Enhancing resilience and wellbeing in the caring professions

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Enhancing resilience and wellbeing in the caring professions

- Health and social care work is rewarding, but emotionally demanding and stressful
- Problems with recruitment and retention due to stress and burnout
- Necessary to enhance resilience to manage personal wellbeing and provide high quality care
- Little known about resilience in health and social care employees to inform interventions
  - What does resilience mean to health and social care workers?
  - Why is it important in caring work?
  - What are the factors that underpin resilience in these settings?
Aims of our research:

- To explore personal meanings of resilience held by health and social care students, why it is important in caring work, and what can be done to enhance it.
- To examine the emotional and social qualities that underpin resilience in these working contexts.
- To investigate the extent to which resilience protects wellbeing.
- To inform the development of an enhanced curriculum to protect personal wellbeing and facilitate effective practice in caring professionals.
Our workshop:

- **Paper 1:** Thriving not just surviving - conceptualisations of resilience in trainee social workers and the factors that underpin it

- **Paper 2:** Emotional labour and wellbeing in nursing & midwifery students: the role of resilience

- **Guided audience discussion:**
Thriving not just surviving - Conceptualisations of resilience in trainee social workers and the factors that underpin it

Louise Grant
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The importance of resilience to wellbeing and professional practice

- “Social workers need to develop the emotional resilience to manage the challenges they will face” (Laming, 2009)

- “The most troubling and intractable situations exist when performance difficulties occur in the context of staff who lack accurate empathy, self awareness and self management skills” (Morrison, 2007)
Study 1: What is resilience?

- Resilience – a term often used, but little understood in workplace settings
- Important to gain insight into the following issues:
  - What does resilience mean?
  - Why is it important for social workers to be resilient?
  - What can be done to enhance it?
- Sample – 240 social work students
- Method – thematic content analysis of qualitative data
What is resilience

- **Coping; ability to manage stress and adversity**
  - “being able to cope without feeling overwhelmed”;
  - “deal with stressful situations/don’t let pressures build up”

- **Adaptability; ability to adjust to situations**
  - “adapt to all situations that can be thrown at you”
  - “bend with the wind”

- **Self-awareness; ability to reflect**
  - “able to reflect and learn about yourself”
  - “self protection through a better understanding of self”
What is resilience

• Inner strength; hardiness, the ability to trust in personal attributes
  “to not be afraid to face difficult times again and again”
  “take things in your stride”

• Self protection; ability to create boundaries between work and home
  “have empathy but protect yourself”
  “keep a professional distance”

• Support; ability to identify and access appropriate sources of support
  “Knowing where and how to get support”
  “building up support groups”
Why is resilience important for social workers?

- **Self Assurance/Self Confidence; ability to advocate on behalf of others**
  
  “to support those who are less resilient to overcome challenges”
  “improve outcomes for service users”

- **Self Protection; ability to cope with adversity, bounce back develop and learn**
  
  “help us cope emotionally and physically with the emotional turmoil of work”
  “help us deal with stressful situations and make difficult decisions”
Why is resilience important for social workers?

- Personal growth; ability to learn from experiences
  - “It can make one flourish”
  - “being able to learn from situations in way and move forward”
- Reflection; ability to know self and be aware of the impact of self on the work
  - “increases self awareness”
  - “enhances ability to evaluate ways of working”
- Support; ability to know when to ask for support
  - “Helps us ask for help and support”
What can be done to enhance resilience?

- **Coping skills; ability to manage stress appropriately**
  - “stress management, self management”
  - “coping strategies to deal with stressful situations”

- **Reflective Practice; ability to enhance self knowledge**
  - “reflect on practice seeking or enhancing knowledge to manage better”
  - “being aware of my own thoughts and feeling”

- **Self care; ability to find time to recover and gain personal support**
  - “Making sure we look after ourselves physically, mentally and spiritually”
  - “Taking time out to relax”
What can be done to enhance resilience?

- **Empathy; ability to understand others perspectives**
  - “Being understanding, open minded, patient”
  - “not blaming self or others”

- **Training; ability to access knowledge and skills**
  - “Learn techniques to deal with emotions and difficulties”
  - “find good skills and ways to de-stress”

- **Organisational Support; ability to access support**
  - “peer support”
  - “strong supervision with clear guidance and space to reflect”

- **Boundaries; ability to keep work in perspective**
  - “have a good work-life balance”
  - “being able to detach from situations, feelings and thoughts”
Study 2: Predicting resilience and wellbeing in trainee social workers

- Reflective ability
  - self reflection, empathetic reflection and reflective communication (Aukes et al., 2007)
- Emotional intelligence
  - Evaluation and expression of emotion; emotional regulation; the use of emotions in decision making
- Empathy
  - perspective taking, empathetic concern and distress
- Social competence
- Self awareness gained via these competencies
  - enhances resilience to stress
  - fosters wellbeing
  - is a key quality for social workers “who fly”
Aims and objectives of research:

- To examine emotional intelligence, empathy, social competence and reflective ability as predictors of resilience in student social workers
- To investigate whether resilience predicts wellbeing
- To explore ways in which the findings might enhance resilience and how the social work curriculum might support this
Predictors of resilience and wellbeing

Sample

- 240 social work students (69% L1, 31% L2)
- 82% female, age range 19 – 53; 78% UK nationals

Measures

- Emotional intelligence (Schutte et al., 1997)
- Empathy: 3 dimensions (perspective taking, empathetic concern, personal distress) (Davis, 1983)
- Social competence (Sarason et al., 1984)
- Reflective ability (Aukes et al., 2007)
- Resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993)
- Psychological distress (Goldberg & Williams, 1987)
- Also reflective accounts gained via interview/logs
Results:

- Levels of psychological distress were high.
- Social work students were more resilient and less distressed if they:
  - were more emotionally intelligent (p<.001)
  - were more socially competent (p<.01)
  - had more empathetic concern, but less empathetic distress (p<.01 and p<.001)
  - had stronger reflective abilities across all domains (p<.001), especially empathetic reflection
- High empathy = positive, but high empathy without empathetic reflection = negative
Reflective accounts

- Asked to reflect on experiences with service user that had a particular emotional impact on them
- The role of emotional containment in reflective practice was emphasised (Ruch, 2007)
- Preliminary findings:
  - Service users have considerable emotional impact: positive and negative
  - Students have high expectations of the emotion management skills and reflective ability of social work practitioners – key role models?
  - Students benefit from discussing emotion and reflecting upon this with peers, but have concerns about opportunities to do so post qualification
Conclusions:

• Resilience encompasses many factors
• Emotional intelligence, social competence and empathy appear to underlie this ability
• Facilitating empathetic reflection may be particularly beneficial
• Developing these abilities should enhance resilience in social work students leading to improved wellbeing
Emotional labour and wellbeing in nursing & midwifery students: the role of resilience.

Sandra Leggetter
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Emotional labour – the essence of nursing?

- “Management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial & bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983)

- A fundamental requirement for healthcare professionals: e.g. comforting, listening, showing sympathy (Small, 1995)

- Portrayed as an entirely “natural” activity
  - Generally unseen, unacknowledged and undervalued (Collins, 2005; Bolton, 2000)

- Although caring is essential and productive, emotional labour is also hard work!
Emotional labour: the impact on wellbeing

- Can be a source of stress (Hunter & Deary, 2005)
  - Regulating emotions requires psychological effort
  - Can lead to emotional exhaustion and other negative outcomes (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998; )

- Risks of over-involvement in caring work & need for emotional boundaries are acknowledged

- Resilience is likely to help healthcare professionals manage emotional labour and promote wellbeing
Rationale for study

• Some insight gained into emotional labour and healthcare professionals, but mainly phenomenological studies using qualified staff.

• Little known about the role of resilience, reflective ability and related competencies in managing emotional labour

• Little known about pre-registration nursing students
  - Need for enhanced training and support in managing emotional demands (e.g. Huyhan et al., 2008)
  - A quantitative, large-scale approach is required to explore impact of emotional labour and risk/protective factors
Study Aims

- To examine the emotional labour faced by students during clinical placements

- To assess relationships with job-related burnout
  - Emotional exhaustion; Depersonalisation / Cynicism; Personal accomplishment

- To examine the role played by resilience & other protective/risk factors
  - Reflective ability, emotional intelligence and empathy
  - Emotional support (from peers, tutors, mentors and clinical staff and friends)
Sample

- 294 University of Bedfordshire nursing & midwifery students (Bedfordshire & Buckinghamshire Campuses)
  - 92% female
  - Age range 18-55 (mean = 30.5, SD = 9.4)
  - 74% White British; 12% Black African
  - 45% year 1, 28% year 2, 28% year 3
Method & Measures

- Students invited to complete online questionnaire

Measures:

- Resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993)
- Reflective ability (Aukes et al., 2007)
- Emotional Intelligence (Schutte et al., 1998)
- Empathy (Davis, 1983)
- Burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1986)
Results

- Emotional Labour – associated with burnout
  - More emotional labour = more emotional exhaustion & depersonalisation (p<.001) but more personal accomplishment (p<.01)

- Emotional Support - associated with burnout
  - Less emotional support = more emotional exhaustion & less personal accomplishment (both p<.001)

- Resilience – associated with burnout & emotional labour
  - More resilience = less emotional labour and less burnout

- Emotional intelligence, reflective ability & empathy are also protective factors
Emotional support gained from all sources, but more frequent from peers* followed by mentors & work colleague

*particularly important for year 1 students (p<.05)
Predictors of Burnout

- Emotional exhaustion
- Lack of personal accomplishment
- Depersonalisation

Less EIQ
Less reflective ability: Empathetic and self reflection
Less emotional support
Greater empathy
Resilience
Protective nature of resilience

Resilience

Emotional labour

Burnout
Conclusions

- Important to recognise the emotional demands of caring
- Serious implications for well-being - long term consequence for future workforce?
- Need to develop resilience earlier rather than later
- Need to enhance underlying qualities such as emotional intelligence, reflective ability, empathy and support
- A range of innovative methods required to help support students
How can these findings enhance resilience and wellbeing in caring professionals?

- A more explicit focus on resilience is needed in training and practice
- Focus on enhancing emotional intelligence, social skills, (appropriate) empathy and reflective ability
- Help students identify and utilise support mechanisms
- Recognise that it is important to care (and show this), but emphasise need for clear emotional boundaries
- Research needed to link resilience with job performance and user wellbeing and satisfaction
- Research needed to gain insight into diverse understandings of resilience and a development of cultural competence
Potential barriers to success

Students’ resilience can be nurtured during training, but there may be organisational barriers in professional practice:

- Job demands and role conflict might undermine good practice
- In health and social care, managerialism can undermine reflective ability (Laming, 2009)
- In both disciplines, lack of time for effective supervision may also undermine opportunities to maintain resilience and wellbeing
- Social and political change will lead to new challenges
Questions:

- Could (and should) we test applicants for resilience as part of recruitment process? What are the implications?
- Can we enhance resilience through training? If so, how?
- How can we develop the self knowledge required to enhance resilience, and promote personal wellbeing and professional practice?
  - What do I need and when do I need it?
- Does a focus on building personal resilience (and taking individual responsibility for wellbeing) let employers off the hook?