



## **COLLECTIVE EMPATHY FATIGUE GOVERNANCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE CARE WORKFORCES AND SYSTEMS**

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### **Abstract**

This article offers a normative account of empathy fatigue management among healthcare staff and social workers within public service organizations. It argues that empathy fatigue should be treated as a collective and structural condition shaped by work design, moral exposure, supervision quality, and procedural fairness, rather than a private weakness. The discussion frames empathy as a professional capacity with predictable depletion and recovery rhythms. A systematic framework is proposed with four pillars: recognition of emotional labor as legitimate workload, work rhythms that embed recovery time, structured supervision and peer support that maintain ethical communication, and fair procedures for complaints, safety protection, and performance evaluation. The paper emphasizes that leaders must provide clear reasons for policy shifts, protect staff from aggression, and ensure safe avenues for clarification without stigma. Technology use and measurement systems are addressed as governance choices that can either erode trust through opaque control or sustain trust through transparent, limited, and accountable use. The central claim is that durable empathic service requires institutional responsibility for the conditions that make humane care possible.

**Keywords:** empathy fatigue, emotional labor, public service, supervision, procedural justice, psychological safety, care work.

## Introduction

Public service organizations dealing with human suffering rely on the empathic capacity of their service providers. Health workers and social workers are faced with repeated encounters with pain, loss, poverty, violence, and decisions that carry moral consequences. Grant and Kinman (2014) emphasize that the ability to manage these emotional demands is a core competence in the helping professions, yet it is often overlooked in formal training. At the level of work experience, empathy becomes a bridge that allows assistance to take place humanely, as it transforms procedures into genuine concern for others. However, empathy also has a psychological cost when it is continuously demanded without space for recovery. Often, an employee's success in working is indeed strongly influenced by the atmosphere at the workplace as well as the individual's ability to develop (Arifin & Mardikaningsih, 2021). In daily practice, these demands can manifest through tight schedules, limited time to listen, and expectations for service providers to always remain emotionally stable. When emotional capacity is used continuously, symptoms of exhaustion emerge that affect how one views clients, interacts with colleagues, and assesses oneself. This exhaustion is often discussed as a personal problem, even though it is formed through work patterns, organizational norms, and the way institutions define professionalism. This shows that how the work environment regulates work-life balance and office rules greatly determines the comfort of its workers (Eddine & Darmawan, 2022). Therefore, the management of empathy fatigue needs to be understood as an organizational matter, not merely a matter of individual resilience.

In the service space, empathy is often positioned as a noble value that must be present in every interaction. This value forms a moral standard for service providers, such that a failure to show empathy easily triggers feelings of guilt. Guilt can drive excessive effort, namely continuing to provide emotional attention without acknowledging human limits. At the same time, organizations often evaluate performance through service speed, administrative accuracy, and procedural compliance. In fact, good work productivity actually also depends heavily on the level of stress felt and how supervision is carried out in the field (Darmawan, 2023). When assessments focus on

measurable outcomes, emotional labor becomes invisible and is not counted as part of the workload. Hojat et al. (2011) explain that without organizational recognition, emotional distancing becomes a logical consequence of excessive workload. This condition is exacerbated if the task burden is too heavy while the employee's social maturity is not yet fully ready (Putra et al., 2022). As a result, service providers carry two demands simultaneously: administrative demands and empathic demands. In field experience, these two demands are not always aligned, because time spent listening can collide with the pressure to clear the queue. This tension transforms empathy into a source of stress, as service providers feel they must choose between relationship quality and target compliance. It is here that empathy fatigue takes on a social form, because it arises from the structure of the work, not from a weakness of character. An adequate discussion needs to assess how organizations manage burden, time, and moral standards so that empathy remains possible to practice healthily.

Empathy fatigue can also be understood as a shift in how service providers perceive their relationship with service recipients. At a certain stage, service providers may feel numb, irritable, or tend to maintain emotional distance. Figley (2002) defines this condition as the "cost of caring" that can erode professional ability to provide effective empathy. Emotional distance often becomes a defense mechanism, because without that distance, the pain of others feels too close. Therefore, an employee's morale urgently requires mental support and a sense of pride in their profession to persist (Arini & Darmawan, 2021). However, if distance becomes a habit, the quality of service is at risk of declining, as service recipients may feel treated as cases rather than human beings. When the quality of the relationship weakens, communication conflicts increase, and service providers increasingly feel their work is never enough. This feeling of never being enough adds a moral burden that accelerates burnout. This situation proves that office culture and employee self-confidence play an important role in their work results (Hariani, 2021). At the organizational level, empathy fatigue can spread through the atmosphere of the work unit, for example, through cynical language, demeaning humor, or the habit of blaming clients. Such an atmosphere is often considered a "tough" work culture, when in fact it

can be a sign of collective exhaustion. If the organization ignores these signs, it nurtures an environment that causes new staff to quickly mimic emotional distancing as a norm. Thus, empathy fatigue has a social dimension that requires an interpretation of work culture, not just individual mental conditions.

The phenomenon of empathy fatigue in public services is also related to the legitimacy of the institution in the eyes of the public. The public tends to judge public services by the way officers interact, not just by clinical or administrative results. Halbesleben and Rathert (2008) found a strong correlation that emotional exhaustion in staff directly lowers patient perceptions of care quality and service safety. When officers appear cold, rushed, or defensive, public trust declines. Additionally, it is important for the community to have legal awareness and a willingness to cooperate for the smooth implementation of rules in the field (Rojak, 2022). A decline in trust drives more complaints, more conflict, and more demands for verification, which ultimately adds to the emotional burden of the officers. This cycle demonstrates that empathy fatigue can become a governance problem, as it affects the quality of the relationship between the institution and the citizens. Furthermore, health and social services often face dilemmas between individual service and systemic interests, such as limited resources or priority rules. Such dilemmas place officers in a difficult moral position, as they see real human needs but must work within policy limits. If moral dilemmas persist without space for discussion, officers may experience moral fatigue that is intertwined with empathy fatigue. Therefore, organizations need to see that maintaining empathy is not romanticization, but rather a prerequisite for fair and civilized service.

