

Personality Attributes of Social Work Students: An Assessment of Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, and Resilience

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ABSTRACT

Standardised instruments were administered to assess 73 social work students at various levels of their degree programme in Tiruchirappalli, India, with regard to the manifestation of empathy, emotional intelligence and resilience. A cross-sectional comparative design was used for the study. The Connor and Davidson Resilience scale (2003), Empathy Assessment Index (2011) and Emotional Intelligence Scale (1998) were administered to the respondents to assess the manifestation of the variables of interest. Data was subjected to statistical analysis. Significant differences were seen between students of different cohorts on the variables studied, with low levels manifested in students of year 1 as against those in their final year. Significant positive relationships were seen between the three dimensions studied. Empathy and emotional intelligence were extracted as predictors of resilience through regression analysis. Implications of the findings have been discussed in terms of the need to enhance these attributes in social work students through the provision of appropriate curricular experiences.

Keywords: Resilience, Empathy, Emotional Intelligence, Social Work Students

Social work is a change-oriented profession that rests on the bedrock of a relationship that social workers establish with those seeking professional help (clients/service users). Biestek (1957), one of the earliest writers who stressed the importance of relationship, envisaged it to be a 'dynamic interaction between the attitudes and emotions of the caseworker and the

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client...’ (p.17). Indeed relationship has been considered to be the ‘heart of helping people’ (Perlman, 1979), a ‘communication bridge between people’ (Kadushin, 1990, p. 36) and is the medium through which change is ushered in, be it in the person seeking help, their environment or in both. Besides being a facilitative medium, relationship by itself has been considered to offer several therapeutic benefits for service users (Rogers, 1961; Sudbery, 2002).

Empathy has for long been acknowledged to be an important attribute of the caring professions including social work and crucial for establishing a positive, purposeful and professional relationship with service users. The term “empathy” has its etymological roots in the German word “*einfuhling*”, meaning, “to feel into” the experience of another (Raines, 1990). Along with warmth and genuineness, empathy has been considered to be one of the core conditions of the helping relationship (Truax & Carkhuff, 1967). Dymond (1949), one of the earliest writers to define empathy, considered it to be the “imaginative transposing of oneself into the thinking, feeling, and acting of another person and so structuring the world as he does” (p. 127). Rogers (1959) who developed the person-centred approach considered empathic understanding to be a key requisite of the therapeutic relationship and defined it as: “to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy, and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto, as if one were the other person, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ condition” (p. 210). Empathy is considered to be a complex, multi- dimensional concept that has moral, cognitive, emotive and behavioural components (Mercer & Reynolds, 2002). The importance of empathy as a key ingredient of the helping relationship has been evidenced in clinical settings where a warm empathetic style has been attributed to improved clinical outcomes (Di Blasi, Harkness, Ernst, Georgiou & Kleijnen, 2001) and also correlated with physicians’ professional satisfaction (Suchman, Roter, Green & Lipkin, 1993). Developing empathy is acknowledged as being fundamental to caring and to enhance the therapeutic potential of the patient-clinician relationship (Spiro, 1992). A key function of the social worker’s role is the ability to engage with service users in an empathic manner (College of Social Work, 2012). The judicious use of empathy is considered as being mutually beneficial to both the client as well as the practitioner and a key requisite in furthering the helping process (Stanley & Sethuramalingam, 2015). Social workers need to be able to empathize with service users who are vulnerable and at-risk and may differ from them on several attributes

such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion and other aspects (Turnage, Hong, Stevenson & Edwards, 2012). Grant (2014) considers accurate empathy as being crucial for social work practice and advocates that it be developed at an early stage of professional development. In spite of being recognised as a key ability required for effective social work practice (Shulman, 2009), research on this quintessential attribute in social work is scarce and sketchy (Gerdes & Segal, 2011; Morrison, 2007).

Social workers deal with stressful situations albeit vicariously be it substance misuse, scenarios of exploitation or abuse, family disorganisation or macro issues such as poverty. Negative life experiences and events, trauma, hardship and adversity in general can leave people feeling unhappy, mistrustful, bewildered, upset, depressed, powerless, hopeless, helpless and in despair. Sharing of such feelings and emotions in the social work relationship can have a profound impact on the social worker. Often engagement with distress evoking circumstances generates high levels of stress. The nature of issues being shared by service users could also emotionally charge the relationship between the professional and the help seeker. The capacity to demonstrate empathy, along with the exposure to challenging situations, including threats to their personal safety, unpredictability of situations and exposure to narratives of distress, can have a deleterious impact on the emotional well-being of social workers (Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015). Appropriate emotional expression, regulation of emotions and their management are hence important competencies that social workers need to possess in their professional tool kit.

