Reducing Compassion Fatigue in Spiritual Leaders: The Role of Connecting with God through Prayer Fulfillment and Connectedness

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Abstract. This chapter examines the relationship between spiritual practices and compassion fatigue among spiritual leaders, revealing that prayer and connectedness are most protective when embedded within broader religious contexts rather than practiced in isolation. Drawing on empirical research with 113 Western spiritual leaders using the ASPIRES assessment and ProQOL-5 measures, findings demonstrate that spirituality factors including prayer fulfillment and connectedness correlate negatively with burnout and secondary traumatic stress when supported by religious frameworks. Conversely, when religious factors are excluded, prayer fulfillment shows positive correlation with burnout, highlighting the critical role of institutional religious support in maintaining well-being among spiritual leaders. The research challenges assumptions about individual spiritual practices and emphasizes the importance of community, customs, and religious grounding in sustaining helping professionals. These findings have significant implications for understanding spiritual transcendence as a holistic process requiring both personal devotion and communal religious anchors.

Keywords. Spiritual transcendence, Prayer, Connectedness, Compassion fatigue, Religious coping, Spiritual leaders, Burnout.

1. Introduction

At the heart of spiritual leadership in Western society are several essential factors, including a call not only to serve, but to lead with God, anchored in prayer, rooted in transcendence, and sustained by faith. While spirituality and transcendence are often used interchangeably, they remain uniquely distinct yet interdependent. Lepherd (2015) identifies transcendence as the element that distinguishes spirituality from religion, linking it to profound encounters with suffering, life, and death. For those in helping professions, prayer and meditation may provide moments of clarity or temporary relief from difficult encounters (Lepherd, 2015).

Previous research indicates that prayer alone, when detached from broader religious sentiments and practices, does not consistently serve as a protective force against compassion fatigue or burnout. For example, a scoping review of Catholic priests identified "leading an active spiritual life" as one protective factor but also emphasized the critical role of social support from parishioners, collaborators, colleagues, and superiors in reducing occupational stress (Ruiz-Prade et al., 2021).

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Similarly, studies on social work practices highlighted that resilience is strengthened not only by private prayer, but by participation in faith communities, shared rituals, and positive perceptual view of God as companion contributed to mental and emotional well-being (Campbell & Bauer, 2021).

Conversely, when prayer is embedded within the wider framework of religious faith and draws on community interaction, rituals, and moral grounding, it demonstrates stronger, more consistent associations with resilience. Religious coping strategies and communal religious practices have been shown to buffer stress and enhance well-being in caregiving contexts (VanderWeele, 2017). Self-transcendence, therefore, is best understood not simply as the outcome of individual devotion, but as a holistic process shaped by spiritual values, intimacy with God, and the communal anchors of religion (Dorais & Gutierrez, 2021; Wong, 2016). This research examines two dimensions of spirituality, (a) prayer fulfillment, and (b) connectedness and their relationship to compassion fatigue factors, (a) compassion satisfaction, (b) burnout, and (c) secondary traumatic stress among spiritual leaders. The findings highlight that prayer is most protective not when isolated, but when practiced as partnership with God within the sustaining context of religious faith.

2. Religion: Institutional Frameworks and Community

Institutional frameworks and community functionality of religion is a phenomenon that has touched and influenced every domain of society (Houston & Cartwright, 2007). This phenomenon has played a role in history, literature, institutions, and practices, which include education, family structure and functioning, philosophies, science, and the morality of cultures and civilizations. Globally, religion has played a crucial role in the psychological processes, moral decision-making, and the well-being of individuals (Shiah et al., 2016), though these connections may appear unclear to some researchers (Koenig, 2012; Seybold & Hill, 2001).

Despite religion's widespread influence, definitional challenges persist in academic research. Researchers often use religion interchangeably with spirituality (Fuertes & Dugan, 2021), yet the two concepts are distinct. Fuertes and Dugan noted that there is confusion among academia regarding the utilization of the two concepts because spirituality is mainly measured through the lens of religion and the interventions religion provides. Generally, researchers believed that an individual's lifestyle and religious beliefs and practices were the factors that contributed to improving mental and physical health (George et al., 2000).