In public service organizations, empathy fatigue is often treated as a personal welfare issue left to resilience training or voluntary counseling. This approach is useful, but it risks placing the primary burden on the individual. If individuals are asked to adjust to structural burdens, then the solution becomes unbalanced. Maslach and Leiter (2016) argue that focusing on individual resilience without improving the work environment can actually exacerbate employee cynicism toward management. Service providers may feel like a failure when they remain exhausted despite practicing self-management techniques. This feeling of

failure worsens the situation, as it adds layers of guilt and shame. This condition of excessive fatigue and accumulated stress often causes a person's job satisfaction to decline drastically (Mardikaningsih & Sinambela, 2022). At the same time, organizations often lack an operational language to discuss empathy as a work resource that needs to be managed just like time and energy. Empathy is treated as a trait, rather than a capacity that requires workload regulation and recovery. Consequently, scheduling policies, case ratios, and service designs are rarely evaluated from the perspective of emotional burden. In practice, the emotional burden is also influenced by the quality of supervision, peer support, and the psychological safety to share difficult experiences. Therefore, every worker needs to continuously hone their self-abilities and receive good supervision to remain able to work professionally (Sinambela et al., 2020). If psychological safety is low, officers will bottle up their feelings, and exhaustion becomes silent yet heavy. Hence, the topic of empathy fatigue management requires a shift in focus from the individual toward the organization.

The description of the problems in this topic centers on the lack of a strong systematic framework to manage empathy fatigue as a collective and structural symptom. Many approaches still place fatigue as a result of a lack of emotional regulation skills or a lack of personal resilience. Rauvola et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of organization-level interventions to mitigate the impact of secondary trauma on workers in the social service sector. Especially in this day and age, developments in technology and big data have brought many new things that change the way we live our social lives (Wahyudi et al., 2021). An individual perspective can overlook the fact that the organization determines the work rhythm, sets service standards, manages case distribution, and handles conflicts with service users. When the work rhythm repeats without pause, when heavy cases pile up in certain units, or when administrative demands continue to rise, empathic capacity is drained as a result of work design. In such situations, individual intervention can feel like a stopgap, because the source of fatigue remains operational. Furthermore, organizations often lack process indicators capable of capturing emotional burden, so managerial decisions do not include empathy variables as a consideration. This is actually closely related to

how an institution is managed transparently and accountably in order to survive (Rojak & Al Hakim, 2023). Without indicators, fatigue remains invisible until serious symptoms emerge, such as a decline in interaction quality, absenteeism, or internal conflict. However, this description does not stem from data, but rather from a normative assessment that organizations require governance that considers empathy as a professional resource that must be protected through rules, supervision, and service design.

The next problem description relates to the way organizations separate the issue of empathy from issues of ethics and procedural justice. Empathy fatigue often goes hand in hand with the experience of being treated unfairly, for example, when officers face aggressive complaints without protection, or when managerial decisions change without explanation. When officers feel unprotected, empathy becomes difficult to maintain because they focus on survival. Molnar et al. (2017) demonstrate that organizational justice is a significant predictor for the sustainability of job satisfaction when facing occupational trauma. In a diverse society, social conflicts indeed often occur and require clear rules so that everyone can remain harmonious (Sulistyo & Hartanto, 2023). Furthermore, hierarchical structures can result in field officers bearing the heaviest emotional burden, while decision-making spaces are located far from the point of service. This distance can create a sense of helplessness that accelerates exhaustion. At the level of work culture, there is a tendency to praise resilience as a professional norm, such that admitting exhaustion is considered a weakness. To overcome differences of opinion in diverse teams, appropriate communication methods are urgently needed so that problems do not escalate (Marsal & Darmawan, 2022). This norm inhibits organizational learning, because difficult experiences do not become material for procedural improvement. Empathy fatigue then spreads as a collective silence. These issues demonstrate the need for a framework that links empathy management with procedural justice, occupational safety, and leadership legitimacy. Without this link, organizations will continue to cycle through individual training, while the structures that drain empathy remain unchanged.

Health workers and social workers perform tasks that combine technical competence with heavy emotional labor. When emotional labor is not managed, the resulting risk is not just personal exhaustion, but a decline in relationship quality, a decrease in public trust, and a weakening of service ethics. Saban et al. (2022) in their recent research emphasize that the integration of social support in the workplace is the primary key to preventing compassion fatigue that leads to the resignation of professional staff. This writing is necessary to clarify that the management of empathy fatigue must encompass work design, supervision, communication culture, and protection for officers when facing difficult situations. A systematic framework is also needed so that organizations can distinguish between individual recovery needs and structural improvement needs, ensuring that interventions are not misplaced. Thus, the urgency of this normative study lies in the effort to construct an academic language that can be used to assess internal policies, develop support standards, and build leadership accountability in maintaining empathy as a prerequisite for civilized service.

The problem formulation in this writing is as follows. How do public service organizations formulate a systematic framework for empathy fatigue management among health workers and social workers as a collective and structural phenomenon, through work design, supervision, organizational culture, and procedural justice, so that empathy can be maintained as a sustainable professional capacity? This question centers on organizational mechanisms, not merely on personal abilities. The focus of the question directs the discussion toward how organizations measure and acknowledge emotional burden, how organizations regulate case distribution and work rhythm, and how organizations provide professionally legitimate recovery spaces. This question also demands a discussion regarding the relationship between leadership, psychological safety protection, and the quality of interaction with service recipients. Accordingly, the problem formulation is aimed at producing a normative framework that is ethically and managerially accountable within the public service work environment.

