestation of symptoms. It is imperative to recognize the human dimension of the professional and how this can be combined with the burden and work stress. As stated by Campos Aguerre (2016), burnout is a progressive process in which personal and situational characteristics influence. People are so diverse, as well as their abilities to cope with adverse events that can occur in their lives and environment. The eight participants agree that each action or

strategy to address the symptoms of compassion fatigue is diverse and depends on the individual coping skills and strengths that each professional possesses.

Participants identify the “relaxation technique as one of the most widely used strategies. Importantly, while it’s a technique that’s effective for some, it certainly can’t be the only one. “You should be part of a cluster of intentionally designed strategies together with a support professional to address the symptomatology of compassion fatigue. In this line of thought, participant F, points out the following “probably a help professional, who may very well be a clinical social worker, can lead this partner in the process of recognizing that he is a victim of secondary victimization and thus be able to work with the symptomatology he experiences.” The intervention of a professional is vital to the design of an intervention plan aimed at working with the origin and symptoms of compassion fatigue.

Two of the eight participants identify exercise as another strategy for working with compassion fatigue. For example, for Participant G, exercise is a way to “release stress and “personal space to channel emotions and take care of health.” On other hand, Participant F says, “exercise and relaxation is cool, but it should be accompanied by a process aware of the emotions you are experiencing.” What these participants propose provides insight into the link between physical activity and compassionate fatigue management for professionals. The eight participants concur, that these strategies must be accompanied by a structured process of help led by a human behavior professional.

Finally, another strategy that we can document in this study is the element of Faith, as stated by one of the participants. Participant B narrates her personal experience

in which she came to experience, as she expresses, “frustration”, “continuous crying” “symptoms of depression” given the level of complexity of the environment in which she works. This participant expressed that “what helped me was to take refuge in faith in Christian beliefs and values to manage all these emotions” In addition, she expresses that the “Faith kept her strong in moments where she thought she had depression.” Newell (2019), in his writing on the application of the ecological systems framework to work with resilience in social work points out several simple strategies for self-care among which includes spiritual activities because they represent an important dimension in the life of the human being (p. 68-69). There is a spiritual dimension that is present in the lives of many professionals and that serves as an instrument to strengthen them. There are multiple ways and means of cultivating spirituality, so these participants highlight that human and spiritual dimension in professionals.

Employee Assistance Programs

Along these lines: What are the agency’s strategies where you work to minimize compassion fatigue?

Employee assistance programs (PAE) are programs, with which agencies or entities have, with the purpose of providing help services to their employees when they face emotional or mental health crises. It is a free service and people request them voluntarily. When exploring with the participants the services they have in their agencies to help them in times of crisis, the eight participants agree that the only service they have access to is PAE. On this service, Participant H says that “on many occasions people prefer to receive help externally.” In this regard, participant D adds that “they are not

being preventive in the agency” and that she understands that the agency’s efforts are only focused on offering the services of the employee assistance program. He expresses that they are only aimed at “remedying” without promoting prevention strategies, specifically about compassion fatigue.

On the other hand, five of the eight participants highlight the efforts of the School Social Work Program and the Department of Education, after Hurricane Maria and the earthquakes that affected the island, in providing training about self-care and trauma. For example, Participant C says, “since Hurricane Maria and then the earthquakes began these workshops of taking care of ourselves emotionally, of self-care” and that is that these events caused significant damage on the Island, school social workers received in schools the children who experienced trauma as a result of these events. Enchautegui, et al. (2018), in the study the effects of Hurricane Maria on Children in Puerto Rico document stories of teachers when children returned to schools “when they returned, they looked sad and withdrawn, especially those who lost their homes.” Similarly, Enchautegui et al. (2018), cite in their study a social worker who states that children were “desperate to be in school, to clear their minds.” (p. 68) Undoubtedly, Hurricane Maria had an adverse impact on the mental health of Puerto Rican children. This hurricane left a trail of collective and individual and family crisis due to the loss of homes, basic services such as electricity and water, economic problems, schools closed for a long period of time.