Koteneva et al. (2021) view spirituality as a different construct than religion. Stanley et al. (2011) believe that religion and spirituality are used interchangeably, but they are different. Spirituality is defined broadly as a relationship with a supreme being, higher power, or God (Stanley et al., 2011). Among cultural traditions, the usage of religion and its practices are sometimes confused with spirituality. Spirituality is viewed as (a) private, (b) inclusive, (c) non-denominational, and (d) focusing on universal human feelings versus inherent belief systems (Karakas, 2009).

3. Spirituality: Personal Connection-Transcendence

The term spirituality and its epistemology are complex, which makes it challenging to define, yet some researchers viewed the concept as a construct derived from religion or (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Yanping et al., 2021; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Karakas (2009) reported that there are over 70 definitions that are applied to spirituality and that there is no widely accepted definition for the term. The epistemology of the concept of spirituality reveals interesting linguistic origins. Spirituality is derived from three Latin words. The first word, spiritualitas is connected to the practical belief of unity and accepting the infinite, and also means breath, to blow or breathe. The second Latin word, "spiritus," carries the meaning of giving life to the soul and serves as a moral compass that provides meaning, purpose, and direction to individuals (Fuertes & Dugan, 2021). Karakas (2009) noted that contextually spiritus, means to give worth to the life of the physical organism, or spiritualis, which means breathing and air. Individuals who function as professionals, serving others spiritually to aid the soul often serve with a deep sense of connection.

Theoretically, the concept of spirituality combines religious and nonreligious understandings to incorporate religious, secular, atheist, and humanistic understandings of persons' values and traditions as they search for meaning (Pargament, 1999; Miller & Thoresen, 2003). The definition evolved from a religious view to a more holistic view of health that incorporates an individual's physical, psychological, social, economic, spiritual, or religious beliefs about humanity (Yanping et al., 2021). The construct provides a deep connection, a moral compass of meaning, purpose, and direction. Research indicates that spirituality encompasses universal themes that transcend cultural and religious boundaries. Dyson et al. (1997), Lepherd (2015), and Tanyi (2002) agreed that spirituality has four core elements: (a) hope, (b) universality, (c) connectedness, and (d) transcendence. Among these elements, prayer represents a particularly significant spiritual practice that crosses ethnicities and religions, serving as a bridge between individual spiritual experience and connection with the transcendent (Lepherd, 2015).

4. Spiritual Transcendence

Spiritual Transcendence represents the defining characteristic that distinguishes spirituality from organized religion (Lepherd, 2015). While spirituality and transcendence remain interconnected concepts, transcendence functions as the primary attribute of spirituality that enables individuals to find meaning in suffering, life, and mortality. Research demonstrated that Spiritual Transcendence provided resources for addressing fundamental human challenges including despair, hopelessness, grief and loss, guilt, shame, and isolation (Kang et al., 2021).

Piedmont (2001) provided a general conceptualization of spiritual transcendence as the capacity to view life from an elevated perspective that transcends the ordinary limitations of time and place, enabling individuals to access broader meaning and purpose. A contemporary understanding of transcendence emphasized its role as an innate human capacity to draw upon spiritual values and beliefs to rise above suffering and hardship (Dorais & Gutierrez, 2021). Through the implementation of spiritual

beliefs and disciplined practices, individuals experienced transformation and developed deeper understanding of their life purpose, creating stronger bonds with their higher power and the universe. The understanding of transcendence varied significantly across cultural and religious traditions, with spirituality taking diverse forms based on individuals' ethnic origins, cultural backgrounds, and geographical contexts. The transcendent may be understood as Allah, HaShem, God or Higher Power in Western traditions, while Eastern traditions conceptualized the transcendent as Ultimate Truth, Reality, Vishnu, Krishna, or Buddha (Koenig, 2010).

