



Stress and Compassion Fatigue in Veterinary Nurses in New Zealand

Laura Harvey* Dip. VN, BSc,
Rebecca Ladyman* BSc, BVSc
Arnja Dale# BSc, GDipHE, MSc, MSc (Hons), PhD

*Unitec Institute of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

#RNZSPCA, Auckland, New Zealand



Introduction

Work-related stress and compassion fatigue are widely acknowledged in animal-related professions¹,

There has been very little research focus on these issues for veterinary nurses.

We investigated the prevalence of stress and compassion fatigue in veterinary nurses in New Zealand.



Introduction

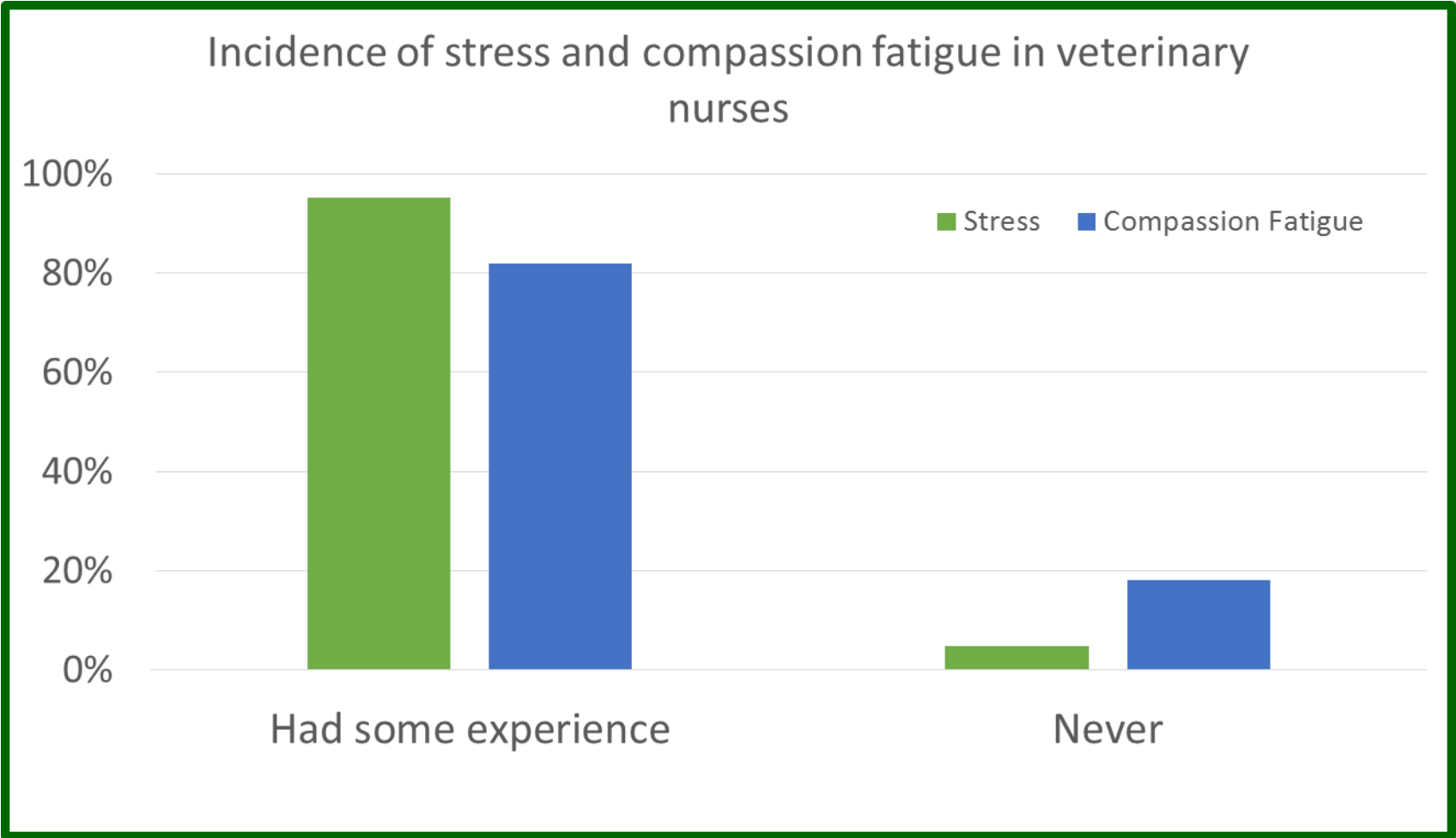
The survey defined compassion fatigue as:

‘emotional and physical exhaustion triggered by traumatic events, such as cruelty cases, major trauma events, or constant exposure to euthanasia’².



