Self-Care and Mindfulness as Important Strategies for Professionals Serving Latinx Populations

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US HERE & NOW

- Do you find that serving others is meaningful work?
- Have you ever felt that at times it is emotionally draining to serve others?
- Have you ever felt overwhelmed by events in your own life?
- Do you engage in activities that provide you a sense of self-care and wellbeing?

OUTLINE

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE
   - Personal stress
   - Occupational risk: compassion fatigue

II. AVAILABLE EVIDENCE-BASED SELF-CARE TOOLS
   - Stress management tools (physical, cognitive, social)
   - Mindfulness

III. WHAT IS MINDFULNESS AND HOW TO PRACTICE IT
   - Practical definitions & brief history
   - Mindfulness of the Body Breathing & Loving-Kindness Meditation

IV. MAKING TIME FOR SELF-CARE
   - Making it part of your life
PROFESSIONALS SERVING LATINX POPULATION:
Four stories of compassion fatigue, burnout & resiliency

"Natalie" 42 year old social worker. Born in the US, mixed heritage.
- Has been working with Latinx community for 20 years.
- ICE raids happening in the last 2 years have affected her sleep.
- Nightmares. Fears some friends and clients may be detained or deported.
- Wondering if it's time to change careers for her own mental health...

"Jorge" 47 year old bilingual court interpreter. Born in Mexico, US resident.
- Difficulty going back to work after interpreting for a father who was separated from his children and about to be deported.
- Experienced intrusive images, anger towards the system, fear of being separated from his own (American) children.

"Mariana" 38 year old counselor from Puerto Rico.
- Survived Hurricane Maria (2017), but lost her belongings and her job as a result of it.
- Few social connections. History of abuse.
- Moved to Texas in 2018, found a job working with Hispanic children separated from their parents - within 4 months she quit her job and went to work at a department store. PTSD & Depression.
- "Taking a break from counseling, taking time to heal my own stuff."

"Roxanna" 58 year old psychologist from Puerto Rico.
- 25 years working with women who experience marital abuse. Has experienced compassion fatigue.
- Experienced compassion fatigue and PTSD in the months that followed Hurricane Maria (sleepiness, irritability, sleep disturbances, fear of another disaster, increased alcohol consumption, intrusive images).
- Coping mechanisms: finding peer & group support, participating in social and spiritual events, mindfulness, prayer, calls her therapist as needed, limits.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-CARE

1. We are human beings - we all experience stress.
   - Left unattended, stress can grow and it may affect you and your ability to work effectively

2. Occupational risks associated with working closely and empathically with those who are feeling emotional and/or physical pain:
   - Burnout
   - Compassionate Fatigue
   - Vicarious Traumatization
   "We are the bearers of inner pictures of human suffering"
   - Brigitta Hoijer
COMPASSION FATIGUE

Compassion: Sympathetic awareness of others’ distress together with a desire to alleviate it.

“Compassion fatigue is a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress, it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper.”

“Secondary traumatic stress refers to the natural behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other - the stress resulting from helping, or wanting to help, a traumatized person.”

Dr. Charles Figley
Tulane Traumatology Institute
Tulane University, New Orleans

COMPASSION FATIGUE RISK FACTORS

OCCUPATIONAL
Working with people experiencing physical and/or emotional pain.
Professionals at a higher risk: social workers, nurses, counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, ER and ICU doctors, vets.

PERSONAL
History of trauma and PTSD
Ongoing life stressors
Lack of training in self-care and stress management
Social isolation
Personal expectations
Savior mentality

II. AVAILABLE EVIDENCE-BASED SELF-CARE TOOLS

1. Stress Management Techniques
From the RRR Training by Peg Baim at the Benson Henry Institute for Mind-Body Medicine (Harvard, 2012):
- Eliciting the relaxation response: meditations and prayers based on repetition, mindful breathing, tai chi.
- Exercise: sports, yoga, gym, walking
- Nutritious diet
- Gratitude journals
- Cognitive logs for reframing
- Maintaining meaningful social connections
- A sense of purpose: social, artistic, spiritual, self-determined
- Healthy sense of humor

- Mindfulness-Based Programs: MBIR & MBCT
- Mindfulness Meditations on their own: Breathing, Body Scan, Loving Kindness, Open Awareness
Most Effective Self-Care Tools
Dr. Mark Brackett, Director of the Center for Emotional Intelligence at Yale McLean Harvard Coaching and Health Care Conference (2019)

The Big 7 for Emotionally Intelligent Self-Care and Wellbeing:
1. Mindful Breathing
2. Proper sleep
3. Nutrition
4. Exercise
5. Positive self-talk, reappraisal, and problem solving
6. Building and maintaining positive relationships
7. Doing things that are meaningful to you

Mindfulness as Self-Care
Benefits of Practicing Mindfulness
- Reduced symptoms of stress
- Reduced symptoms of anxiety
- Reduced symptoms of IBS and other gastric disorders
- Reduced intensity of perceived pain related to chronic pain conditions
- Increased ability to manage frustration and unexpected change
- Increased feelings of satisfaction
- Increased ability to find joy
- Increased capacity to prevent depressive relapses in patients with recurrent mild-moderate depression
- Increased ability to concentrate while performing a particular task
- Increased ability to feel compassion for self and others
- Increased self-understanding
- Increased ability to see the bigger picture
- Increased emotional intelligence
- Increased cognitive flexibility
- Improved sleep
- Improved response of the immune system
- Improved interpersonal communication
- Less mind wandering and rumination due to a decrease in the activation of the DMN

Mindfulness and Therapist
Dr. Paul R. Fulton

- Research on the therapeutic application of mindfulness practice can bring beneficial effects to both patients/participants and health care workers, such as reduced anxiety and depression, and increased empathy and self-compassion.
- Therapists who practice mindfulness can share those qualities with patients: offer them more focused caring attention and provide more equanimity and compassion when attending to pain.
- Mindfulness Practice can make us happier by allowing us to taste more calm and joy in the middle of our inevitable challenges.