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a term coined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and has been variously referred to as emotional literacy, emotional quotient, personal intelligence, social intelligence, and interpersonal intelligence (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2000). It has been conceptualised as 'as the set of abilities (verbal and nonverbal) that enable a person to generate, recognize, express, understand, and evaluate their own, and others' emotions in order to guide thinking and action that successfully cope with environmental demands and pressures' (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004, p. 72). Conceptually EI encompasses skills of empathy, self-awareness, motivation, self-control and adeptness in relationships (Bar-On, 1997). EI has also been termed as emotional efficacy and emotional competence and to be a personality trait that is associated with academic performance in students (Petrides, Furnham & Frederickson, 2004). It has been considered to have four dimensions: the perception of emotion, the integration and

assimilation of emotion, knowledge about emotions, and its management (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso, 1999). EI is related to academic achievement (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan & Majeski, 2004) and to stress management, problem-solving skills, wellbeing, mental health (Ciarrochi, Deane & Anderson, 2002; Gerits, Derksen, Verbruggen & Katz, 2005) and to overall life satisfaction (Ciarrochi, Chan & Caputi, 2000). Understanding and handling one's own emotions and those of others is crucial during various tasks of the social work process, be it engagement with service users, assessment, decision making, action planning and intervention (Morrison, 2007). The nature of EI thus makes it a valuable attribute for social workers and needs to be inculcated in students as part of their professional training (Stanley & Metilda, 2016a).

Resilience is another attribute required to withstand the emotionally gruelling nature of professional practice, to avoid compassion fatigue and burn out (Cooke, Doust & Steele, 2013; Olson, Kemper & Mahan, 2015). It is positively associated with psychological well-being and negatively with psychological distress, depression and anxiety and hence important for one's mental health and wellbeing (Haddadi & Besharat, 2010). Resilience refers to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity (Wald, Taylor, Asmundson, Jang & Stapleton, 2006) and has also been defined as 'the potential to exhibit resourcefulness by using available internal and external resources in response to different contextual and developmental challenges' (Pooley & Cohen, 2010, p. 34). From the perspective of vulnerability, it is seen as "the protective factors and processes or mechanisms that contribute to a good outcome, despite experiences with stressors shown to carry significant risk for developing psychopathology" (Hjemdal, Friborg, Stiles, Martinussen & Rosenvinge, 2006, p. 97). It is seen to be a dynamic relational phenomenon that develops through significant interactions over time (Hurley, Martin & Hallberg, 2013).

Resilient individuals seek support from others, have close and secure attachments, focus on personal and/or collective goals, besides demonstrating higher levels of self-efficacy (Rutter, 1985). Several social work practice models draw from concepts associated with resilience (Guo & Tsui, 2010) and resilience has been construed to be an important characteristic for social workers (Munro, 2011). One of the tenets of the contemporary strengths based approach (Saleebey, 2006) is to cultivate resilience in service users and empower them to deal with adversity (Norman, 2000). Besides, the development of resilience is also important

to enable social workers deal more competently with the challenges and demands of practice (Grant & Kinman, 2014) and it has been argued that emotionally intelligent social work trainees who are socially competent and empathetic and have good reflective abilities will be more resilient to stress (Kinman & Grant, 2011).

The nature of the social work curriculum is such that besides requiring proficiency in a range of social science oriented subjects, it also exposes the student to the rigours of practice placement, often with challenging real life scenarios. The demands of academia are thus complex and perceived as being stressful and require considerable resilience and coping abilities to be able to meet the multifarious demands of the degree successfully (Stanley & Bhuvaneswari, 2016b). Our focus in this study is on three key personality attributes namely empathy, emotional intelligence and resilience in undergraduate students of social work. These attributes are important for students and as indicated by the literature are core competencies crucial for effective professional practice. There is a dearth of literature on these variables in the Indian context and this study seeks to further an understanding of their manifestation in students of social work in India.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To portray the socio-demographic profile of undergraduate students of social work in a women's college in Tiruchirappalli, India.
2. To assess the manifestation of dimensions such as empathy, emotional intelligence and coping in these students.
3. To compare students of different years of their degree course across these dimensions.
4. To ascertain correlations if any between these subject dimensions and with socio-demographic variables.
5. To identify dimensions and their components which predict the manifestation of resilience in social work students.