Academy

Research question: What is your perception regarding the absence of university courses aimed at preparing social workers on the following topics: compassion fatigue, self-care, vicarious and secondary traumatization?

Lewis and King (2019) cite “working with clients who are suffering is an unavoidable aspect of social work practice, creating the risk of fatigue compassion (Decker et al., 2015). (p. 96) As part of this study, the perception of school social work professionals regarding education in topics such as trauma, vicarious and secondary trauma, self-care, and compassion fatigue was explored. Of the answers obtained from the eight participants in this line, the absence of courses within the university curricula that are aimed at educating on these issues stands out. For example, Participant F states “unfortunately and sadly in academia the issue of compassion fatigue is not touched.” In the same way, Participant G states that “it is imperative that universities host this type of courses to train these colleagues who are going to arrive at the work scenario”. Participant B also expresses “my perception is that these courses must exist because we are living in times of great tension, of great stress”. These answers put us in perspective of the importance of reviewing academic curricula to address the incorporation of these courses.

The eight participants agree that these courses are incorporated into the Universities that students and future social work professionals are prepared in these topics and develop skills to recognize the symptoms and strategies to prevent them. Lewis and King (2019) affirmed that social work field pedagogy is paramount in the

preparation of emerging social work professionals during the professional field practicum. As such, it is imperative that students implement practice skills acquired in the classroom (p. 96-97) Incorporating courses that address issues for the protection of the mental and emotional health of social workers represents a new paradigm. Promoting the development of skills to prevent compassion fatigue in future social work professionals represents a step in the right direction to address the social-emotional needs of this emerging generation of social workers.

Unexpected Findings

As part of the analysis of the data collected in the interviews with the participants, unexpected findings emerge. However, these findings are relevant to the theme of this study because they raise a dimension and perspectives of how social workers perceive the issue of compassion fatigue. The unexpected findings in this study were

- conceptual and contextual confusion between compassion fatigue and burnout, and
- concepts of trauma and vicarious trauma.

Conceptual and Contextual Confusion Between Compassion Fatigue and Burnout

For some participants this topic is novel, so there is a conceptual and contextual confusion with burnout syndrome. Although both syndromes have similarities in terms of symptoms, the origin of these is different. Participant E, for example, links compassion fatigue to “having a lot of administrative burden and an overload of cases to attend”. In addition, he says they have “very few resources to help them do their jobs.” Likewise, Participant G affirms that “the lack of resources, tools, and strategies for the management

of their cases leads the social worker to feel tired and exhausted.” On the other hand, Participant B describes the work of school social workers “we are continuously putting out fires” and Participant H that the integration of technology brought great challenges for social work professionals and consequently generated anxiety, tension, stress.

These responses are linked to working conditions, administrative and structural challenges that affect the work carried out by social work professionals. According to Cetrano et al. (2017), burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion due to being exposed for long periods to situations. Emotionally demanding, and unlike compassion fatigue is not linked to working with trauma. (p. 10) Therefore, there is a difference in concept and context in which compassion fatigue develops which is linked to working directly with the traumatic experiences of your clients.

Concepts of Trauma and Vicarious Trauma

The concepts of vicarious trauma, secondary as well as compassion fatigue are concepts unknown to some school social work professionals. An example of this is the comment of one of the participants who expresses “I had never heard that concept of vicarious trauma”. It is an element that I did not expect in the results that sustains the need to be intentional in education regarding these concepts. On the other hand, one of the participants states that she heard for the first time the concept of compassion fatigue at a conference in the United States, which leads to the analysis that they are indeed issues that need to be inserted into the trainings that provide the workplaces. In addition, in the school setting there is a perception that social workers do not experience compassion fatigue. An example of this is seen in Participant D, who points out “many

social workers suffer fatigue, stress, exhaustion, but in social work it is mostly associated with Burnout”. In this direction, it is palpable that social work professionals link the symptoms they experience with burnout and not with compassion fatigue due to the lack of ability and knowledge to discriminate between the two syndromes.