The distinction between Eastern and Western approaches to Spiritual Transcendence revealed fundamentally different pathways to the same transcendent goal. Eastern traditions, particularly Buddhism and Taoism, conceptualizes transcendence as a process of dissolving the perceived self and achieving harmony with the universal order. Buddhist spirituality focuses on transcending through the recognition of impermanence, suffering, and not-self, where individuals learned to release attachment to their individualized sense of self to achieve liberation from suffering (Ren, 2012). Similarly, Taoist philosophy emphasizes transcendence through harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, seeking to develop inner peace and harmony by aligning with the universe's natural movement (Ren, 2012).

Eastern cultures cultivates transcendent virtues such as love, compassion, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness, viewing these qualities as vehicles for serving humanity across diverse cultures within the universe (Favier & O'Brien, 2004). In contrast, Western spirituality typically approaches transcendence through the development and elevation of the self, focusing on discovering one's deepest values and meanings while maintaining individual identity in relationship with the transcendent (Ren, 2012). Despite these philosophical differences, both Eastern and Western traditions converges on the practical understanding that Spiritual Transcendence manifests through specific practices and results in an expanded connectedness. Universal spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and contemplation served as pathways to transcendent experiences across cultural boundaries, assisting individuals in developing their inner lives and converting these experiences into connectedness with reality on a larger scale (Ren, 2012).

Such a transcendent connectedness encompasses relationships with the self, other individuals, nature, the cosmos, and the divine realm, creating what researchers described as an expanded awareness that extends beyond ordinary temporal and spatial limitations (Ren, 2012). For spiritual leaders, this understanding of transcendence as both pathway and outcome provides the theoretical foundation for examining how specific spiritual practices particularly prayer and connectedness function as components of Spiritual Transcendence that can buffer against occupational stress and promote sustained well-being in helping professions.

4.1. Prayer

As a sub-construct of spirituality, prayer functions as a form of communication joined to the concept of connectedness, encompassing reflection, meditation, and internal communication with a higher being (Lepherd, 2015). Prayer represents one of the most widely practiced religious behaviors worldwide, serving as what researchers describe as inward communion or conversation with the power recognized as divine (Upenieks, 2023). Research reports that prayer's effectiveness may depend on consistency, context, and the specific type of prayer practiced. The type of prayer utilized varies on the individual and spiritual goals.

4.1.1. Types of Prayer and Their Functions

Understanding prayer's role in spiritual transcendence required examining its various forms and functions. Poloma and Pendleton (1991) created one of the most widely used taxonomies for prayer by defining four primary types of prayer: (a) colloquial (informal, conversational prayer), (b) petitional (requests for specific outcomes), (c) ritual (formal, structured prayers), and (d) meditative/contemplative (focused reflection and listening). These classifications revealed prayer's multifaceted nature and provided the foundation for subsequent research.

Additional research identified prayer dimensions that influenced effectiveness. Ladd and Spilka (2006) distinguished between inward (personal spiritual connection), outward (prayers for others), and upward (praise and worship) orientations. More recently, researchers examined various prayer types including devotional prayer (praise of God and prayer for well-being of others), prayers for support (requests for health, financial aid, or guidance), and prayer expectancies (beliefs about whether and how God responds to prayers) (Ellison et al., 2014). The latter demonstrated a collaboration with a Higher Power.

4.1.2. Prayer as Collaborative

Building on this collaborative understanding, emerging research conceptualized prayer not merely as an individual spiritual practice, but as a form of collaborative problem-solving with the divine (Schille-Hudson et al., 2024). This perspective viewed prayer as an interactive process where individuals work in partnership with God to address life challenges. Studies revealed that people often experienced prayer as involving shared work with God, asking for divine assistance in changing perceptual thinking, gaining wisdom, or developing compassion for difficult situations (Schille-Hudson et al., 2024). This collaborative dimension may explain why prayer demonstrated stronger protective effects when embedded within broader religious contexts, communal faith practices, social support, and the reinforcement of coping resources (VanderWeele, 2017). The sense of divine partnership provided both cognitive reframing opportunities and emotional support that individual meditation alone may not offer. These collaborative benefits must be understood within the broader context of empirical research on prayer's effectiveness.