METHODS

Research Design

This study used a cross-sectional design. It is comparative in nature, as the attributes studied have been compared across students of different year

groups and in terms of other demographic variables. A survey methodology has been adopted for the collection of data.

Measures

- Self-prepared schedule to collect socio-demographic data.
- The Connor and Davidson Resilience scale (2003) (CD-RISC) is a 25 item instrument. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0-4), with higher scores reflecting greater resilience. It measures five factors (sub-dimensions). Factor 1 refers to personal competence, high standards, and tenacity; Factor 2 assesses tolerance of negative affect; Factor 3 deals with the positive acceptance of change, and secure relationships; Factor 4 looks at issues related to control and Factor 5 to spiritual influences. The total score was achieved by adding up all responses, and ranges from 0 to 100, with higher scores reflecting greater resilience. The computed Cronbachs alpha for internal consistency of this scale in the present study was 0.89 which is the same established in earlier studies (Garcia & Calvo, 2013) and is considered to be 'good' (George & Mallery, 2003).
- Empathy Assessment Index (EAI) by Lietz, Gerdes, Sun, Geiger, Wagaman, and Segal (2011) is a validated 17 Item self-report instrument that measures five sub-dimensions namely, Affective Response, Emotion Regulation, Perspective Taking, Self-Other Awareness and Empathic Attitudes. Items are scored on a six point Likert scale (from never=1 to always=6) with higher scores indicating higher levels of empathy. The scale has excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$) and strong test-retest reliability as reported by the authors. In this study the Cronbach's alpha was .80, which is considered to be 'good' in terms of reliability (George & Mallery, 2003).
- Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) by Schutte et al. (1998) is a 33 item instrument that measures three sub-dimensions namely: appraisal and expression of emotion, regulation of emotion and utilisation of emotion. The items are measured on a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from strongly disagree (score 1) to strongly agree (score 5). Higher scores indicate higher emotional intelligence. Internal consistency analysis by the authors showed a Cronbach's alpha of .87 and sound test-retest reliability ($r=.78$),

predictive validity, and discriminant validity as well. In the current study the alpha computed was .87, the same reported by the authors, and is considered to be 'good' in terms of reliability (George & Mallery, 2003).

Setting for the Study

Cauvery College is a college for women and a leading provider of higher education in the city of Tiruchirappalli (also known as Trichy or Tiruchi) centrally located in the state of Tamilnadu in south India. The city is located on the banks of the river Cauvery and is a major hub for the Indian Railways and is also a leading centre for education. Cauvery college is a self- financing college (receives no Government funds) that was established in 1984 and is run by a private educational trust. It is an arts and science college affiliated to the Bharathidasan University and offers fourteen undergraduate three year degree programmes and nine two year post graduate courses including social work at both levels. The college caters to about 4000 students at all levels.

Data Collection

Initial permission for the study was obtained from the Principal of the college. Students in each year (years 1, 2 and 3) of the social work undergraduate degree were briefed about the nature of the study. Informed consent was obtained from all students who agreed to participate. Data was collected in the classroom with one of the investigators present to provide clarifications. Students were told that participation was entirely voluntary and that they could drop out of the study at any point without assigning any reasons and would not be contacted further. It was emphasised that their non-participation or discontinuation would in no way influence their academic life in the college. Respondents were not required to provide their name, roll number or any other personal identifying data and confidentiality was assured.

Statistical Analysis

We have used t tests for two group comparisons and computed ANOVAs for comparisons involving more than two groups. Pearson's correlation coefficients have been used to look at the relationship between key

variables and their sub-dimensions. Finally linear multiple regression using the enter method was utilised to look at the predictors of emotional intelligence.