Finally, the results reflect participants’ perceptions of compassion fatigue among school social workers. They concur in the need for a curriculum within universities to train professionals in issues related to trauma. In addition, they recognize the need to expand services and resources to help address the symptoms of compassion fatigue and burnout. They also agree that this syndrome has an impact on the physical and emotional health of school social workers. The eight participants agree that the administrative burden and structural challenges will reflect the mood and professional performance of the social worker.

Summary

In Section 3, I discussed the findings, the data analysis techniques, the results obtained. The findings were consistent with the study’s expectations for the main theme of The Perceptions of School Social Workers About Compassion Fatigue Syndrome. The research question is What is the perception of school social workers working for the Puerto Rico Department of Education on fatigue compassion? This study consisted of knowing the perceptions regarding: definition, approach of professionals to compassion fatigue, symptom management, education on the subject and resources of the agencies. In each of these lines, the participants provided valuable, binding, and contextualized information regarding the research topic.

Section 4, which constitutes the final part of this qualitative study, provides an overview of the impact on professional ethics and social change in the practice of Puerto Rican school social work.

Section 4: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Social Change

The purpose of this study was to learn about school social workers' perceptions of compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue has the potential to impact the physical and emotional health of social work professionals. School social workers continuously work with families with high levels of conflict and domestic violence. In these families, there are problems such as child abuse, domestic violence, mental health problems, alcoholism, substance abuse, economic problems, discrimination, poverty. Faced with these scenarios, school social workers make use of all their resources and skills, and it is precisely in this process where attrition and exhaustion begin. The empathy and therapeutic alliance resulting from the relationship between the student and the school social worker can produce symptoms of compassion fatigue in the professional without being aware of it.

Emotional exhaustion has the potential to adversely influence the exercise of the profession since the social worker can experience vicarious traumatization given the emotional bond has with the participant who has lived a trauma. Figley (1995, as cited in Campos Aguerre, 2016) defined compassion fatigue as “the natural emotional behaviors and reactions derived from knowing a traumatic event experienced by another significant person (also as the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person)” (p. 6). Without a doubt, social workers develop an affective relationship with their participants since it is a natural reaction of people when working with people who suffer, which we can attribute to the empathic process. Therefore, experiencing compassion fatigue can be disabling for the professional who experiences it;

it can diminish their professional development and execution in the face of such continuous exposure to human suffering. Therefore, the results of this study may inform future concerted actions aimed at (a) preventing compassion fatigue, (b) identifying the associated symptoms, and (c) providing services aimed at attending to social work professionals who experience this syndrome. In the same way, this study may inform the professional class of school social work about the urgent need to establish self-care strategies.

In this section, I will focus on exploring the findings of this study and its implications for the ethics of school social work professionals. Recommendations aimed at working with compassion fatigue in the practice of social work in the school context will be presented. I will also discuss the implications of this study for social change.

Application to Professional Ethics in Social Work Practice

The findings of this study focus on the importance of addressing the issue of compassion fatigue from an ethical perspective.. The Code of Ethics of the NASW (2017) sets out the guidelines for the social work profession. The Code establishes the values and principles that are fundamental to the well-being of the persons who receive its care services. The values of the profession are the foundation for guaranteeing adequate and effective services to populations in situations of vulnerability and social and institutional oppression. The values of the profession have a leading role in ensuring that social workers can carry out an ethical practice and that their work is aimed at prioritizing the socioemotional well-being of people and therefore their own emotional well-being. The core values set out in the NASW (2017) Code of Ethics are as follows: service,

social justice, the dignity and worth of the person, the importance of human relationships, integrity, and competences.