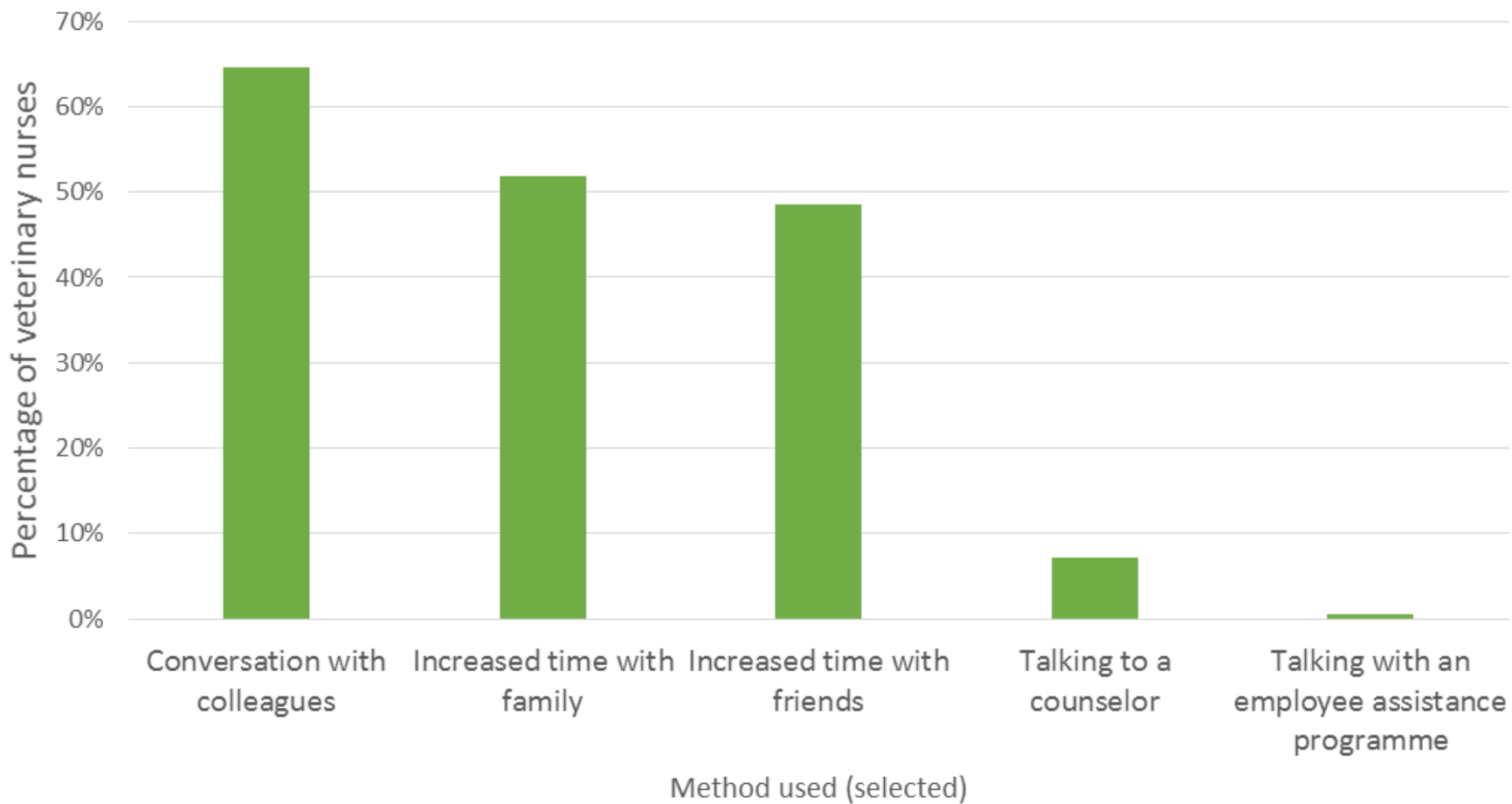
Methods

- Web-based questionnaire (SurveyMonkey)
- 288 responses (March 2015)
- Response rate: 19% of the New Zealand veterinary nursing population (n=288/1479)
- Distribution:
 - New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association members via email
 - New Zealand Veterinary Association e-newsletter
 - Social media (Facebook)