Source: Meditation and the Therapist by Paul Fulton
https://www.buddhistinquiry.org/article/meditation-and-the-therapist/
III. WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

1. Definitions
2. How to practice mindfulness
3. Brief history
4. Mindfulness as a way to understand reality

1. DEFINITIONS


- "Mindfulness is the disciplined practice of moment-to-moment awareness, the complete "owning" of each moment of your experience, good, bad or ugly."
- "Cultivating mindfulness can lead to the discovery of deep realms of relaxation, calmness and insight within yourself."
- "Mindfulness is a particular way of paying attention. It is a way of looking deeply into oneself in the spirit of self understanding."

Note: Mindfulness is a verb. Being Mindful. Mindful of something or someone.

2. HOW TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

By intentionally paying attention to a chosen object of attention with:
1. Alertness: energy and concentration.
2. Curiosity: open-mind, interest, non-judgment.
3. Mindfulness: remembering to bring attention back when it wanders off somewhere else.

The Four Establishments of Mindfulness (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2006):
1. Body
   - Mindfulness of Breathing
   - Mindfulness of the Positions of the Body
   - Mindfulness of the Actions of the Body
   - Mindfulness of the Parts that Make the Body
2. Sensations and Feelings
3. "Mind": Mental and Emotional States
4. "Objects of Mind": All Perceptions, Thoughts and Cognitions
BEING MINDFUL: FORMAL & INFORMAL PRACTICES
Mindful mindsets via different activities

FORMAL MINDFULNESS PRACTICE
- Practicing mindfulness by choosing a certain position, a certain body posture or a particular way of walking.

“...it is indeed a radical act of love to just sit down and be quiet for a time by yourself...”
- Jon Kabat-Zinn

INFORMAL MINDFULNESS PRACTICE
- Moving or carrying out an action or activity while being mindful involves slowing down.

Examples:
- Mindful eating
- Mindful listening
- Mindful showering
- Mindful driving

3. BRIEF HISTORY OF MINDFULNESS

India, c.500 BC: Original teachings on mindfulness given by Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha).
Sri Lanka, 1880s: Prof. Thomas Rhys Davids translates the Pali term “sati” into “mindfulness”.
England, 1890s-1910s: The Rhys Davids speak about mindfulness at universities and societies.

USA, 1960s-1970s: Americans travel to Asia, learn about mindfulness, bring back the practice and establish mindfulness practice centers near Boston (IMS). Seeds of Research.
USA, 1980s: Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn publishes groundbreaking research on mindfulness and a best-selling book.

World Wide: 1990s-present: mindfulness becomes a subject of research, psychotherapists and neuroscientists drawn to it.

4. MINDFULNESS AS A WAY TO UNDERSTAND REALITY
Principles of Buddhist Psychology
Kornfield (2008)

- Impermanence: constant change as the nature of life, everything is transient: joys, sorrows. Parallels existential models of therapy.
- Interdependence and interconnectedness: systems connect to each other, nothing stands alone. Our actions affect others, the actions of others affect us. Parallels social and systemic models of therapy.
- No fixed self exists: our identity is constructed socially, our sense of self is malleable, our rigid stories about self can lead to stress. Parallels constructivist approach, narrative therapy.
- Invitation to question our beliefs: our thoughts are the results of assumptions which may not be true. Parallels cognitive models of therapy.
- Action and reaction: compassionate actions lead to the wellbeing of self and others. Ethical behavior is conducive to mental peace.

IV. PRACTICE TIME

1. MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING
Formal Practice
Research: Dr. Sara Lazar et al at Harvard
Concentration practice: elicits RR
Warning: not recommended for people experiencing severe anxiety, psychosis, PTSD.

2. LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION
Research: Dr. Richard Davidson et al at Center for Healthy Minds UW
Concentration: elicits RR & promotes empathy
1. MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

Awareness and gratitude

Body scan

Feeling and following the breath mindfully...in...out...in...out...

Excerpt from The Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

“A practitioner sits down and practices like this:

- Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.
- Breathing in, I am aware of my whole body. Breathing out, I am aware of my whole body.
- Breathing in, I calm my whole body. Breathing out, I calm my whole body.”

2. LOVING-KINDNESS MEDITATION

CONNECTING WITH LOVE, COMPASSION AND EMPATHY

Key words: inner peace, safety, joy, wellbeing, love, blessings...

1. May I experience ______________
2. May (a very loved one) experience ______________
3. May (a friend) experience ______________
4. May (a neutral person) experience ______________
5. May (a difficult person) experience ______________
6. May (a community) experience ______________
7. May we all experience ______________

V. MAKING TIME FOR SELF-CARE

What Nourishes You?

Recognize it. Imagine it. Plan for it.

- Which activities give you a sense of purpose and wellbeing? Intellectual, artistic, spiritual, hobbies...
- Whose company do you enjoy? People, animals, nature...
- What can you start doing today? Mindful activities, gratitude notes...
Gracias & thank you all for serving the latinx community here and now!

When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." — Mr. Rogers

REFERENCES & RESOURCES


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www.mbsrtraining.com

www.mindandlife.org

https://www.nicabm.com/compassion-fatigue-treat-patients/

www.self-compassion.org

www.richardjdavidson.com

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