School social workers demonstrate recognition of the value of social justice as critical to meeting people's needs. Participants in this study recognized their role as promoters of social justice for their students and their families. Children, like adolescents, who receive social services in schools on countless occasions, are victims of inequity, oppression, and discrimination that permeates the institutions that have the duty to educate and protect them. Administrative structures in many instances adversely affect the professional practice of school social work.

Another value highlighted by the participants in this study is the importance of human relationships. Specifically, this study is framed in the theme of compassion fatigue. Developing compassion fatigue syndrome is highly linked precisely to the relationship that is born between school social workers and their students. The exchange of human experiences is a constant during the development of the therapeutic alliance with the student. This alliance fosters an empathetic relationship that involves the affectivity and emotions of the social work professional by recognizing the importance of human relationships. The social workers in this study recognize that human relationships must be characterized by respect and commitment to work with people's well-being.

Another ethical principle that is present in the findings of this study is respect for the dignity of the human being. In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize that this respect for dignity must occur in both directions, towards people but in the same way towards the professional. School social workers work every day with the experiences of

trauma, domestic and structural violence, child maltreatment and sexual abuse, social inequities, institutional oppression that afflict students and their families on an ongoing and uninterrupted basis. Faced with these challenges, professionals strive to ensure that people's conditions and problems achieve a positive transformation, aimed at their social and emotional well-being. However, we cannot overlook that in this process the professional compromises his physical, emotional and mental health exposing himself to develop symptoms of compassion fatigue. That is why it is necessary that the agencies and employers that employ social workers recognize this dimension by promoting respect and dignity towards them.

The code of ethics is clear in its postulates regarding the way in which social workers should carry out their practices within the framework of the mastery of competencies and knowledge of the values, ethical principles and ethical standards of social work, importance of continuing education, as well as the development of self-care skills (NASW, 2017, p. 7). The development of a culture of respect and commitment to the dignity of these professionals is fundamental and a priority to address compassion fatigue fostered self-care as paramount for an ethical and competent practice (NASW, 2017, par.13).

Recommendations for Social Work Practice

The findings of this study have the ability to generate knowledge that will inform future actions to address the issue of compassion fatigue in school social work professionals. The development of future research that is focused on exploring socioemotional aspects of school social work professionals becomes more relevant when

we look at the context in which they practice. The diversity of situations, traumas, problems, issues of domestic violence that social workers work with are factors that have the potential to trigger for the development of symptoms of compassion fatigue. In this way, the findings of this study reveal the inescapable and urgent need to explore the long-term consequences and effects that constant exposure to trauma has on the exercise of their profession. From a broad and biopsychosocial perspective, the development of strategies for the emotional and physical well-being of school social workers is pertinent.

Recommendation 1: Employee Assistance Programs

One recommendation to address the needs of social workers related to compassion fatigue is the strengthening of employee assistance programs. Employee assistance programs serve the function of providing psychological and emotional support services to employees who merit it and voluntarily request it. However, these programs can expand their field of action by educating about self-care strategies for school social workers.

Recommendation 2: Academy and Continuing Education

A second recommendation is aimed at the development of university and continuing education courses focused on the issue of compassion fatigue. In the findings of this study, I was able to document the conceptual and contextual confusion that exists between compassion fatigue syndrome and burnout. Precisely this confusion is the product of the lack of education and knowledge about the bases and origins of these two syndromes that affect social work professionals. Similarly, the findings show the lack of courses within university curricula that educate professionals on topics such as vicarious

and secondary trauma, trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout, and self-care. Education is an important tool in human processes because it has the ability to transform people's actions through the academic offer. For this reason, the creation of continuing education courses would greatly help mitigate those biases between both syndromes and thus empower professionals with tools aimed at self-care.