RESULTS

Respondents of the Study

73 students in all three years of the social work degree agreed to participate in the study and were present on the pre-announced dates of data collection. Details of students enrolled in each year as well as those enlisted as respondents for the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Table Depicting the Number of Students Enrolled and Enlisted for the Study

<i>Year of study</i>	<i>Students enrolled</i>	<i>Respondents</i>
1	39	34
2	32	22
3	28	17
Total	99	73

Respondents' Profile

The majority (68.5%) of respondents were in the 18-19 year age group, and the mean age was 18.6 years. They hailed predominantly from a rural background (68.5%) and from nuclear families (83.6%). In terms of religious orientation, the majority came from Hindu families (90.4%) and the remaining from a Christian background. The medium of instruction for the majority in their school prior to joining the degree was Tamil (vernacular) (79.5%) and the remaining had been to English medium schools. The majority of these schools (57.5%) were located in rural areas. During their school days (78.1%) as well as currently in college (64.4%) the majority lived with their parents, while the others stayed/were staying in student hostels. The educational background of their parents was considerably low with the majority of parents having studied at different levels up to higher secondary school. 2.7% of fathers and 15% of mothers had never been to school. The father was the main breadwinner in most families and the majority (50.7%) were engaged in farming or employed

as casual labourers (called ‘coolie’ in the vernacular) in farming or in the construction sector.

For the majority (76.7%), their mother was not in paid employment and looked after the domestic front. The reported total monthly family income ranged from Rupees 1,000 to 70,000 with a mean of Rupees 11,100 (approx. 178 USD) per month. The socio-demographic background of the respondents, by Indian standards is consistent with a lower-middle class profile.

When asked why they chose to do a degree in social work, the majority of students (56%) attributed it to guidance and encouragement received from family and friends, 30% said they were encouraged by their former teachers and the rest felt that it would help them to secure employment (14%). While the majority (84%) expressed their desire to take up a social work career or in related fields such as counselling, the others said they would take up some other occupation. When asked about their opinion about the course that they had joined, the responses from the majority were positive and they used words like happy (16.4%), interesting (27.4%) and useful (24.7%) to describe their experience. A question specifically asked to those in the 2nd and 3rd years related to any change that they felt their degree had brought about in them. While 24% felt that the course had not brought about any significant change in them, other responses pertained to an increased awareness of social problems (23%), change in behaviour (13%) and attitudes (8%) besides becoming more helpful towards others (24%).

Empathy, Emotional Intelligence and Resilience

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by mean scores on key dimensions and year of study

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Year 1</i>		<i>Year 2</i>		<i>Year 3</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Factor 1	23.82	5.96	22.65	5.87	24.05	6.30
Factor 2	19.50	5.05	19.06	5.77	21.32	4.73
Factor 3	9.06	2.77	13.12	3.43	14.14	3.76
Factor 4	7.53	2.26	9.41	2.65	9.09	2.41
Factor 5	4.53	1.35	5.59	1.66	6.09	1.85
Total Resilience Score	64.32	11.38	69.82	15.70	74.68	17.67

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Year 1</i>		<i>Year 2</i>		<i>Year 3</i>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Regulation Perspective	14.50	3.87	12.94	4.51	17.05	4.28
Taking Self-Other	12.47	5.13	13.71	4.24	16.32	3.51
Awareness Empathy	12.32	3.20	13.35	3.16	14.14	2.42
Attitudes	11.15	2.58	12.18	3.15	13.50	3.16
Total Empathy Score	66.06	12.53	67.35	13.00	76.18	12.24
Appraisal of emotions	45.85	5.54	48.77	3.19	49.23	6.09
Regulation of emotions	40.59	1.88	41.82	3.70	42.50	3.65
Utilisation of emotions	39.41	2.96	40.94	1.82	41.59	1.62
Total Emotional Intelligence Score	125.82	6.10	131.53	6.37	133.55	6.66

N=73

Table 2 portrays the manifestation of the key variables of this study in students of all three years. An important observation based on the data in table 2 is that the total scores of all three key variables studied show an increase from year 1 to year 3. This is also observed for the sub-dimensions of the EI scale, but not necessarily so for all the sub-dimensions of the resilience and empathy scores. The scores for all three total scores are lowest in year 1 and highest in year 3.

Between Year Differences on Key Dimensions

A one way analysis of variance was conducted between the three year groups to test for statistically significant differences and the results are depicted in table 3.