The purpose of this writing is to develop a normative conceptual framework regarding empathy fatigue management for health workers and social workers within public service organizations. The description

aims to explain how empathy fatigue can be understood as a collective phenomenon shaped by work design, supervisory systems, communication culture, and procedural justice. This writing also aims to formulate normative measures for the recognition of emotional burden, the protection of psychological safety, and the transparency of managerial decisions that influence empathy. Theoretically, this framework clarifies the relationship between emotional labor and organizational governance. Practically, this framework provides a reference for formulating support policies, practice-based training, and service evaluations that respect the dignity of both the providers and the service recipients.

## Method

This study utilizes a qualitative literature review to construct a conceptual synthesis regarding the management of compassion fatigue among healthcare professionals and social workers as an organizational issue within public services. The exploration of ideas is directed toward the themes of emotional labor, professional supervision, organizational culture, psychological safety, and procedural justice in service delivery. Babbie and Edgerton (2023) emphasize the importance of precision in constructing arguments from written sources, including the discipline to distinguish between conceptual claims, normative assumptions, and policy implications. Lune and Berg (2017) highlight that a qualitative approach aids in understanding social meanings and processes; thus, the synthesis is structured to capture how compassion fatigue is formed through organizational rules and habits. In this manner, reading materials were selected based on their capacity to explain the relationship between work design and collective emotional experiences, rather than for providing figures or measurements.

The processing of materials was conducted through iterative reading, notation of key concepts, and the categorization of themes that form the argumentative flow. Lampard and Pole (2015) stress the importance of orderly social inquiry procedures, including methods for assessing source relevance and synthesizing conceptual findings into a coherent explanation. Shipman (2014) underscores the limitations of social research and the need for caution regarding generalizations; consequently, the synthesis in this study refrains from personal labeling

and focuses instead on organizational mechanisms. The themes developed include the recognition of emotional burden, case distribution design, ethics of complaint handling, peer support, and leadership legitimacy. These themes were then compared to formulate interrelated normative propositions capable of addressing the research problem with focus.

The reliability of reasoning is maintained through the orderly definition of terms and the consistent use of concepts throughout the manuscript. De Vaus and De Vaus (2013) emphasize the accuracy of definitions and discipline in social research design, even though their work is rooted in the survey tradition. The principle of definitional order is employed to maintain consistency in terms such as compassion fatigue, emotional labor, psychological safety, supervision, and procedural justice. Finally, the synthesis is organized as a framework linking work design, supervisory processes, organizational culture, and managerial decision-making structures, ensuring the discussion does not fragment into isolated recommendations that are difficult to implement. This study does not present field data nor conduct interviews; therefore, all arguments are built through structured conceptual reasoning derived from relevant written sources.

## Result and Discussion

Empathy fatigue management is a systematic approach to managing the psychological condition of individuals, especially in professions that demand high emotional involvement such as health workers, educators, social workers, counselors, and public service workers to prevent a decline in empathic capacity due to repeated exposure to suffering, emotional pressure, or the intensive and sustained needs of others. Ludick and Figley (2017) emphasize that without proper management, chronic exposure to the trauma of others can cause a profound cognitive shift in the worker's worldview. Empathy fatigue arises when the ability to understand and feel the condition of others is no longer balanced by adequate psychological recovery mechanisms, leading individuals to experience emotional exhaustion, decreased interpersonal sensitivity, depersonalization, and reduced professional satisfaction. Work experience, good supervision, and opportunities for

career development greatly help workers feel more satisfied with what they do (Sinambela et al., 2023). Therefore, empathy fatigue management is not only understood as an effort to reduce work stress, but as an organizational and personal strategy to maintain the sustainability of healthy empathy through emotional regulation, clear professional boundaries, organizational social support, and the creation of a work environment that pays attention to the mental well-being and psychological resilience of workers.

Measurement indicators for empathy fatigue management can be seen from the level of an individual's emotional balance in facing relational job demands, the ability to maintain empathy without experiencing prolonged emotional exhaustion, and the presence of consistent self-reflection and self-care practices. Measurement also includes perceptions of organizational support toward mental health, the quality of supervision and interpersonal communication in the workplace, and the individual's ability to maintain a healthy separation between professional experiences and private life. Support from family is also very important so that workers can have a good balance between office matters and home matters (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2023). Stamm (2010) provides a framework through the Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) which distinguishes between compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue as vital indicators of work effectiveness. Furthermore, other indicators are visible in the stability of work motivation, low symptoms of burnout, sustainability of job satisfaction, and the ability to consistently maintain the quality of interpersonal service. All forms of mental support and social relationships in the work environment are proven to be closely related to the stress levels experienced by employees (Issalillah et al., 2021). Evaluation of these indicators shows the effectiveness of the management system in protecting the workforce from the erosion of empathy while ensuring that empathy remains a source of professional strength, rather than a source of psychological exhaustion.

Empathy fatigue management needs to begin by positioning empathy as a work capacity that has a rhythm of use and a rhythm of recovery. In public service organizations, empathy is often understood as a personal trait inherent to the profession, leading to the assumption that

it is always available. This assumption ignores the reality that empathy is used in interactions filled with pressure, often repetitive, and frequently occurring when resources are limited. A systematic normative framework demands recognition that empathy is a legitimate part of the workload. Choi (2017) argues that when empathy is not recognized as formal "emotional labor," organizations fail to allocate the recovery resources necessary to prevent burnout. In this regard, the quality of service provided to the community must continue to be prioritized so that service users feel satisfied and valued (Darmawan et al., 2022). This recognition changes how organizations view schedules, case ratios, and service standards. If empathy is considered a burden, then work design needs to incorporate breaks and rotations as part of quality. If empathy is considered a trait, the organization will judge fatigue as an individual failure. This shift in perspective is crucial because it determines whether the organization builds support or builds stigma. Leaders capable of bringing positive change are greatly needed to transform values within an organization (Rojak et al., 2022). In health and social services, the stigma toward fatigue can lead staff to suppress difficult experiences and choose emotional distance as a defense. Unmanaged emotional distancing can turn service into something mechanical. Therefore, a systematic framework must organize empathy as an organizational resource that requires governance.