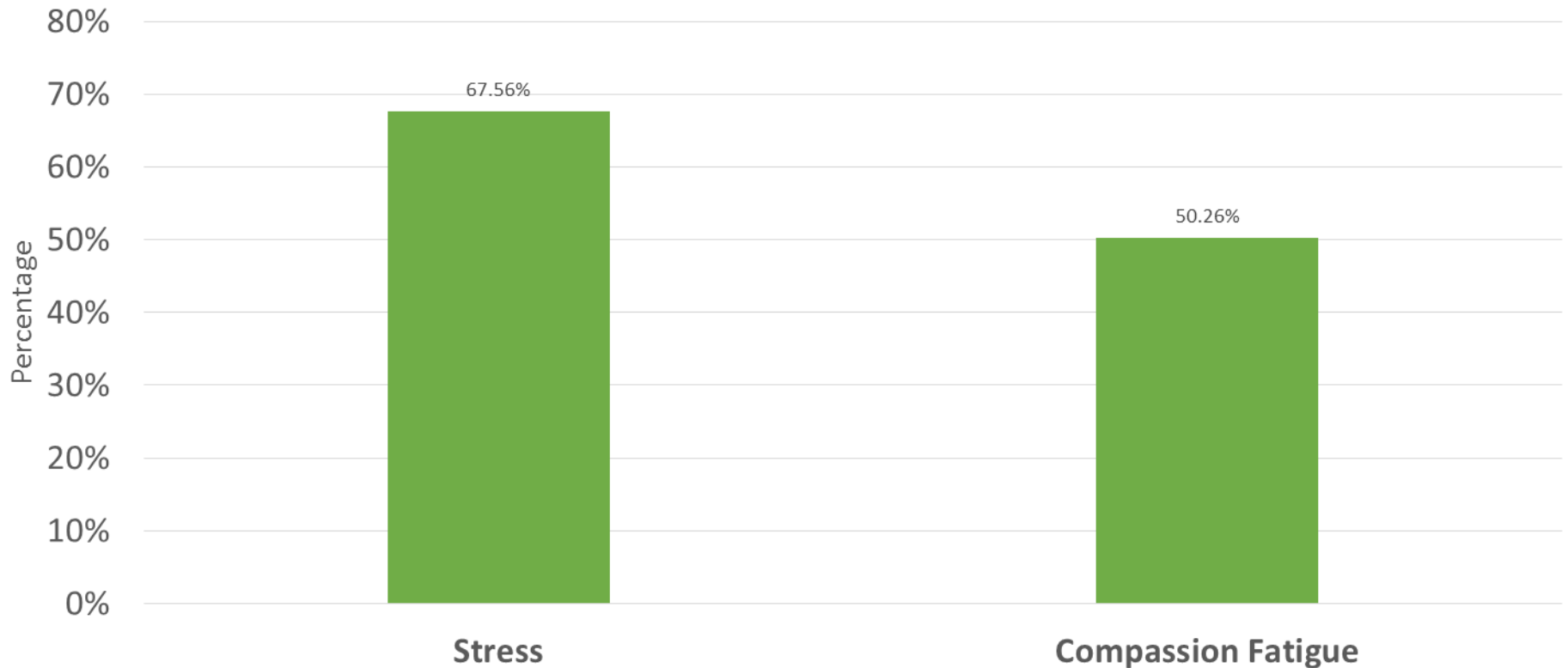


95% of veterinary nurses had some experience of stress as a result of their working environment
82% of veterinary nurses had some experience of compassion fatigue as a result of their working environment

