

# Exploring Resilience in Social Work Trainees

<sup>[1]</sup>Ms. Divya J, <sup>[2]</sup> Dr. K. Sathyamurthi

<sup>[1]</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work

<sup>[2]</sup>Research Supervisor, Department of Social Work, Madras School of Social Work

**Abstract:** Social work students are at risk for burnout and stress due to the demanding nature of their education and the challenging populations they serve. Resilience is the ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, and it is essential for social work students to develop in order to succeed in their studies and future careers. Social work education often involves long hours of coursework and fieldwork. This paper through a descriptive research design discusses the resilience among social work students and the role of social work education in fostering the same. The under graduate trainees were chosen for the study and the data was collected using Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale. The scale comprises 25 items reflecting five general factors: personal competence, tolerance of negative affect, acceptance of change, control and spiritual influences. Psychology the individual difference factor was identified that have an effect on resilience is understood through examining their psychological needs satisfaction. Research revealed that social work students are resilient and they are able to cope with stress and adversity. There is a significant negative relationship found between resilience and psychological distress. The various interventions based on the findings to promote resilience among social work trainees is discussed in the paper.

**Keywords:** Resilience, Social Work, Education, Classroom, Stress, Burn out, Support Systems, Psychological Distress

## 1. Introduction

Resilience in social work trainees is an essential aspect of understanding and enhancing the capabilities of budding professionals in this field. Resilience, in the context of social work, refers to the ability to adapt, persevere, and maintain well-being despite facing adversity, trauma, or challenging circumstances. This quality is crucial for social work trainees as they navigate a complex and often emotionally demanding profession. Understanding how social work trainees develop and maintain resilience is not only vital for their personal well-being but also for their effectiveness in supporting and empowering individuals and communities facing various hardships. By examining the factors that contribute to the resilience of these trainees, such as personal traits, support systems, coping strategies, and training programs, we can better equip future social workers to thrive in their roles and sustain their passion for helping others.

This process of understanding delving into the experiences, challenges, and successes of social work trainees, identifying the mechanisms that enable them to bounce back from adversity, and recognizing the strategies that foster their growth and professional development. Through this inquiry, we can discover best practices, interventions, and training approaches that promote resilience in social work trainees, ultimately strengthening the entire social work profession.

**María de las Olas Palma-García and Isabel Hombrados-Mendieta** (2016) did a study on Resilience and Personality in Social Work Students and Social Workers provides valuable insights into the relationship between personality traits and the development of resilience within the context of social work. The research tracks changes in personality traits within social work students during their pursuit of a university degree and the subsequent professional phase. Throughout their academic tenure, students demonstrated an increase in traits such as openness, accountability, extraversion, and kindness. In contrast, there was a concurrent decrease in levels of neuroticism, a personality trait that exhibited lower prevalence in the professional stage. This transition in personality traits suggests a developmental pattern, indicating the evolution of traits deemed beneficial in the social work profession, such as increased accountability and reduced neuroticism.

**Ed Carson, Sue King, and Lisa H. Papatraianou** (2011) in their study on Resilience Among Social Workers: The Role of Informal Learning in the Workplace", sheds light on the crucial yet underexplored topic of resilience in the realm of social work. The authors address a gap in the existing social work literature by highlighting the dearth of comprehensive documentation regarding the mechanisms of resilience development.

They advocate for a paradigm shift, suggesting that understanding the creation of worker resilience can be achieved by recognizing the significance of practice wisdom and tacit knowledge cultivated within professional networks, both within and outside the organizational sphere. The authors advocate for recognizing the informal channels through which social workers gather and internalize crucial insights, contributing to their resilience in dealing with the myriad challenges they face.

Though there are conceptual variations, many of the studies bring various factors like personality, stress, psychological wellbeing, performance etc. Resilience plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals to effectively navigate and adapt to the intricacies and adversities inherent in their continually evolving work environments. The psychological needs of the individual and its satisfaction in relation to resilience is not much studied on. So, this paper aims to look through the Basic Psychological Needs Theory, a component of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan, that focuses on intrinsic motivation and highlights three fundamental inherent needs in human beings. These needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—are recognized as integral inner motivational resources. They significantly influence development, adaptation, and overall well-being across diverse cultures. Their implications span various motivational aspects, practical applications, and extend to broader social policies, making them crucial factors in understanding human motivation and behavior (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2017; Gillison et al., 2019).

## **2. Materials and methods**

The study employed a descriptive research design to investigate the understand the resilience of the social work trainees. The sampling method used was proportionate random sampling, ensuring a representative selection from the target population. Two primary tools were utilized: the Connor Davidson Scale and the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scale, enabling the assessment of resilience through the dimensions namely Personal competence, Tolerance to negative affect, Positive acceptance, Control and spiritual influence and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Additionally, qualitative insights were gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGD), offering a deeper understanding of subjective experiences. Data analysis was conducted using Jamovi software, employing various statistical tests such as correlation, chi-square, t-test, and ANOVA to examine relationships, differences, and group variations within the collected data.

