

When the pandemic first hit and the lockdowns began, I remember hearing people say things such as, “it’s like the whole world froze” but for me, as a front-line worker, the world became louder and busier than ever. I noticed while driving to work that the roads that were once bustling, were now barren. Although I was one of few cars making my way to work, the overwhelming feeling of uncertainty, and fear consumed me. I would hear people say, “you’re a social worker, you went to school for this.” However, I have to argue that we never covered life or death pandemics in school. I felt like I was trying to dodge an invisible threat, a virus that couldn’t be seen, smelled, or heard. I work at a residential treatment center for children. When the pandemic came, the numbers of viral infections swelled, and I was faced with a moral dilemma. Do I continue to provide care for children who need mental health services or do I risk the health and wellbeing of my children, husband, and parents? Due to the duties of my job, financial obligations to my family, and the social work ethics I swore to abide by, I continued on serving children who had experienced extensive traumas. After working long hours and coming home, I was fearful of what I was bringing back to my children. I was scared to be near them, worried I would be the one to make them sick. My children cried as I left home. My husband, who was forced out of work due to the shutdown, relied on me to keep our family afloat, but it wasn’t enough. As a society we talked about experiencing a collective trauma, we were all in this pandemic together. However, for me on the front lines it felt very much the opposite, I felt alone. Looking at the eyes of my coworkers as we passed by each other in the halls, I could tell they felt the same. They felt abandoned. Some of the people I worked with decided the risk was too great and they could no longer work. I didn’t blame them, but that meant the rest of us would have to pick up the hours they used to fill. I work with children who have been victims of sexual, physical, and mental abuse. Some of the symptoms of their trauma result in us being physically assaulted. Our mental health is important so we can help them to the best of our ability. Mentally, we were all exhausted. We were forced to work long hours, without an end in sight. As the months progressed it was as if we were stuck in a loop of confusion, exhaustion, and uncertainty. I risked more than just my health, but my loved ones too and you never really adjust to that. I would like to say the fear subsided but as I persevered forward in my job, the toxic stress I experienced grew and grew. Each day I wore the weight of knowing that I could be the

one to bring the virus to the most loved people in my life, and as I said you can't mentally adjust to that.

Respectfully,

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