

# **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  
Gail Kinman

# 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**

**Gail Kinman**

# 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% year3**

# Method & Measures

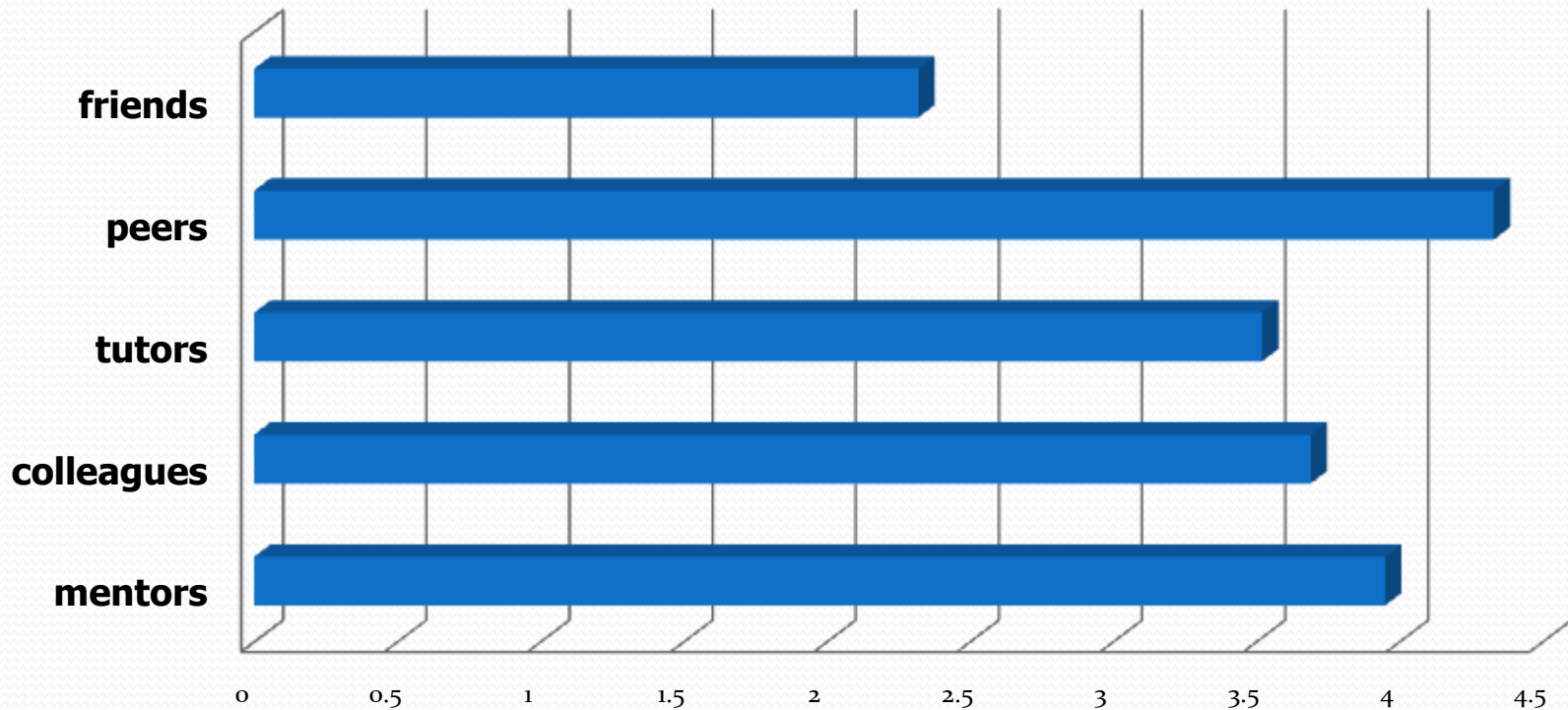
- **Students invited to complete online questionnaire**
- **Measures:**
  - **Resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993)**
  - **Reflective ability (Aukes *et al.*, 2007)**
  - **Emotional Intelligence (Schutte *et al.*, 1998)**
  - **Empathy (Davis, 1983)**
  - **Burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1986)**

# 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**

**Sources of Emotional Support**



**\*particularly important for year 1 students ( $p < .05$ )**

# Predictors of Burnout

## **BURNOUT**

Less EIQ →

Less reflective  
ability:

Empathetic and self  
reflection →

Less emotional support →

Greater empathy →

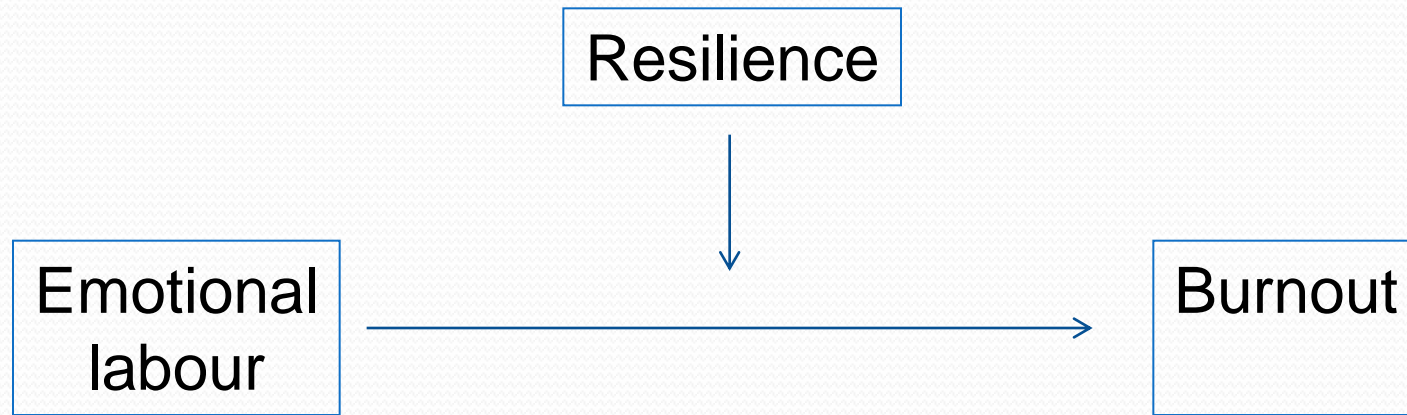
Resilience →

• **Emotional exhaustion**

• **Lack of personal accomplishment**

• **Depersonalisation**

# Protective nature of resilience



# 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?