Recommendation 3: Public Policy

A third recommendation is aimed at the development of public policies and programs aimed at creating a culture of protection for school social work professionals in Puerto Rico. Educational agencies can foster safe environments with the implementation of public policies that aim to create prevention and care programs specifically for school social workers. These policies may be aimed at implementing guidelines for the development of safe environments and therapeutic services for social work professionals who show symptoms of compassion fatigue. They can also develop a program of ongoing educational campaigns through social media and official Department of Education digital platforms aimed at educating about compassion fatigue and developing self-care experiences. These recommendations can be instrumental in preventing the development of physical, emotional, and mental symptoms associated with compassion fatigue.

Based on the results reported in this study, school social work professionals will have the benefit of recognizing the importance of the issue of compassion fatigue and what are the determinants that favor the development of this syndrome. These findings will have a positive and transformative impact on the professional practice of school social work as well as on the various specialties within the professional field. They will

keep in mind that self-care is indispensable and imperative to cope with the challenges of the profession and constant exposure to people's problems and traumas. One highlight of this study is the conceptual and contextual dimension of learning to differentiate between compassion fatigue and burnout. Working conditions, the high caseload, the lack of adequate workspace, and the inclusion of the school social worker in tasks that have nothing to do with the intervention process are certainly predictors of burnout. However, working every day with problems of violence, with trauma, with anguish and social-emotional problems of people cause wear and tear for empathy. Recognizing the differences in these two concepts will help put professionals experiencing symptoms into perspective to recognize them and identify resources for professional help, such as clinical social workers. Developing skills to identify the origin of symptoms will be decisive for a professional practice that tends to the common well-being of participants and professionals.

I must also emphasize that in the development of my professional practice it will help me to be aware of the need to be consistent in the development of self-care strategies, and to have the ability to identify symptoms to experience emotional exhaustion. Practicing self-care will allow me to collaborate with people in a positive way, modeling the importance of taking care of our physical and mental health. On the other hand, from the independent practice in clinical social work, I will collaborate with colleagues who need therapeutic services to manage compassion fatigue. Likewise, I will stimulate the development of best practices and policies that help create healthy professional spaces tempered to the needs and contexts of social work professionals.

Finally, the educational institutions where school social work professionals work have the opportunity to make this problem visible and be intentional and punctual when attending to it and understanding it to guarantee the social and emotional well-being of these.

Transferability

The dissemination of this study will help inform the exercise of an informed and aware school social work practice of the importance of knowing about compassion fatigue. The range of data and information collected will inform new research on the topic of compassion fatigue in social workers in Puerto Rico. The findings of this study will set a precedent by generating new knowledge about the impact of compassion fatigue on the emotional state of these professionals in the school setting. During the literature review on the subject, I realized that there are no studies on compassion fatigue in the school scenario in Puerto Rico, so it has the potential to generate new knowledge.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were minimal, although it should be noted that participation could be higher, however, only eight professionals were volunteers for this study. A limitation in terms of the number of participants may be related to ignorance about the impact of experiencing compassion fatigue, in the same way it can be the product of the confusion that exists with the concept of burnout. Although it is not necessarily a limitation, a notable observation was that the participants were all women; there was no male volunteer.

Further Research

I recommend that future research focus on identifying the management of the symptoms of compassion fatigue. It is possible to explore and document the prevalence in terms of physical and mental health conditions and in Puerto Ricans, the majority of cases of compassion fatigue are identified. In the same way, researchers could study the services to which school social workers have access in Puerto Rico and the effectiveness of these. School social work is characterized by facing the faces of pain, human tragedy, and social problems that affect the lives of students. Hence, the relevance of expanding and developing new research on the subject.

Finally, school social workers will be able to learn about this study after it is published and use it as an instrument to advocate for the development of public policies that address the issue of compassion fatigue. The dissemination of the results and analysis of this study may help school social work professionals to recognize the relevance and importance of the topic for their professional practice. In addition, another dissemination strategy of the study will be a presentation to the country's educational agencies to present the findings and promote concrete actions for the well-being of school social workers in Puerto Rico.