The collective dimension of empathy fatigue can be read from how the atmosphere of a work unit is formed through language, habits, and silent norms. When the emotional burden is high, work groups often create collective defense mechanisms, such as cynical humor, jokes about clients, or language that reduces service recipients to labels. These mechanisms may function as temporary protection, but they can also become destructive habits. Slocum-Gori et al. (2013) underline that an emotionally supportive organizational culture is the strongest predictor in mitigating empathy fatigue compared to individual characteristics alone. Respecting differences and creating an open environment for everyone is essential to maintaining order in today's workplace (Irfan & Hariani, 2023). Within a normative framework, organizations need to understand that the culture of language is an indicator of collective emotional health. If an organization only assesses quality based on

procedural compliance, changes in language go unnoticed. Yet, language determines how staff treat the human beings in front of them. Systematic management needs to position communication culture as part of quality control, though supervision here is not for punishment, but to recognize signals of exhaustion. In short, good cooperation and mutual respect will make public services run much more optimally. Thus, a collective framework demands policies that protect safe spaces for conversation among colleagues, so that heavy experiences can be shared without fear of blame. Safe spaces also prevent the normalization of cynicism. When cynicism is normalized, empathy diminishes as a habit, and service quality declines slowly but extensively.

The structural dimension of empathy fatigue is visible in work designs that place staff in intense encounters with suffering without adequate control over time and decisions. In many service organizations, field staff bear the greatest emotional burden but have the least autonomy over rules. When autonomy is low, the sense of helplessness increases. Helplessness accelerates fatigue because staff feel they are merely conduits for anger and unmet needs. Karasek (1979) shows that the combination of high job demands with low job control significantly increases the risk of psychological stress and emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, it is important for leaders to demonstrate a leadership style that truly focuses on the interests of the broader community to maintain a positive work atmosphere (Rojak, 2021). The normative framework must link empathy management with the structure of authority, as empathy is difficult to nurture if staff are always in a defensive position. Additionally, performance measurement structures that focus on quantity can narrow the space for listening. Listening is the core of social work and humane clinical care. If listening is always considered a waste of time, staff will work against their own professional values. Especially in this modern era, the combination of great employee capabilities and the use of technology is highly needed to ensure public satisfaction (Darmawan et al., 2023). Working against professional values triggers moral tension. Moral tension is intertwined with empathy fatigue. Therefore, a systematic framework needs to change quality metrics to include the quality of interaction, clarity of

communication, and the psychological safety of the staff. A change in metrics is a change in structure, not just a change in attitude.

Empathy fatigue needs to be distinguished from physical fatigue, although the two often reinforce each other. Empathy fatigue is related to the depletion of the capacity to respond to others' suffering with stable attention. When this capacity wanes, officers may experience changes in perception, such as viewing requests for help as disruptions or perceiving complaints as attacks. This shift in perception often occurs without malice; it is the result of accumulated exposure and a lack of recovery. Within a normative framework, this distinction is crucial so that organizations do not assume that ordinary rest is always sufficient. Neff (2011) emphasizes that functional recovery requires the development of self-compassion supported by the environment to reduce the negative impact of constant empathic exposure. Fundamentally, everyone has an equal right to receive proper attention and healthcare services without discrimination (Noor et al., 2023). Empathy recovery requires the processing of experiences, relational support, and a sense of security that the organization acknowledges the burden being carried. If recovery is only understood as taking leave, while returning to work means returning to the same burden, then recovery becomes merely temporary. Therefore, innovation in managing services is essential to maintain high-quality work (Putra et al., 2023). A systematic framework needs to organize recovery as a repetitive process embedded within the work rhythm. This recovery includes micro-breaks within shifts, rotation of task types, and supervision spaces that are more than just administrative. Thus, mature empathy management demands that organizations consider the design of time as a part of service ethics.

Professional supervision is a core component of a systematic framework because it provides a reflection space that is organizationally legitimate. Without supervision, officers process heavy experiences alone or through informal conversations that are not always safe. Good supervision allows officers to name emotions, assess boundaries, and formulate ethical actions in difficult situations. Within a normative framework, supervision must not be narrowed down to compliance inspection. If supervision becomes an inspection, officers will hide weaknesses and lose learning opportunities. Supervision needs to blend

accountability and support. Rankine (2017) argues that effective supervision must be able to facilitate "emotional literacy" so that practitioners can navigate the complexities of professional relationships without losing self-integrity. Mental safety and the way someone faces problems in a social environment also greatly influence their morale in working (Pakpahan et al., 2022). Accountability means standards are maintained; support means the correction process is carried out without shaming. Furthermore, supervision must link the officer's experience with procedural changes. If supervision only becomes a space for venting, the organization loses the opportunity to improve work design. A systematic framework demands a pathway from supervision to organizational learning, such as revising service flows, case distributions, or public communication. Through such pathways, officers see that speaking up leads to improvement, thereby increasing psychological safety. Psychological safety halts the spread of cynicism and keeps empathy possible.

Empathy fatigue management also demands fair and transparent case distribution policies. In social and health services, there are cases that require high emotional involvement, and there are those that are more routine. If heavy cases are continuously concentrated on specific individuals, the organization creates an unfair burden. This inequity in burden accelerates fatigue and triggers internal conflict. A normative framework demands that case distribution considers the level of emotional intensity, not just the number of cases. Eriksson et al. (2013) underline that the accumulation of traumatic cases that are not well-distributed contributes directly to the development of secondary trauma among professional workers. Understanding the cultural background of every person also greatly helps us to live harmoniously and respect one another (Oluwatosin & Rojak, 2023). This consideration can be manifested through agreed-upon internal classifications, accompanied by clear rotation procedures. Rotation is neither a punishment nor an avoidance; rather, it is the management of empathic resources to remain sustainable. Furthermore, case distribution must consider experiential capacity. New staff often lack the professional mechanisms to process heavy experiences, thus they require closer mentoring. If an organization assigns heavy cases to new staff without mentoring, the organization

creates a risk of premature burnout. A systematic framework needs to view case distribution as an ethical decision that affects the dignity of the staff and the quality of service. Thus, case distribution policy is a part of governance, not merely a matter of logistics.

