

Social Workers and Resilience Revisited

A Critical Review of the research, Stewart Collins (2017).

Concepts of Resilience

- Resilience often implies **positive characteristics** and the 'ability to cope with, adapt to and function under, adverse internal and external conditions of stress, conflict or uncertainty' (Klohn, 1996:1067)
- Resilience can have **reactive and proactive elements** through the learning of new knowledge and skills, as a result of negative events to cope with present and future situations, (Carver 1998) and use of assets to contribute to planning and prevention before events occur (Obrist, Pfeiffer & Henley, 2010).
- Definitions of resilience vary from being considered as a **fixed personality trait**, predicted by family and peer relations to a **changeable psychological state** that alters within different environments and circumstances.

Students, NQSW's & Experienced Workers

- Resilience in students can be associated with perceptions of competence in social situations and effective relationships, those with higher levels of resilience are skilful in expressing **emotion, reflexivity and empathy** (Kinman and Grant, 2011)
- For NQSW's, the research evidence identifies that **well planned induction programmes, reflective practice, professional role models, mutual support groups** and **having a realistic optimism** were key factors in developing and sustaining emotional resilience (Kearns & McArdle, 2012).
- Experienced social workers identify **high quality supervision** as central to resilient practice, including sufficient attention given to emotional support (Beddoe, Davys & Adamson, 2014).

Implications for Education & Practice

- Interventions to foster resilience need to occur at an early career stage, with more emphasis placed upon student's learning about their own emotions and feelings of others and **increased opportunities for reflection and intellectual reflexivity** on emotions (Kinman and Grant, 2011).
- Organisations have a role in maintaining and developing resilience amongst it's workforce ; social workers have identified that **communities of practice and group supervisions** provide effective support by learning with each other and sharing experiences.
- Social workers, and managers may benefit from workshops and training opportunities to refresh and update their understanding of resilience to meet their own needs and those of others.

TIME TO REFLECT

Applying research to practice

Time to Reflect

- Do you think resilience is fundamentally a personality trait that is 'fixed and stable' (Klohn, 2010 Kinman & Grant, 2011) **OR** a psychological state that is changeable according to the specific circumstances and environmental impact upon the individual (Rutter, 1999)?
- Have your levels of emotional resilience fluctuated during your social work career and can you identify what type of support/activities helped you to develop and maintain resilience?
- Is there anything you or your organisation could do differently to develop and maintain emotional resilience amongst social workers?

Messages from the research:

- Resilience is not a clear cut concept, as it is subject to different definitions. However there has been a move towards resilience as being a changeable psychological state which is influenced and underpinned by external environments/systems and internal resources.
- In the current climate of austerity, social workers have to cope with the added pressures of working with reduced resources, in addition to existing stress factors. Greater understanding of resilience and the development of a range of formal and informal provisions (good quality reflective supervision, peer support, workshops) within organisations will help to develop resilience amongst social workers.
- Supervision is vital in maintaining resilience, with particular attention given to the provision of emotional support and recognition of the impact of interactions between the individual, their team, manager and wider communities.
- Collins' critique of the literature highlights that resilience definitions are often based upon white, western populations with little attention to how age, ethnicity and gender contextualise and define resilience; and with much emphasis placed upon individual and organisational responsibilities to develop resilience, attention is then drawn away from the broader economic, social and political context.

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