Implications for Social Change

Social change involves a transformation of social structures for the social and emotional well-being of people. It is a process where people articulate common efforts and initiatives on behalf of individuals and communities. The NASW Code of Ethics (2017) states, "Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on

behalf of clients” (p. 1). Social work professionals are called upon to promote social change in favor of the communities or people with whom they work in order to promote their socio-emotional well-being. Similarly, social change addresses the need to foster a structural and institutional culture that recognizes the need for self-care and prevention of the development of compassion fatigue, vicarious and secondary traumatization of school social work professionals.

Compassion fatigue is a syndrome that adversely affects the quality of life of the social worker and therefore the exercise of his profession. The participants of this study highlight the need for new institutional and social proposals to address the development of this syndrome. Therefore, the impact at the micro level is focused on school social workers developing skills and strategies to identify and recognize indicators that point to the development of compassion fatigue. School social workers are continually exposed to human pain, trauma, human tragedy, violence, inequity, and social justice that permeates society. Therefore, at the mezzo level, the focus is on developing prevention and educational programs that strengthen the development of self-care skills.

At the macro level, it is important to highlight the primary role of entities, government agencies, organizations in the development of public policies aimed at improving the working conditions of professionals in the school environment. Promote self-care spaces, establish alliances with professional organizations that are consultants in the process of designing policies and initiatives aimed at promoting the socio-emotional well-being of school social work professionals.

Summary

In summary, the results of this qualitative study on the perceptions of school social workers about compassion fatigue syndrome support the prevailing need to work with the issue in the school scenarios of Puerto Rico. The interview process revealed the socioemotional needs of these professionals and the impact on their physical state and even more the emotional challenge they have as a result of the work they do in schools. That is why this study is highly relevant for school social work professionals. Interviewees highlighted the need for policies, initiatives, and programs at both the government and academia levels to educate them with skills that help them work with the indicators and symptoms associated with compassion fatigue. The results of this study will serve as a source of information for future research in the field of school social work in Puerto Rico, studies that not only address the context of excessive workload and cases but also document the impact on physical and mental health of school social workers.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions in English

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: _____ F _____ M
3. Years of service as a social worker? _____
4. Years of service as a school social worker? _____
5. Geographic Zone of Puerto Rico
 - a. North
 - b. South
 - c. East
 - d. West
6. How do you define the concept of compassion fatigue?
7. What is your perception of compassion fatigue in school social workers?
8. How do social workers approach the development of symptoms associated with compassion fatigue: physical, emotional, and mental?
9. If a school social worker experiences compassion fatigue, what strategies, activities, or actions would they minimize these symptoms?
10. What is your perception regarding the absence of university courses aimed at preparing social workers on the following topics: compassion fatigue, self-care, vicarious and secondary traumatization?
11. What are the agency's strategies where you work to minimize compassion fatigue?

Appendix B: Interview Questions in Spanish

1. Edad: _____
2. Género: _____ F _____ M
3. ¿Años de servicio como trabajadora social? _____
4. ¿Años de servicio como trabajadora social escolar? _____
5. Zona Geográfica de Puerto Rico
 - a. Norte
 - b. Sur
 - c. Este
 - d. Oeste
6. ¿Cómo define el concepto de fatiga por compasión?
7. ¿Cuál es su percepción de la fatiga por compasión en los trabajadores sociales escolares?
8. ¿Cómo abordan los trabajadores sociales el desarrollo de síntomas asociados con la fatiga por compasión: física, emocional y mental?
9. Si un trabajador social escolar experimenta fatiga por compasión, ¿qué estrategias, actividades o acciones minimizarían estos síntomas?
10. ¿Cuál es su percepción con respecto a la ausencia de cursos universitarios dirigidos a preparar a los trabajadores sociales en los siguientes temas: fatiga por compasión, autocuidado, traumatización vicaria y secundaria?
11. ¿Cuáles son las estrategias de la agencia en la que trabajas para minimizar la fatiga por compasión?