Procedural justice within an organization is the foundation of empathy management because it influences the sense of being protected. Staff who feel they are treated fairly will be more capable of giving empathy, as their mental energy is not exhausted by dealing with uncertainty and favoritism. Procedural justice is visible in how the organization explains schedule changes, how the organization evaluates performance, and how the organization handles complaints against staff. If public complaints are always accepted without investigation and the staff is always presumed guilty, the staff will work in a state of feeling threatened. Feeling threatened reduces empathy and increases defensive reactions. A normative framework demands balanced complaint procedures, namely protecting citizens while also protecting the staff. Balanced procedures include objective investigation, clear communication, and opportunities for staff to provide explanations. Colquitt et al. (2001) in their meta-analysis show that procedural justice is crucial in building organizational trust and reducing withdrawal behavior among employees. Additionally, organizational decisions must be explainable with reasonable justifications. Decisions without reasons trigger rumors and cynicism. Cynicism reinforces collective exhaustion. Thus, empathy fatigue management must include the reform of decision-making processes, because empathy does not survive in an environment of injustice. Empathy requires the security of knowing that the organization stands behind its workers when they work in good faith.

Psychological safety is a prerequisite for maintaining empathy, as empathy requires managed vulnerability. Staff who constantly feel monitored and blamed will close themselves off, and this withdrawal reduces the quality of interaction. A normative framework views psychological safety as the result of respectful team norms and consistent leadership. Respectful team norms are visible in the way colleagues respond to mistakes, how they respond to complaints, and how they acknowledge burdens. If a team mocks weakness, psychological safety collapses. Consistent leadership enforces boundaries against humiliation

and upholds the habit of reflection. The habit of reflection can take the form of brief meetings after heavy cases, or discussion spaces focused on lessons rather than scapegoats. Furthermore, psychological safety demands that speaking about exhaustion does not jeopardize one's career. If speaking up is considered a sign of incompetence, staff will remain silent, and the organization loses its risk signals. A systematic framework needs to organize confidentiality policies, support referrals, and protection from retaliation within internal channels. Thus, psychological safety is a governance tool that maintains empathy as a professional habit (Edmondson, 1999).

Empathy fatigue is often accelerated by value conflicts between professional goals and organizational demands. Health workers and social workers often bring a commitment to help, yet organizations may demand efficiencies that cut into relational space. When staff must choose between meeting targets and meeting human needs, they experience moral tension. Moral tension can give rise to guilt, anger, and despair. Within a normative framework, moral tension must be read as a signal of a work design that needs improvement. A systematic framework demands spaces for ethical deliberation spaces to discuss dilemmas openly and formulate consistent guidelines. Ethical deliberation spaces help staff understand that dilemmas are not personal failures, but part of complex work. Consistent guidelines help prevent double standards between units. Double standards trigger a sense of injustice. Moreover, ethical deliberation needs to be connected to policy. If deliberation does not change the rules, staff will perceive that the organization listens only to pacify, not to improve. Thus, empathy fatigue management must incorporate operational organizational ethics tools, so that moral burdens do not accumulate into collective exhaustion (Lütznén et al., 2003).

The role of peers in maintaining empathy is an important social mechanism, but it requires regulation so as not to turn into an additional burden. Peer support often occurs spontaneously through storytelling and mutual encouragement. Within a normative framework, this support needs to be facilitated as a professional practice, not as an activity performed during already narrow intervals. If support always occurs after working hours, what forms is a new, exhausting sacrifice. A systematic

framework demands schedules that provide support spaces as part of working hours. Furthermore, peer support requires guidance to avoid falling into gossip, cynicism, or venting that demeans service recipients. Healthy support emphasizes emotional processing, action learning, and the restoration of a sense of meaning. Meaning is crucial because empathy fatigue is often linked to the loss of the feeling that work produces good. Organizations can strengthen peer support through the training of internal facilitators who understand boundaries, maintain confidentiality, and close meetings with action plans. Thus, peer support becomes part of a collective framework that maintains empathy without producing an unproductive culture of complaining (Hu et al., 2012).

Training to manage empathy fatigue needs to be positioned as organizational training, not merely individual skills training. Individual training such as breathing techniques or mindfulness can be useful, but it is inadequate if the work design remains draining. Within a normative framework, training must include organizational literacy regarding emotional labor, namely the ability to recognize collective signs, recognize burden patterns, and recognize language that signals the blunting of empathy. Training must also reach managers, as managers regulate rhythm, set priorities, and determine whether staff feel heard. If managers are not trained, staff training will lose structural support. Additionally, training needs to emphasize communication skills with angry or desperate service recipients, as difficult interactions are a primary source of exhaustion. Communication skills help staff maintain boundaries without losing respect. A systematic framework demands that training be followed by procedural changes, such as security escalation procedures, task distribution procedures during crises, and debriefing procedures. Thus, training becomes a bridge between personal capacity and systemic improvement, rather than a symbolic activity (Westermann et al., 2014).