4.1.3. Empirical Findings: Complex and Context-Dependent Effects

Research on prayer's effectiveness reveals complex, often contradictory patterns that underscore the importance of context and methodology. Effects of prayer have been documented in numerous studies. Sharp Donahoo et al. (2018) found that compassion satisfaction improved among persons who practiced high frequencies of prayer and mindfulness, with participants perceiving lower stress levels. Researchers Fincham and May (2017) revealed that frequent prayer correlates positively with relationship quality, reducing vengeful behaviors and promoting forgiveness in interpersonal conflicts.

Large-scale randomized controlled trials have produced mixed results, with some studies showing no significant differences between prayed-for and control groups (Roberts et al, 2009). In contract, one major study found that patients who received intercessory prayer experienced slightly higher complication rates (52%) compared to those who received no prayer (51%) (Benson et al., 2006). This variability suggests that prayer's effectiveness depends heavily on contextual factors including the type of prayer, practitioner characteristics, and surrounding religious or spiritual framework.

4.1.4. Prayer Frequency and Religious Context

Wnuk (2022) reported crucial findings about prayer frequency and context: strong, positive correlations exist between religious practices and the frequency of praying, attending religious services, and the religious dimension of employees' spirituality. Importantly, when employees prayed more frequently, there was a positive, significant association between relationship to a higher power and attitudes toward peers and employers. Conversely, this association was not significant when employees prayed less frequently, suggesting that consistency and integration with broader religious practice matter significantly.

These findings align with neuroscientific research showing that prayer activates neural networks associated with social cognition and theory of mind, particularly when prayer involves a perceived personal interaction with God (Schjoedt et al., 2009). According to researchers, the brain regions activated during prayer, encompasses active areas of social cognition suggesting that personal prayer functions as a form of social interaction, deepening communication with the divine.

4.1.5. Prayer Frequency and Religious Context

Prayer differs fundamentally from meditation in its communicative nature, though it could include meditative elements. Both prayer and meditation engages with transcendent experiences and utilizes mental processes, but meditation typically focuses on specific objects or states while prayer is articulated through various modalities including contemplation, verbal expression, and silence, usually within religious contexts (Lepherd, 2015).

The communicative aspect of prayer created what researchers termed connectedness among individuals, their higher power, and often their communities (Wnuk, 2022). This multi-directional connectedness might explain prayer's protective

potential while also illuminating why isolated prayer practices reveals less consistent benefits than prayer embedded within supportive religious frameworks.

4.2. Connectedness

The second key component of spiritual transcendence, connectedness, focuses on the relational aspects that complement prayer's communicative function. Beyond prayer, connectedness represents another fundamental dimension of Spiritual Transcendence that warranted examination. Connectedness demands action that caused individuals to seek relationships with others, surroundings, or greater power (Lepherd, 2015). When connectedness occurs, it causes individuals to transcend beyond self and provides motivation to help others from a selfless mentality (Dyson, 1997).

Spiritual Connectedness operates beyond self and across multiple relational dimensions that distinguishes it from general social support or community involvement. Research identifies four primary dimensions: (a) intrapersonal connectedness (relationship with self and personal values), (b) interpersonal connectedness (relationships with others and community), (c) transpersonal connectedness (relationship with the transcendent, divine, or higher power), and (d) environmental connectedness (relationship with nature and the broader universe) (Burkhardt & Nagai-Jacobson, 2002; Reed, 1992). For spiritual leaders, these dimensions interacts synergistically rather than operating independently. Transpersonal Connectedness often serves as the foundation that informs and strengthens the other dimensions, creating what researchers describes as an integrated spiritual worldview that guides both personal well-being and professional helping behaviors (Piedmont, 2020).