## **3. Conceptual Definition**

### **Resilience**

The five dimensions of personal competence, as outlined by Connor and Davidson, represent various aspects of an individual's self-perception and abilities related to their overall well-being:

1. **Trust:** This dimension encompasses an individual's belief in themselves and in others. Trust involves having confidence in one's own capabilities, decisions, and judgments. Additionally, it includes a willingness to rely on and have faith in the trustworthiness of others, fostering a sense of security and stability in personal relationships and the world at large.
2. **Positive Acceptance:** Positive acceptance refers to the capacity to acknowledge and embrace oneself with all strengths, weaknesses, and imperfections. It involves self-compassion, self-esteem, and the ability to affirm and appreciate oneself, fostering a positive self-image and self-worth.
3. **Control:** Control relates to the perception of having agency and influence over one's life circumstances. It involves feeling competent in managing and navigating life's challenges, making decisions, and having a sense of autonomy in directing one's path. Individuals with a strong sense of control tend to believe they can effectively cope with difficulties and steer their lives in desired directions.
4. **Spiritual Influence:** This dimension involves the recognition of spiritual or existential beliefs and their impact on one's life. It encompasses a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection to something larger than oneself, whether through religion, personal beliefs, or a deeper sense of existential understanding. It plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's perspective on life and provides guidance and comfort.

5. **Personal Competence:** This overall dimension refers to the combination of the above aspects—trust, positive acceptance, control, and spiritual influence—culminating in an individual's perception of their overall ability to function optimally. It's a broader measure encompassing various facets of psychological and emotional well-being, incorporating one's perceived capability to manage challenges and thrive in life.

These dimensions collectively contribute to an individual's self-assessment of their competence, agency, and well-being, and they play a significant role in shaping an individual's mental health and overall quality of life.

### Psychological Needs

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a framework in psychology that focuses on intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs. According to SDT, there are three primary psychological needs that are essential for personal growth, well-being, and intrinsic motivation:

1. **Autonomy:** Autonomy refers to the need to feel in control of one's actions and choices. It involves the sense of volition, feeling that one's behavior is self-endorsed and emanates from one's authentic interests and values. When individuals have autonomy, they feel a sense of independence, self-direction, and the ability to make decisions that align with their beliefs and desires. It's about feeling that one's actions are driven by one's own will rather than external pressures or influences.
2. **Competence:** Competence refers to the need to feel effective and capable in handling the challenges that one faces. It involves the sense of mastery, the feeling of being able to successfully accomplish tasks and achieve desired outcomes. When individuals feel competent, they experience a sense of efficacy, confidence in their abilities, and a belief that they can effectively navigate their environment and achieve their goals. Competence is about feeling a sense of accomplishment and capability in various areas of life.
3. **Relatedness:** Relatedness refers to the need to feel connected, understood, and cared for by others. It involves the sense of belonging, feeling that one is part of a community, and experiencing meaningful connections and relationships. When individuals have a sense of relatedness, they feel supported, valued, and understood by others, which contributes to their overall well-being and motivation. Relatedness is about forming and maintaining healthy, supportive relationships and feeling a sense of connection with others.

According to Self-Determination Theory, the fulfillment of these three basic psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—is crucial for an individual's motivation, psychological well-being, and optimal functioning. When these needs are supported and satisfied, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, personal growth, and a sense of fulfillment in their lives.

## 4. Results & Discussions

**Table 1:** 't' test to check difference among gender

SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE		N	MEAN	S.D	t-value	p-value
Gender	Male	38	54.63	12.536	2.195	0.754
	Female	8	64.50	11.339		

H1(1) Gender – Female social worker trainees will report lower levels of resilience than male social worker trainees.

An independent- sample t-test was conducted to compare Emotional Intelligence and Gender. There is a significance difference in the scores for the Male Executives (M=113.95, SD=10.139) and for the Female Executives (M=109.21, SD=8.016), with  $t=2.090$ ,  $p=0.039$ . Hence hypothesis is rejected. However, is observed that with respect to Emotional Intelligence, the Male Executives have a higher mean score of 113.95 compared to female Executives with the mean score of 109.21. So, it can be concluded that Male Executives have better Emotional Intelligence compared to the Female Executives.

H1(2) Psychological Need Satisfaction – Social worker trainees whose psychological need satisfaction is high will report higher levels of resilience than social workers whose needs are not satisfied.