Table 3: One Way Analysis of Variance based on Year of Study for Key Dimensions

<i>Dimen- sions</i>		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Signifi- cance</i>
Factor 1	Between Groups	21.48	10.74	0.28	.753
	Within Groups	2645.78	37.80		
Factor 2	Between Groups	61.57	30.78	1.17	.317
	Within Groups	1844.21	26.35		

<i>Dimen- sions</i>		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Signifi- cance</i>
Factor 3	Between Groups	399.93	199.96	18.96	.000***
	Within Groups	738.24	10.55		
Factor 4	Between Groups	53.57	26.78	4.66	.013**
	Within Groups	402.41	5.75		
Factor 5	Between Groups	35.16	17.58	6.98	.002**
	Within Groups	176.41	2.52		
Total Resil- ience Score	Between Groups	1459.84	729.92	3.46	.037*
	Within Groups	14770.68	211.01		
Perspective Taking	Between Groups	198. 73	99.36	4.91	.010**
	Within Groups	1414. 77	20.21		
Self-other Awareness	Between Groups	45.20	22.60	2.55	.085
	Within Groups	619.91	8.85		
Empathetic Attitudes	Between Groups	74.09	37.04	4.40	.016*
	Within Groups	588.23	8.40		
Total Empa- thy Score	Between Groups	1462.63	731.31	4.60	.013*
	Within Groups	1115.03	158.78		
Appraisal of emotions	Between Groups	184.89	92.44	3.30	.042*
	Within Groups	1957.18	27.96		
Regulation of emotions	Between Groups	51.87	25.93	2.95	.059
	Within Groups	614.20	8.77		
Utilisation of emotions	Between Groups	69.34	34.67	6.12	.004**
	Within Groups	396.49	5.66		
Total Emo- tional Intelligence	Between Groups	889.58	444.79	11.08	.000***
	Within Groups	2808.63	40.12		

p<0.05*; p<0.01**; p<0.001***

The data shows a statistically significant difference between the year groups on the total scores of all three key dimensions. In terms of their sub-dimensions, this difference is seen for factors 3, 4 and 5 of the resilience scale, the perspective taking and empathic attitudes sub-dimensions of the empathy scale and the appraisal of emotions and regulation of emotions sub-dimensions of the EI scale.

Table 4: t test for subject dimensions on selected socio-demographic variables

	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Empathy</i>				<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>				<i>Resilience</i>			
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>*t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>*t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>*t</i>	<i>p</i>
Nativity	Rural (50)	69.92	13.62			128.66	7.54			68.38	14.82		
	Urban (23)	68.30	12.51	0.48	0.63	130.00	8.82	0.67	0.51	69.47	15.73	0.29	0.77
Medium of Instruction	English (15)	68.87	12.48			126.07	6.11			67.27	13.82		
	Tamil (58)	69.55	13.50	0.18	0.86	129.86	8.20	1.67	0.09	69.10	15.40	0.42	0.68
Residential Status	Hostel (26)	70.69	10.09			129.81	6.37			69.46	12.46		
	Day scholars (47)	68.70	14.72	0.61	0.54	128.68	8.72	0.58	0.57	68.32	16.37	0.31	0.76
Religion	Hindu (66)	70.03	13.03			129.11	8.06			69.42	14.3		
	Christian (7)	63.57	14.63	1.23	0.22	128.86	7.10	0.08	0.94	62.14	20.59	1.22	0.23
Note: Figures in parentheses are respondent numbers												*df=71	

Comparison of Key Dimensions on Select Socio-Demographic Variables

Table 4 presents comparisons for all respondents based on their nativity (rural v/s urban), previous medium of instruction (English v/s Tamil), residential status (hostel v/s day scholars) and religious background (Hindu v/s Christian). The t tests do not show any statistically significant differences for the total scores of all three key dimensions (for all $p > 0.05$) based on these comparisons.

Correlations among Dimensions and their Components

The inter-correlation matrix in table 5 shows a high positive correlation between the total scores of all three dimensions. It is of course to be expected that sub-dimensions of each scale will show strong correlations among themselves and to the total score for that particular key dimension. An important observation is that all correlations in the matrix, however weak or strong are of a positive nature. It is also seen that sub-dimensions of one dimension enter into correlations with those of other key dimensions. For instance perspective taking (of the empathy scale) is correlated with the total resilience score as well as three of its sub-dimensions (Factors 1, 2 & 3). Self-other awareness (sub-dimension of empathy scale) also shows a similar relationship with the total resilience score and all its factors (except factor 5).

