

Research Brief

The Cost of Caring: Compassion Fatigue among Peer Overdose Response Workers in British Columbia

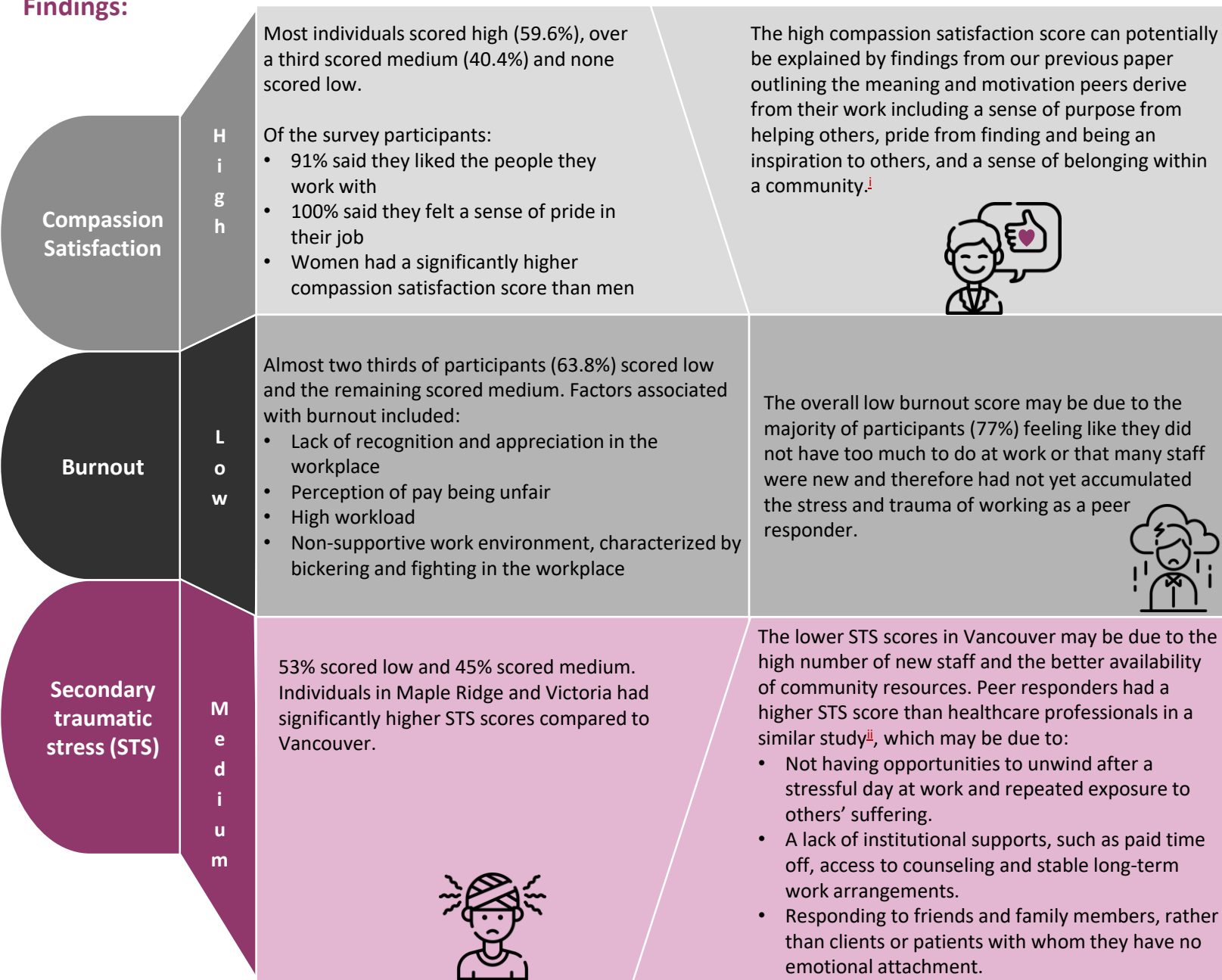
Zahra Mamdani, Sophie McKenzie, Emma Ackermann, Rayne Voyer, Fred Cameron, Tracy Scott, Bernie Pauly & Jane A. Buxton (2023) The Cost of Caring: Compassion Fatigue among Peer Overdose Response Workers in British Columbia, Substance Use & Misuse, 58:1, 85-93. [URL](#)

Background: Peer overdose response workers (peer responders), i.e., individuals with lived/living experience of drug use who work in overdose response settings, are particularly susceptible to the negative physical and mental health impacts of the drug toxicity crisis. Despite that, the mental health impacts on peer responders have yet to be studied and measured.

A research paper published in Substance Use and Misuse in November 2022 describes the factors influencing feelings of compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue among peer responders.

Methods: The Professional Quality of Life survey (Version 5) was completed by 47 peer responders – 18 from Vancouver, 21 from Victoria and 8 from Maple Ridge – between September 2020 and March 2021 to assess compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. The Likert scale responses were converted into numerical values and scores were calculated for each sub-scale. The mean score was calculated for each sub-scale and categorized as low, medium, or high.

Findings:



Conclusion: Although peer responders derive pleasure and fulfillment from their jobs, i.e., compassion satisfaction, they also sometimes face burnout and stress due to continuous exposure to the trauma of the people they support. These results shed light on the areas that need to be targeted when creating supports for peer responders.

