

# Witness to Suffering: Mindfulness and Compassion Fatigue among Traumatic Bereavement Volunteers and Professionals

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## Abstract

This study used a survey to investigate the relationship between mindfulness and compassion fatigue and compassion satisfaction among 41 volunteers and professionals at an agency serving the traumatically bereaved. Compassion fatigue comprises two aspects: secondary traumatic stress and burnout. Because prior research suggests that compassion satisfaction may protect against compassion fatigue, the authors hypothesized that (a) mindfulness would be positively correlated with compassion satisfaction, (b) mindfulness would be inversely correlated with compassion fatigue, and (c) there would be differences between respondents with a personal history of traumatic bereavement and those with no such history. Correlation analyses supported the first two hypotheses; an independent means *t* test did not provide evidence for the latter hypothesis, although the number of nontraumatically bereaved respondents was small. Overall, this sample showed surprisingly high levels of compassion satisfaction and low levels of compassion fatigue, even among respondents thought to be at higher risk of problems due to personal

trauma. Implications of these findings are particularly relevant for social workers and other professionals employed in positions in which they encounter trauma and high emotional stress.

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