Empathic attitudes correlate with all factors of the resilience scale (except factors 1 & 2) as well as its total score. Looking at correlations between the sub-dimensions of the EI scale and those of the other two instruments, it is seen that appraisal of emotions has entered into correlations with all the sub-dimensions of the empathy and resilience scales as well as their total scores. On the other hand regulation of emotions and utilisation of emotions (sub-dimensions of resilience scale) have not entered into any significant correlations with any of the dimensions of the empathy or resilience scales (except with factor 3 of the resilience scale). The total EI score shows varying levels of correlation with all the sub-dimensions of the empathy and resilience scales except with factor 3 of the resilience scale and the perspective taking component of the empathy scale.

Table 5: Inter-correlation matrix for key dimensions and their components

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>14</i>
1. Factor 1	1													
2. Factor 2	.81***	1												
3. Factor 3	.30*	.23	1											
4. Factor 4	.55***	.36**	.60***	1										
5. Factor 5	.32**	.22	.56***	.59***	1									
6. Total Resilience Score	.89***	.82***	.63***	.74***	.57***	1								
7. Perspective Taking	.50***	.49***	.31**	.22	.13	.25*	1							
8. Self-other Awareness	.34**	.34**	.28*	.26*	.23	.40***	.43***	1						
9. Empathetic Attitudes	.18	.11	.24*	.28*	.27*	.25*	.29*	.31**	1					
10. Total Empathy Score	.50***	.50***	.27*	.25	.31**	.52***	.60***	.76***	.82***	1				
11. Appraisal of emotions	.34**	.37**	.24*	.33**	.36**	.42***	.31**	.25*	.38**	.49***	1			
12. Regulation of emotions	.07	.12	.25*	.12	.03	.16	.04	.07	.19	.15	.17	1		
13. Utilisation of emotions	-.06	-.04	.42***	.14	.17	.12	-.14	.12	.11	-.04	.19	.08	1	
14. Total Emotional Intelligence Score	.21	.26*	.46***	.34**	.33**	.39**	.12	.25*	.38**	.35**	.30*	.40**	.66***	1

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

With regard to correlations of demographic variables with the key dimensions, age of the respondents correlated positively with the total empathy score ($r=0.25$, $p<0.05$) and the total EI score ($r=0.32$, $p<0.01$) but not with the total resilience score ($r=0.17$, $p>0.05$). The respondents' birth order, their number of siblings or family income did not enter into any significant correlations with any of the key dimensions.

Predictors of Resilience

A preliminary multiple regression was conducted to see if the total EI and Empathy scores predicted the manifestation of resilience in the respondents. Using the enter method it was found from the ANOVA table that both the total empathy and EI scores explain a significant amount of the variance (31.4%) in the manifestation of resilience in the students ($F(2, 70) = 16.05$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.31$, $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = 0.30$). The analysis also showed that both empathy ($\beta = 0.44$, $t(72) = 4.06$, $p < 0.001$) and EI ($\beta = 0.22$, $t(72) = 2.01$, $p < 0.05$) significantly predict the manifestation of resilience.

As both the total empathy and EI scores were extracted as significant predictors of resilience in the first analysis, we carried out a second regression by omitting the total scores and including only the sub-dimensions of both the empathy and EI scales. The ANOVA table showed that together the sub-dimensions of both the empathy and EI scale accounted for a significant amount of variance (36%) in the manifestation of resilience ($F(8, 64) = 4.49$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.36$, $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}} = 0.28$). The analysis showed that of the eight sub-dimensions entered in the analysis, only appraisal and expression of emotions (sub-dimension of EI scale) ($\beta = 0.25$, $t(72) = 2.16$, $p < 0.05$) and perspective taking (sub-dimension of empathy scale) ($\beta = 0.31$, $t(72) = 2.17$, $p < 0.05$) emerged as significant predictors of resilience in the students.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that empathy, EI and resilience were lowest in fresher's (year 1 students) than in those in their final year (year 3) and we obtained statistically significant differences between students of the three cohorts. Our findings are similar to those reported by an earlier longitudinal study of Spanish social work students which found that resilience increased from one academic year to the next (Palma-Garcia & Hombrados-Mendieta,

2014a). However the cross-sectional nature of this study and the fact that three different cohorts of students have been included does not permit the inference that the key dimensions studied mature and develop over time with age and experience.