**Table 2:** Correlation test show the relationship between needs satisfaction and resilience

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Resilience	--			
2. Autonomy needs satisfaction	.497**	--		
3. Competence needs satisfaction	.597**	.006	--	
4. Relatedness needs satisfaction	.128	.209	.085	--

\*\* significant 0.01 level

The correlation matrix provides insights into the relationships among the variables under consideration. Resilience shows a moderate positive correlation with Autonomy needs satisfaction at .497\*\* and a stronger positive correlation with competence needs satisfaction at .597\*\*. However, there is a notably lower correlation between Resilience (1) and Relatedness needs satisfaction at .128. Autonomy needs satisfaction exhibits no significant correlation with competence needs satisfaction but does show a slight positive correlation with Relatedness needs satisfaction at .209. Competence needs satisfaction does not show a significant correlation with Relatedness needs satisfaction either. These findings suggest that, in this context, meeting autonomy and competence needs is more strongly associated with resilience than meeting relatedness needs. The lack of a significant correlation between resilience and relatedness needs satisfaction implies a weaker connection between these two factors in the studied population.

**Table 3:** Correlation Matrix for dimensions of resilience

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Personal Competence	--					
2. Tolerance of negative affect	.452**	--				
3. Positive Acceptance	.485**	.473**	--			
4. Control	.809**	.489**	.658**	--		
5. Spiritual	.046	.106	-.106	-.012	--	
6. Total Resilience	.890**	.731**	.709**	.882**	.163	--

\*\* significant 0.01 level

The correlation matrix reveals associations among the study variables. Notably, Personal Competence (1) exhibits a strong positive correlation with Tolerance of negative affect (2) at .452\*\* and Positive Acceptance (3) at .485\*\*. Control (4) is highly correlated with both Personal Competence (1) at .809\*\* and Positive Acceptance (3) at .658\*\*. Additionally, Total Resilience (6) shows significant correlations with Personal Competence (1) at .890\*\*, Tolerance of negative affect (2) at .731\*\*, Positive Acceptance (3) at .709\*\*, and Control (4) at .882\*\*. However, the Spiritual variable (5) appears to have negligible correlations with the other variables. These findings suggest that attributes related to Personal Competence, Tolerance of negative affect, Positive Acceptance, and Control are strongly interlinked, contributing substantially to overall resilience as indicated by the Total Resilience variable. The lack of significant correlations with the Spiritual variable implies that it may not play a prominent role in the observed resilience factors within this study.

## 5. Findings

1. The hypothesis that there is no difference in Emotional Intelligence between genders is rejected. It can be concluded that, in this sample, Male Executives exhibit better Emotional Intelligence compared to Female Executives.
2. Autonomy needs satisfaction has no significant correlation with competence needs satisfaction but shows a slight positive correlation with Relatedness needs satisfaction.

3. Competence needs satisfaction does not show a significant correlation with Relatedness needs satisfaction. The findings suggest that, in this context, meeting autonomy and competence needs is more strongly associated with resilience than meeting relatedness needs.
4. The Spiritual variable has negligible correlations with other variables. Attributes related to Personal Competence, Tolerance of negative affect, Positive Acceptance, and Control are strongly interlinked, contributing substantially to overall resilience, as indicated by the Total Resilience variable. The lack of significant correlations with the Spiritual variable suggests it may not play a prominent role in the observed resilience factors within this study.

## **6. Suggestions**

### **1. Gender Sensitivity Training**

Include training modules that address gender sensitivity and the potential impact of gender on emotional intelligence. This could help educators better prepare social work professionals for understanding and working with diverse populations.

Provide opportunities for ongoing professional development that includes training on emotional intelligence, cultural competence, and gender sensitivity. This ensures that social work professionals stay informed about the latest research and best practices in the field.

### **2. Emotional Intelligence Curriculum & Self-Reflection**

Integrate emotional intelligence training into the social work curriculum. Emphasize the development of emotional intelligence skills for both male and female social work trainees to enhance their effectiveness in working with clients.

Engage in self-reflection on personal emotional intelligence strengths and areas for growth. Social work trainees can benefit from recognizing and developing their emotional intelligence skills to enhance their interactions with clients.

### **3. Inclusive Teaching Practices & Cross-Cultural Competence**

Foster an inclusive learning environment that recognizes and values the contributions of individuals from diverse backgrounds. This can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of emotional intelligence within different cultural and gender contexts.

Actively seek training and experiences that enhance cross-cultural competence. Understanding the intersectionality of gender and cultural factors can contribute to more effective social work practice.

Recognize the importance of resilience in social work practice. Focus on developing personal competence, tolerance of negative affect, positive acceptance, and a sense of control to enhance overall resilience in the face of challenging situations.

Implement and enforce policies that promote diversity and inclusion within social work institutions. This includes creating an environment that is supportive of individuals of all genders, backgrounds, and identities.

### **4. Support Systems**

Establish support systems within social work institutions to address the unique challenges faced by social workers. This includes providing resources for self-care, supervision, and peer support to enhance overall well-being and job satisfaction.

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