4.2.1. Connectedness as Protective Factor Against Compassion Fatigue

Emerging research reported that spiritual connectedness functioned as a significant buffer against occupational stress and compassion fatigue among helping professionals. Studies of intensive care nurses revealed that while professionals maintained high levels of spiritual well-being generally, they experienced moderate levels of compassion fatigue, with younger and less experienced practitioners showing greater vulnerability (Yurtsever et al., 2023). These findings suggested that Spiritual Connectedness developed over time and required intentional cultivation to serve as a protective factor.

4.2.2. Behavioral Manifestations of Connectedness

Spiritual Connectedness (SC) behaviorally occurs through specific actions and orientations that distinguishes it from abstract spiritual concepts. Research identified several key manifestations: (a) compassionate service motivated by transcendent purpose rather than mere professional obligation, (b) meaning-making that framed suffering and challenges within larger spiritual narratives, (c) community engagement that extended beyond professional duties to include spiritual fellowship and mutual support, and (d) contemplative practices that maintained awareness of transcendent presence in daily activities (Koenig et al., 2012).

Among spiritual leaders, these behavioral manifestations created what Dorais and Gutierrez (2021) described as self-transcendence, a holistic process shaped by spiritual values, intimacy with the divine, and communal anchors that sustained helping behaviors over time. This transcendent motivation appeared essential for preventing spiritual exhaustion that could develop when helping behaviors were driven solely by individual compassion without transcendent grounding.

4.2.3. Barriers to Connectedness

Despite its protective potential, spiritual connectedness faced several barriers in contemporary helping professions. Research identified institutional pressures that prioritized efficiency over spiritual care, professional skepticism regarding spiritual interventions, time constraints that limited opportunities for contemplative practices, and cultural diversity that challenged assumptions about shared spiritual frameworks (Hodge, 2011).

For spiritual leaders, additional barriers included role conflicts between administrative duties and spiritual care, theological doubts that could undermine transcendent connectedness, and isolation from supportive faith communities due to professional demands (Ruiz-Prade, et al., 2021). These barriers helped explain why connectedness required intentional cultivation and supportive institutional contexts to function effectively as a protective factor.

4.2.4. Integration with Prayer and Religious Context

Connectedness achieved its fullest protective potential when integrated with prayer practices within broader religious contexts. While individual spiritual connectedness provided important benefits, research consistently demonstrated that connectedness embedded within faith communities and religious traditions showed stronger associations with resilience and well-being (Dulin et al., 2021) This integration created what researchers described as religious connectedness, a multidimensional experience that combined personal spiritual relationship, communal support, theological grounding, and ritualistic practices into a coherent framework for managing life's challenges. For spiritual leaders, this integrated connectedness appeared essential for maintaining both personal well-being and professional effectiveness in demanding helping roles (VanderWeele, 2017).

5. Compassion Fatigue and Factors

To understand how prayer and connectedness function as protective factors for spiritual leaders, it is essential to examine Compassion Fatigue (CF). This phenomenon presents particular risks for spiritual leaders who regularly engage with human suffering through their spiritual functioning roles. According to Kinnick et al. (1996), compassion was viewed as a character trait that varied among individuals but at differential levels due to situational factors. Cole et al. (2014) reported that Compassion Fatigue's origin was

unknown, yet it was believed to have derived from burnout because it was a more exacerbated form.

Stamm (2002) attributed the development of the term to Charles Figley, who published his research findings in 1995 titled Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized. Compassion fatigue was seen as emotional sensitivity (Lee et al., 2021) and was described as "the price for caring emotionally for others" (Slocum-Gori et al., 2011) while possessing empathy when serving others who were experiencing or had experienced traumatic events.

Cole et al. (2014) discussed how CF differed from stress and burnout due to the extreme state of tension and preoccupation among individuals that assisted those suffering, creating secondary traumatic stress for the helper. This difference was critical for understanding why traditional stress management approaches might prove insufficient for spiritual leaders who experienced this phenomenon. Compassion Fatigue is interconnected to a person's character trait; it is the outcome of working with a significant number of traumatized individuals in combination with a strong empathic orientation (Figley, 1995).