The selected demographic variables on which respondents were compared included their former medium of instruction, their religion, current residential status and nativity and respondents did not show any significant differences in terms of the key dimensions studied. This to some extent negates the influence exerted by these demographic variables on the key dimensions.

The positive correlations obtained between the total scale scores of all three key dimensions studied and many of their component sub-dimensions indicate that they tend to reinforce each other. Empathy is seen to be an important component of EI (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). As in this study, positive correlations have also been obtained in an earlier study between resilience and EI and between empathy and resilience scores in social work students (Kinman & Grant, 2011). Cause-effect interpretations however need to be assigned with caution, given the cross-sectional nature of this study.

The regression analysis establishes both empathy and emotional intelligence and their respective components of perspective taking and appraisal and expression of emotions as significant contributors to the manifestation of resilience in social work students. These findings are also in consonance with those of Kinman and Grant (2011).

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It has been noted that increased workloads, bureaucracy and the complex nature of decisions that need to be made have resulted in increasing levels of stress among social work practitioners (Stevens & Higgins, 2002). An earlier study from India has indicated high levels of anxiety and stress among student social workers (Stanley & Bhuvaneshwari, 2016b) and high levels of psychological distress are seen in social work students in the UK (Collins, Coffey & Morris, 2010) as well as the USA (Harr & Moore, 2011). It has been evidenced that training and social work practice can influence personality traits in student social workers that are positively associated with their resilience (Palma-Garcia & Hombrados-Mendieta, 2014b). Against this background it becomes important that social work

students are enabled to develop enhanced resilience to cope effectively with the manifold challenges of professional practice. This study has found empathy and EI to be significant predictors of resilience and hence it is important to focus on strategies that develop skills relating to empathetic expression and EI in students. Further as resilience, empathy and EI are positively correlated; developing skills in one or more domains could potentially have beneficial outcomes for the others.

Relationship skills are important in social work practice not only in terms of interactions with service users but also for teamwork with other colleagues and are important for supervisors, administrators, leaders, and for managers (Morrison, 2007). EI is an important feature in effective interpersonal skills and is positively related to empathic perspective taking and self- monitoring, social skills, cooperative ability and the ability for close and affectionate relationships (Shutte et al., 2001). Empathy is a key component of emotional intelligence and is likely to underpin resilience in social workers (Howe, 2008). EI can be acquired and enhanced with suitable training (Goleman, 1995; Caner & Salovey, 1997) and empathy may be amenable to positive change with a range of interventional strategies (Stepien & Baernstein, 2006).

It has been observed that resilience may be fostered by exposure to manageable challenges or small doses of a stress experience (Rutter, 2013). Role playing scenarios could provide such challenges to students and could be incorporated in small group sessions to facilitate the development of these skills in a safe classroom environment. Role plays have been found to be effective in developing interviewing and relationship skills in social work students (Dennison, 2011) and such experiential techniques need to be given more importance. At present our experience in India is that issues relating to empathy for instance are rather cursorily dealt with in the classroom through lectures. While students develop a theoretical understanding of these concepts, their practice is guided more by intuition and trial and error. What is required is a conscious effort to develop skills of empathy and relationship competence in practice simulated situations with appropriate analysis and feedback given to students so that they are able to integrate these skills sets within their repertoire. Organising skills labs for social work students where elements relating to communication are honed and the management of emotions and their expression is developed would go some way in achieving this.

Students of social work in India lack the emphasis on reflective practice that students in the West are exposed to. Reflective ability is a crucial

component in supporting the development of resilience (Grant & Brewer, 2014). Reflective abilities may be beneficial in protecting students from the negative implications of engaging with the problems of service users and for their own wellbeing (Grant, 2014) and could thus enhance their resilience. Structured classroom activities to promote experiential learning need to be introduced to enhance these skills. While students in India write reports on placement, these tend to be rather descriptive and so the writing of reflective logs is another measure that needs to be encouraged, as they are useful tools for professional development (Wilson, 2013).