The use of technology in public service can lighten administrative burdens, but it can also increase emotional burdens through documentation and monitoring demands. When digital systems require repetitive input, the time for human interaction decreases. Reduced interaction time can trigger guilt, as staff feel they have failed to provide attention. Within a normative framework, technology design must be

considered as part of empathy management. This is particularly important in preparing human resources ready to face the digital work world of the future (Gani & Darmawan, 2023). Good technology reduces repetitive work, provides clear flows, and does not turn staff into data operators. Furthermore, technology is often used to monitor performance through artificial intelligence, which, if not handled carefully, can lead to injustice in work systems (Mardikaningsih & Oluwatoyin, 2023). In fact, the way we manage people within organizations is now beginning to change alongside the presence of increasingly sophisticated artificial intelligence technology (Darmawan, 2022). Excessive monitoring lowers the sense of being trusted. A lack of trust erodes motivation and accelerates exhaustion.

Apart from technological issues, other challenges such as differences in political and religious views within society also often become an additional burden in maintaining unity (Fariz, 2021). A systematic framework demands the principle of justice in data usage, namely clear objectives, usage limitations, and opportunities for clarification. When indicators do not match the reality in the field, officers must have the space to explain. Without the space to explain, indicators become a source of injustice. This issue of injustice is also frequently felt by workers in cities whose positions are less powerful and who lack certainty in government regulations (Mahmudah, 2022). Thus, technology governance needs to be aligned with empathy governance, because empathy lives in a workspace that provides trust and allows time for meaningful interaction (Arnetz & Zhdanova, 2015). In short, technology should help us become more humane, rather than making us feel distant from one another.

Empathy fatigue management requires process indicators that allow the organization to read risks before they turn into a crisis. Process indicators are not incident numbers, but operational signs that managers can observe, such as increasing internal conflict, rising cynical language, or declining attendance in supervision. Within a normative framework, process indicators help the organization shift its culture from reactive to preventive. A preventive culture views fatigue as a signal that the work arrangement needs adjustment. However, process indicators must be used ethically. If indicators are used to blame

individuals, they become tools of control. Control increases fear. Fear suppresses information. Therefore, a systematic framework demands that indicators be used for unit improvement, not for the stigmatization of individuals. Additionally, indicators need to be followed by action protocols, such as rescheduling, adding support, or task rotation. Without protocols, indicators only produce reports. Reports without action reinforce cynicism. Thus, process indicators are devices that bridge knowledge and decision-making. They make the emotional burden managerially visible and facilitate the organization to act with responsibility (Leiter & Maslach, 2003).

The daily work rhythm has a major influence on the maintenance of empathy. In health and social services, the rhythm is often filled with interruptions, changing priorities, and emergency situations. A chaotic rhythm makes it difficult for officers to process experiences. Without processing, experiences accumulate as a burden. A normative framework demands a rhythm design that incorporates micro-breaks, such as transition gaps between cases or documentation breaks that are separate from client interaction. Micro-breaks help officers regulate emotions and return to being fully present. Furthermore, a systematic framework demands the organization of meetings so that they do not add to the burden. Long, unfocused meetings drain energy and increase cynicism. Good meetings center on coordination, learning, and support. In high-load units, brief structured meetings are often more useful than long meetings. The normative framework also demands shift arrangements that pay attention to recovery. Recovery is not just sleep, but also social recovery time for family and community. If shifts always sacrifice social recovery, officers lose their source of meaning. A loss of meaning accelerates empathy fatigue. Thus, work rhythm is an ethical policy (Sonnetag et al., 2010).

A systematic framework needs to include protections for physical and emotional safety when staff encounter aggression. Aggression can take the form of threats, harsh words, or intimidation. If an organization regards aggression as a normal part of service, staff will feel abandoned. This sense of abandonment shuts down empathy and increases emotional distance as a defense. Within a normative framework, the organization is obligated to enforce boundaries against verbal and

physical violence while still allowing room for the expression of emotion from suffering citizens. Fair boundaries distinguish between emotion and violence. To achieve this, organizations require de-escalation protocols, security assistance lines, and post-incident support. Post-incident support is vital because incidents of aggression often leave behind fear and shame. Shame arises when staff feel they have failed to control the situation. A systematic framework demands a culture that does not blame the victim. Furthermore, organizations need to provide easy reporting mechanisms and clear follow-up. If reporting is difficult, incidents go unrecorded, and the organization fails to learn. Thus, protection from aggression is part of empathy management, because empathy requires a sense of security. Without security, service turns into self-defense (Edward et al., 2014).

Empathy fatigue among health workers and social workers is also influenced by policy uncertainty and frequent regulatory changes. Frequent changes without explanation make staff feel a loss of control. This loss of control exacerbates stress and reduces the space for empathy. Within a normative framework, policy changes must be accompanied by clear communication, understandable reasoning, and a space for Q&A. This Q&A space is important because staff need to translate rules into practice. If this translation is not supported, staff will improvise, and improvisation under pressure increases the risk of errors. Errors reinforce guilt. Guilt accelerates fatigue. A systematic framework demands predictable leadership. Predictable leadership does not mean being rigid, but rather being consistent in principles and honest about limits. Honesty about limits makes staff feel respected as professional adults. Additionally, organizations need to avoid communication that adds to the moral burden, such as blaming staff for systemic problems. Blaming staff makes empathy psychologically expensive. Thus, empathy management requires a policy communication system that preserves dignity and maintains a reasonable sense of control (Aiken et al., 2002).

The role of organizational ethics within a systematic framework is to affirm that empathy is a professional value that must be nurtured without sacrificing the worker. Organizational ethics are not slogans, but a set of decisions governing priorities, workload, and protection. Within a normative framework, organizations need to define realistic empathy standards. Realistic standards acknowledge that staff cannot always be

fully emotionally present in every interaction, especially in emergency situations. Milliken et al. (2007) argue that the failure of organizations to establish clear ethical boundaries often forces workers into moral compromises that lead to chronic fatigue. However, realistic standards still demand respect, clarity of communication, and a rejection of indignity. Organizational ethics also demand the recognition that staff have limits. Limits are not weaknesses, but a part of sustainability. To this end, organizations need to organize referral mechanisms, namely when staff should ask for help, when a case should be transferred, and when a break should be taken. Referral mechanisms protect staff from unnecessary guilt. Furthermore, organizational ethics demand the equalization of the moral burden. Moral burdens often fall on field staff, while systemic decisions are made at the top. A systematic framework needs to include staff participation in decisions that affect service. Participation increases legitimacy and reduces the sense of helplessness.

