Impact of caring for bereaved parents and protective factors on maternity health professionals.

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Background: Caring for traumatised populations may have adverse mental health outcomes for caregivers. We investigated the prevalence of compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, compassion satisfaction and burnout in maternity healthcare professionals providing care to bereaved parents who experienced a stillbirth or neonatal death. Possible protective factors such as age, experience, job stress, social support and previous history of trauma were explored.

Method: A correlational, non-experimental, descriptive design was employed. All members of the Queensland Maternity and Neonatal Clinical Network (SMNCN) were invited to complete an online survey. The final sample of 201 participants gave sufficient power for subsequent statistical analyses.

Results: Around a third (30.3%) reported moderate compassion fatigue and high secondary traumatic stress (32.3%). Whereas 40% of participants reported high levels of compassion satisfaction. Around half (50.7%) reported moderate levels of burnout, and the majority (90%) reported high levels of job stress. Social support moderated compassion fatigue when job stress was high. High levels of social support elevated the satisfaction gained from caring for bereaved parents in participants who had low job stress.

Conclusions: Maternity health professionals who have high levels of job stress but high social support are less susceptible to develop symptoms of compassion fatigue and more likely to report compassion satisfaction than carers with low social support. The moderating effects of social support on job stress warrants further investigation. Strategies to monitor and enhance the emotional well-being of maternity staff should be implemented to retain staff and provide better care for bereaved parents.