Methods for dealing with stress or compassion fatigue



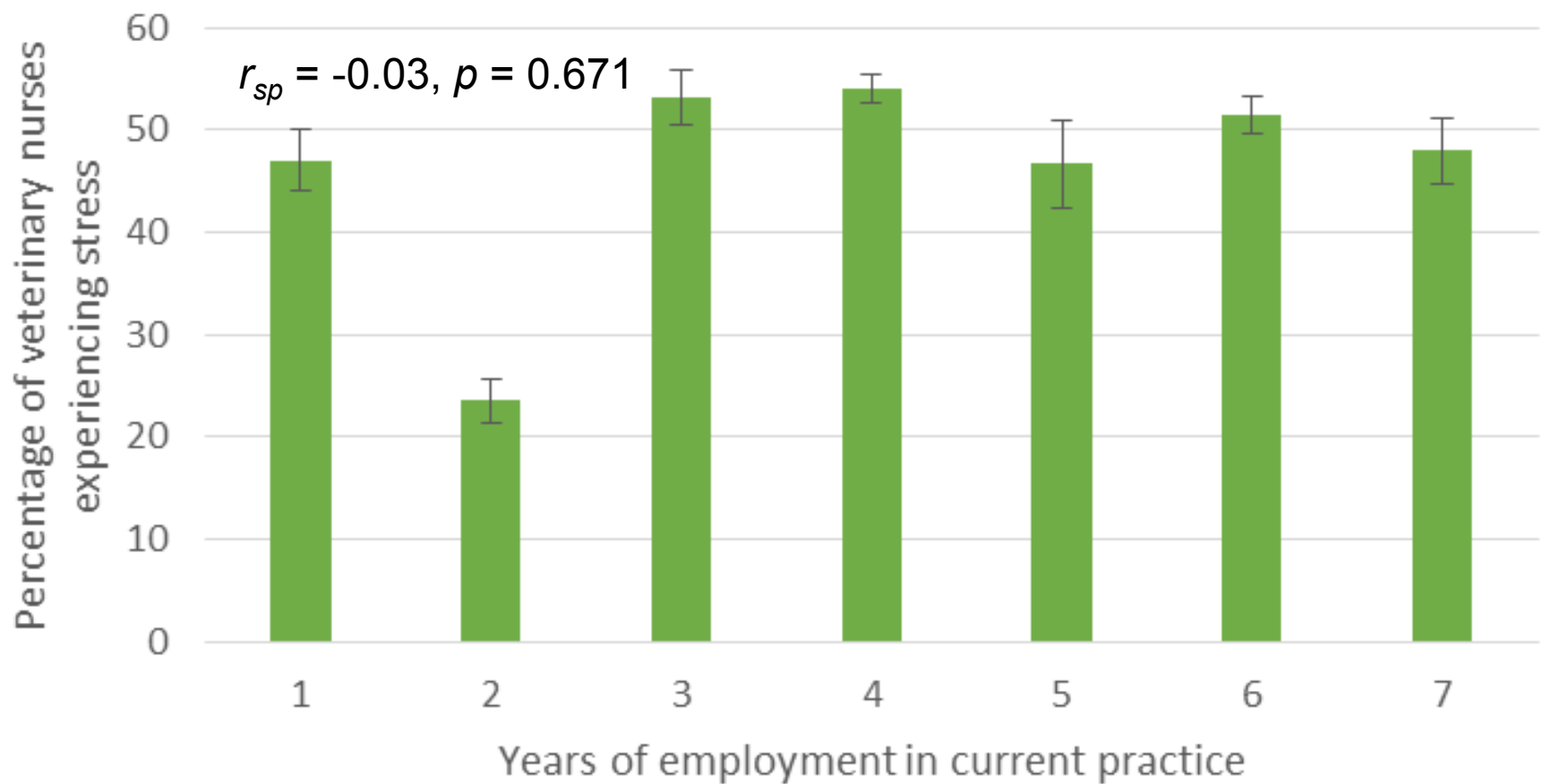
Percentage of veterinary nurses considering a different career path due to stress or compassion fatigue?



Incidence of compassion fatigue with length of employment



Incidence of stress with length of employment





Conclusions

- Veterinary nurses in New Zealand report a very high incidence of stress (94%) and compassion fatigue (82%)
- Only a very small minority sought professional help in relation to this.
- Correlation between stress and compassion fatigue
($r_{sp} = 0.67, p < 0.001$)



Future Research

- Risk factors present
- Severity of compassion fatigue in veterinary nurses using the widely recognised Professional Quality of Life (ProQol) measure for compassion fatigue
- Ways of reducing stress and compassion fatigue in veterinary nurses in New Zealand.
- Future study



References

1. Huggard, P. K., & Huggard, E. J. (2008). When the caring gets tough: Compassion fatigue and veterinary care. *VetScript, May, 14-16.*
2. Overfield, R. (2012). *Compassion fatigue and stress. Queensland, Australia: Crampton Consulting Group.*