Empathy fatigue management as a collective framework also requires the formalization of emotional labor recognition. Many organizations reward output, while the work of listening and calming is taken for granted. Within a normative framework, the recognition of emotional labor is a matter of justice, as the organization benefits from healthy relationships. Recognition can take the form of assessments that include communication quality, peer support, and adherence to the ethics of respect. Hülshager and Schewe (2011) emphasize that acknowledging emotion regulation efforts significantly reduces the negative impact of emotional labor on workers' mental well-being. However, recognition must avoid the romanticization of sacrifice. If an organization praises excessive sacrifice, it reinforces a destructive work culture. A systematic framework demands recognition that encourages sustainability, such as valuing the ability to maintain healthy boundaries and the ability to ask for help. Furthermore, recognition must be accompanied by resources. Recognition without resources becomes a symbol that fuels cynicism. Thus, a systematic framework links recognition with improvements in work design, such as adjusting case ratios, adding administrative support, or scheduling supervision time. This connection affirms that emotional labor is not a private burden, but

a component of service quality. When emotional labor is recognized, staff feel their work is seen in its entirety, and their sense of meaning increases.

The structuring of career paths and professional development is also related to empathy management. If career paths only evaluate speed and volume, staff learn that empathy is not valued. If empathy is not valued, staff will reduce their emotional investment to survive. Within a normative framework, professional development needs to include relational skills, difficult communication skills, and ethical reflection skills as core competencies. Core competencies must be visible in promotions and assignments. Additionally, organizations need to provide specialization paths that do not force the most empathically gifted staff to become managers. Bakker and Demerouti (2007) explain that job resources, including relevant professional development opportunities, play a critical role as a buffer between high job demands and the risk of burnout. Many staff members possess strengths in interaction but do not wish to minimize their clinical role for the sake of administration. If the organization does not provide alternative paths, staff may lose motivation or leave. A systematic framework demands a diversity of career paths so that the organization retains its empathic capacity. Professional development also needs to include learning about boundaries and recovery, so that staff do not equate professionalism with self-effacement. Thus, empathy management links career systems with the ethics of sustainability. An organization that connects promotion with the habit of professional self-care will lower the stigma toward recovery and strengthen a healthy culture.

In public service, the relationship with top management influences empathy fatigue because top management determines priorities and resources. If top management emphasizes numbers without understanding the emotional burden, staff feel treated like machines. Treatment as a machine damages dignity and lowers commitment. Within a normative framework, top management needs to establish structured listening mechanisms, such as regular forums discussing workload and moral experiences. Listening forums must result in decisions, not just ceremonies. Furthermore, top management needs to uphold the principle that the quality of relationships is a part of service quality. This principle must be visible in time and staff allocation. A

systematic framework demands leadership that can explain compromises, such as when resources are limited. An honest explanation is better than an unfulfilled promise. Unfulfilled promises reinforce cynicism. Cynicism accelerates collective exhaustion. Thus, top leadership is a structural element in empathy management. It determines whether empathy is treated as a cost or as the core of the mission. Organizations that place empathy at the core will draft policies that protect the staff's capacity to be present humanely (Shanafelt et al., 2017).

Quality measurement systems in public service often assess procedural compliance and administrative outputs. A systematic framework for empathy fatigue management demands an expansion of measurements to include indicators of work experience quality and interaction quality. The quality of work experience encompasses psychological safety, access to supervision, and a sense of justice. The quality of interaction includes communication clarity and respect. Within a normative framework, including these indicators is not an effort to pamper staff, but rather an effort to maintain sustainable service quality. However, measurements must be organized so they do not add to the documentation burden. If measurement increases the burden, the goal of recovery fails. A systematic framework demands measurements that are light yet meaningful, as well as feedback mechanisms that provide rapid improvements to the unit. Furthermore, organizations need to arrange ways to discuss indicators without assigning blame. If indicators are used to shame a unit, that unit will hide problems. Hiding problems exacerbates risks. Thus, quality measurement needs to be integrated with a learning culture. A learning culture emphasizes improvement, not retaliation. In a learning culture, empathy fatigue can be read as a signal of work design that needs to be refined (Montgomery et al., 2013).

Empathy recovery is also related to the organization's ability to provide meaning to work through honest narratives. Honest narratives acknowledge difficulties, admit limitations, and remain firm in affirming the moral purpose of service. If an organization only conveys heroic narratives, exhausted staff will feel guilty for being unable to meet heroic standards. Heroic standards accelerate exhaustion. Within a normative framework, organizational narratives need to balance appreciation with realism. Realism helps staff accept that boundaries

are part of professionalism. Additionally, organizations need to provide meaning-recovery rituals, such as meetings that celebrate small successes, recognition of collaborative work, and reflections on cases that provide lessons. Rituals of meaning recovery reduce the sense of futility, which often arises when burdens are high and results feel invisible. A sense of futility lowers empathy. Thus, empathy management involves symbolic work that builds a sense of meaning, but symbolic work must be supported by structural actions. Structural actions provide evidence that the organization is not just talking. Evidence strengthens internal trust. Internal trust strengthens the ability to provide empathy to the public (Grant, 2012).