Involvement in film and/or book clubs, use of digital stories in assessments, and students being encouraged to write poems and short stories from the perspective of a service user, could encourage them to engage with issues from different perspectives, and to examine their emotional responses, values, beliefs and assumptions, that are key factors in reflective practice (Considine, Hollingdale & Neville, 2015). Experiential learning has been found beneficial in developing empathy and educators have used techniques such as theatre, literature, and writing to foster empathy in medical students (Stepien & Baernstein, 2006).

Experiential learning and reflective, emotional writing activities have been effective in enhancing reflective ability, empathy and in levels of emotional intelligence in social work students (Grant, Kinman & Alexander, 2014). The use of narrative literature, both biographical and fictional, to foster empathy in social work students in Australia has been demonstrated by Turner (2013).

The role of mental characteristics such as planning, self-reflection, and active personal agency in resilience processes has also been acknowledged (Rutter, 2013). Studies from India have found a strong positive association between role efficacy and EI in social work professionals (Singh, 2006; Pareek, 1997). It is hence important to aid students to develop skills of personal self-efficacy that could potentially influence their professional repertoire. Stress management skills, training in relaxation techniques and generic self-care skills such as effective time management, goal setting and prioritisation, planning and organisational abilities need to be imparted alongside the core social work curriculum. Experiential learning techniques to promote self-efficacy and consequently resilience in social work students have been advocated (Farchi, Cohen & Mosek, 2014). Resilience promotion workshops for social work students that incorporate themes such as mindfulness, peer coaching and support, cognitive-behavioural

techniques, using supervision for reflective practice, promotion of self-awareness and action planning are some resilience enhancing measures that have also been suggested (Grant & Kinman, 2012).

We also need to provide safe spaces for emotional thinking (Howe, 2008) and this is important particularly while discussing issues that involve grief, trauma, exploitation, injustice and abuse. The classroom ethos needs to be free of prejudice and hostility, open to accommodating disagreement and dissent and one that fosters open sharing of opinions, feelings and emotions. A supportive environment along with positive supervision plays a pivotal role in shaping resilience along with support provided for professional development, education, personal experiences, safety measures, self-care, and self-protection (Kapoulitsas & Corcoran, 2015). Social work educators thus have a crucial role in ensuring that students who graduate are equipped not only with the knowledge base required for practice but also with adequate skills that promote personal self-efficacy and interpersonal competence and thus fosters resilience in them and equips them to deal with the many challenges of professional practice.

LIMITATIONS

The cross-sectional design adopted in this investigation precludes our ability to infer whether the key dimensions studied develop and mature over time from admission to graduation and whether exposure to the social work curriculum and placement experiences can be related to their manifestation in social work students. This inference is also limited by the lack of a reference (comparative) group against which to contrast social work students from those in other degrees. We are hence unable to assess whether the manifestation of these dimensions are 'more' or 'less' when compared to students of other disciplines. We are now engaged with a similar study that overcomes these limitations by tracking these dimensions in a cohort of social work students as they progress through their degree and to also compare these dimensions with a group of non-social work students.

This study was conducted in an exclusive college for women and so gender based comparisons were not possible. Generalisations to social work students elsewhere are also limited owing to socio-demographic and cultural differences, differences in taught content and theoretical emphasis and to the uniqueness of placement experiences.

There is evidence that resilience for example, is related to personality variables such as neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, and openness (Campbell-Sills, Cohan & Stein, 2006). We have however not looked at these variables and they could be important in terms of understanding their influence on resilience, empathy and emotional intelligence.

In spite of these limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to the extant literature, particularly in the Indian context where these dimensions have not received the kind of focussed attention that they deserve.

CONCLUSION

Empathy, emotional intelligence and resilience are three personality attributes that social workers need to consciously develop for effective practice. These attributes not only influence service users but also are important to preserve the emotional wellbeing and mental health of social workers themselves. There is a paucity of research on how these dimensions develop in social work students and how student experiences can enable the development, strengthening and nurturance of these key characteristics. This study has shown that students in different years of their social work degree manifest these traits to varying degrees. Strong positive correlations among these dimensions also indicate that focussed development on one or more of these dimensions could potentially have beneficial impact in terms of the others. Resilience in particular can be fostered by enhancing skills in communication, emotional expression and management and hence measures to foster accurate empathy and emotional intelligence in social work students could go a long way in enhancing their resilience.

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