The phenomenon represents a unique occupational hazard for helping professionals, particularly spiritual leaders who consistently engaged with congregants experiencing trauma, grief, and spiritual crises. Understanding the multifaceted nature of CF through its three primary components is essential for recognizing when spiritual practices themselves might require modification or supplementation with protective factors.

5.1. Burnout Component

One factor of CF is burnout, which includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Burnout (BO) is a pattern of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal achievement characterized by cynicism, psychological distress, dissatisfaction, impaired interpersonal functioning, emotional numbing, and physiological problems (Fothergill et al., 2004). Zysberg et al. (2017) reported that the main descriptive factors of BO includes: (a) exhaustion and cynicism, (b) a sense of helplessness and low self-efficacy that led to low job performance, (c) a range of health problems, (d) disruptive behaviors or isolation, (e) absenteeism in the workplace, and (f) depression and severe emotional and psychological conditions. For spiritual leaders, BO manifested uniquely as it intersects with their calling and spiritual identity. The sacred nature of their work could make acknowledgment of burnout symptoms feel like a crisis of faith rather than a natural occupational hazard, potentially complicating help-seeking behaviors and intervention strategies.

5.2. Secondary Traumatic Stress Component

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) another factors of CF which is the distress that emerges as an emotional disruption when an individual encountered another individual who has experienced primary traumatization (Meadors et al., 2010). Figley (1995)

defined STS as natural behaviors and emotions that results from perceptually experiencing traumatizing events of another or others. STS symptoms mirror those experienced by trauma survivors themselves, including intrusive thoughts about clients' traumatic experiences, avoidance of reminders of client trauma, and negative alterations in mood and cognition.

STS occurs across helpers among the helping professions. Meadors et al. (2010) reported that during a helper's career, some struggled with STS while caring for traumatized individuals without knowing how providing empathic listening could have internal negative effects on their personhood. This component was particularly relevant for spiritual leaders who frequently encountered congregants dealing with loss, abuse, addiction, and other traumatic experiences through pastoral counseling, crisis intervention, and spiritual guidance.

5.3. Compassion Satisfaction Component

Compassion Satisfaction (CS) refers to the pleasure an individual experienced when doing one's job well (Knutt et al., 2022). CS is also described as the positive sensation of purpose, meaning, and happiness rooted in work experience (Lacson & Agnes, 2021) and represented a positive perception displayed when a caregiver perceived their work as a helper in a positive manner (Cao et al., 2021). The level of job satisfaction that helpers found in their jobs and the degree to which they felt successful in their work and supported by colleagues was key (Conrad & Keller-Guenther, 2006). Compassion satisfaction resulted from work-life balance and reduced stress levels.

Sharp Donahoo et al. (2018) found that CS improved among persons that practiced high frequencies of prayer and mindfulness, and participants who practiced prayer and mindfulness with higher frequencies perceived lower levels of stress. This finding suggested that spiritual practices, which were inherently part of spiritual leaders' lives, might serve as natural protective factors against compassion fatigue. Nevertheless, the critical question emerged: under what conditions did these same spiritual practices become inadequate or potentially counterproductive in maintaining psychological well-being?

5.4. Compassion Fatigue in Spiritual Leaders Context

Although spiritual leaders specializes in people's affairs, aiding individuals in navigating life's challenges similar to counselors and psychologists, research regarding spiritual leaders and how they navigate compassion fatigue was limited. Collins and Long (2003) found that professionals who did not recognize or cope with their symptoms of Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) were sometimes challenged in their ability to provide effective services and maintain positive personal and professional relationships in their work contexts. While most research on STS, Compassion Fatigue (CF), and BO focused on healthcare professionals, the research regarding spiritual leaders and clergypersons and how they navigated experiencing STS and CF was limited.

Jacobson et al. (2013) found that clergy participants scored in the moderate range, at risk for compassion fatigue, while Yan and Beder (2013) found that chaplains'

burnout was influenced by organizational support factors. These limited findings highlighted the vulnerability of spiritual leaders to compassion fatigue and underscored the critical need for understanding how religious sentiments and spiritual practices could serve as protective buffers or when they might fall short of providing adequate protection against the occupational hazards inherent in spiritual leadership.