A systematic framework also needs to place professional boundaries as a tool for empathy protection. Many staff feel that empathy means being always available, always listening, and always giving. In fact, sustainable empathy requires boundaries, such as time limits, access limits, and role limits. Boundaries protect staff from draining involvement. Within a normative framework, organizations need to teach boundaries as a competence, not as a sign of coldness. Healthy boundaries allow staff to be present with quality, rather than being present through destructive sacrifice. Furthermore, organizations need to provide legitimacy for boundary-setting, such as procedures to refuse threatening interactions, procedures to transfer cases, and managerial support when staff enforce boundaries. Without legitimacy, staff will be afraid to enforce boundaries for fear of being judged as unempathetic. This fear leads staff to cross their own boundaries. Crossing one's own boundaries accelerates exhaustion. Thus, professional boundaries are a structural component that guards empathy. They bridge human values and the need for sustainability. A systematic framework demands that organizations build a culture that praises wise boundaries, not one that praises endless sacrifice (O'Connor & Leonard, 2014).

Empathy fatigue management as a collective framework requires consistency across units. If one unit has good supervision and another does not, injustice arises. This injustice lowers morale. A normative framework demands a minimum standard of support applicable to all service units, accompanied by flexibility according to the character of the work. Minimum standards may include the frequency of supervision,

access to psychological support, debriefing procedures after incidents, and case distribution rules. Flexibility is necessary because different units have different burden patterns. However, flexibility must not become an excuse for neglect. Furthermore, consistency requires a manager training system that is uniform in principle. Managers are the link between policy and experience. If managers act differently without reason, staff feel treated unfairly. A sense of unfairness accelerates exhaustion. Thus, a systematic framework demands a manager training system that emphasizes procedural justice, respectful communication, and the ability to recognize signals of collective exhaustion. Consistency also demands periodic evaluations of support policies. Periodic evaluation is a form of accountability. Accountability makes staff believe that the organization is serious. Trust helps maintain empathy (Pecino et al., 2019).

The relationship with service recipients needs to be understood as a two-way relationship influenced by how the organization manages access and expectations. When public expectations are not managed, staff face demands that exceed their capacity. Within a normative framework, organizations need to communicate service boundaries honestly and clearly, and provide alternative pathways when requests cannot be met. This clarity protects staff from anger arising from confusion. Confusion is often a source of conflict. Conflict drains empathy. Furthermore, the organization needs to arrange the service environment to reduce tension, for example, through transparent queuing systems, humane waiting rooms, and easily understood information. A calming environment reduces aggression. The reduction of aggression protects empathy. A systematic framework demands that empathy management is not restricted to staff areas but also encompasses service designs that influence public emotions. Thus, the organization manages empathy fatigue by managing the relationship with citizens through fair procedures and respectful communication. When citizens feel respected, conflict decreases. When conflict decreases, staff are better able to be empathetically present. These are interconnected social mechanisms (Zenasni et al., 2012).

In public service, ethics is not a theory, but a daily practice. When staff are exhausted, the risk of harsh language, neglect, or insensitive snap decisions increases. A normative framework demands that organizations

treat the maintenance of empathy as an institutional ethical obligation. This ethical obligation can be formulated as the organization's responsibility to provide conditions that enable staff to practice professional ethics. If the organization fails to provide these conditions, it shares responsibility for the degradation of service ethics. Therefore, the management of empathy fatigue is not an additional activity, but a part of quality governance and ethical governance. A systematic framework links the recognition of emotional burden, work design, supervision, peer support, and procedural justice into a single chain. This chain enables the organization to act on the root cause rather than the symptoms. Thus, the answer to the problem formulation lies in building a framework that views empathy as a shared resource that must be maintained through structures, culture, and explainable decisions. Such a framework fairly shifts the burden from the individual toward the organization (Hamric & Epstein, 2017).

Consequently, there are four mutually reinforcing pillars: the recognition of emotional burden as a workload, work design that provides a recovery rhythm, structured supervision and collective support, and procedural justice in decisions and protection. The recognition of emotional burden forces the organization to include empathy in staff planning, case distribution, and quality measurement. Work design that provides a recovery rhythm demands micro-breaks, task rotation, and humane shift arrangements. Supervision and collective support demand legitimate reflection spaces, post-incident debriefing, and peer facilitation that maintains linguistic ethics. Procedural justice demands balanced complaint channels, honest policy explanations, and protection for staff from aggression and retaliation. These four pillars form a systematic framework that views empathy fatigue as an organizational symptom, not as a personal disgrace. In this way, public service organizations can maintain empathy as a sustainable professional capacity and as a prerequisite for public trust.

## Conclusion

The management of compassion fatigue among healthcare professionals and social workers must be understood as organizational governance that recognizes empathy as a work capacity that can be depleted and requires

restoration. Compassion fatigue is not merely an individual problem; rather, it is a collective symptom shaped by work design, case distribution, service rhythms, communication culture, and procedural justice regarding protection and evaluation. The discussion positions professional supervision, psychological safety, and peer support as organizational instruments that safeguard the ability to be humanely present. Furthermore, the use of technology, quality measurement systems, and policy communication are understood as structural factors that can either strengthen or weaken empathy. The answer to the research problem is formulated through the pillars of recognizing emotional burden, designing recovery rhythms, structured collective support, and procedural justice that protects both staff and citizens. Thus, the proposed systematic framework reinforces the ethical obligation of institutions to provide working conditions that enable the fulfillment of professional ethics without demanding destructive sacrifice.

The implications and suggestions emphasize the need for public service organizations to build policies that transform daily work practices rather than merely adding welfare programs. Organizations are advised to integrate emotional burden into staffing planning, case distribution, and quality evaluation, ensuring empathy is recognized as a legitimate part of the work. Work schedules need to be arranged to provide transition breaks and recovery spaces, including task rotation for high-exposure units. Supervision should be strengthened as a space for reflection and learning, with clear pathways toward improving service procedures. Organizations also need to uphold procedural justice in handling complaints and incidents of aggression through balanced protocols, clear communication, and protection from stigma and retaliation. The use of data and indicators must be regulated to support unit learning rather than control that amplifies fear. These recommendations guide organizations to build a work culture that respects professional boundaries and preserves empathy as the foundation of dignified service.

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