6. Research Methods and Findings

6.1. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research was to identify which specific spiritual transcendence components were most protective against occupational stress among spiritual leaders in the helping profession. The primary objective of this study was to examine the individual effectiveness of Prayer Fulfillment (PF) and Spiritual Connectedness (SC) as buffering factors against compassion fatigue among spiritual leaders.

6.2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Is there a negative relationship between spirituality factors specifically PF and SC, as measured by the ASPIRES (Piedmont, 2020) and Compassion Fatigue (CF) factors (Compassion Satisfaction (CS), Burnout (BO), and Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) as measured by the ProQOL-5 among spiritual leaders?

Hypothesis: Prayer Fulfillment and Connectedness would be significantly negatively associated with Burnout and Secondary Traumatic Stress and positively associated with Compassion Satisfaction among spiritual leaders.

6.3. Research Methods

A correlational analysis was conducted using existing survey data (N=113 Western spiritual leaders). ASPIRES subscales were analyzed both within their full religious context and isolated from Religiosity (R)/Religious Crisis (RC) factors. Outcomes were measured via ProQOL-5 (Compassion Satisfaction, Burnout, Secondary Traumatic Stress). Moderators such as gender, age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, position type, and hours worked were also tested.

6.4. Findings and Implications

This study revealed that spirituality factors such as Prayer Fulfillment and Spiritual Connectedness were negatively correlated with Burnout, positively correlated with Compassion Satisfaction, and negatively correlated with Secondary Traumatic Stress, indicating that religiosity was a significant factor in the correlation of Spiritual Transcendence as a buffer against Compassion Fatigue factors. When religious factors were included, Prayer Fulfillment showed a strong negative correlation with Burnout

($r = -.342$, $p < .001$) and a moderate positive correlation with Compassion Satisfaction ($r = .355$, $p < .001$). When Religious factors of the ASPIRES were excluded, Prayer Fulfillment showed a positive correlation with Burnout ($r = .279$, $p = .003$) and a negative correlation with Compassion Satisfaction ($r = -.394$, $p < .001$), whereas Spiritual Connectedness factors regarding Burnout, Compassion Satisfaction, and Secondary Traumatic Stress (r values ranging from .005 to .120, all $p > .05$).

These findings highlight how important Western spiritual leaders' connection to religion, along with spiritual transcendence, served as a buffer against compassion fatigue factors such as burnout. Prayer fulfillment and Religiosity both served as protective shields for spiritual leaders against emotional exhaustion and promoted sustained well-being in their work. These results support the central thesis that spiritual practices achieved their protective potential when embedded within broader religious contexts rather than practiced in isolation.

7. Conclusions

The research presented in this chapter revealed a critical distinction between spiritual practices conducted in isolation versus those embedded within broader religious contexts. While prayer and connectedness represented essential components of spiritual transcendence, their protective effects against compassion fatigue among spiritual leaders depended significantly on their integration with religious frameworks that provided community support, theological grounding, and institutional anchoring. The finding that Prayer Fulfillment actually correlated positively with burnout when isolated from religious context challenged prevailing assumptions about individual spiritual practices.

This suggested that the communal dimensions of religion, including shared rituals, community support, and collective meaning-making, were not merely supplementary to spiritual practice but essential for its protective function. For spiritual leaders working in demanding helping professions, sustainable well-being required not just personal spiritual discipline but active participation in religious communities that could provide both horizontal support from peers and vertical support through transcendent connection.

These findings has important implications for training and supporting spiritual leaders with developing integrated approaches for well-being that combines personal prayer and connectedness with active engagement in religious communities. Additionally, religious institutions must recognize their crucial role in sustaining the well-being of their spiritual leaders through providing ongoing support, community, and institutional resources.

Future research should explore how different religious contexts and community structures influences the protective effects of spiritual practices and investigate interventions that could strengthen the integration between personal spirituality and religious community engagement. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing more effective approaches to preventing compassion fatigue and promoting sustained well-being among those called to serve others through spiritual leadership.

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