

Stress, Self Compassion and Coping Mechanisms among Social Work Students

Gibimol Babu¹ and Jeslet T Mathai²

Abstract

Stress is a common feeling experienced by people throughout life and it is important to understand the way they cope with their stressors. Self-compassion entails being warm towards oneself when encountering pain and personal shortcomings, rather than ignoring them or hunting oneself with self-criticism. Coping means to invest one's own conscious effort, to solve personal and interpersonal problems, in order to try to master, minimize or tolerate stress and conflict. Self-compassion is an important intervention so through this research, researcher trying to understand the knowledge about self-compassion among the social work trainees. The present study implies us to understand the stress, self-compassion and coping mechanisms among social work students.

Key Words: Stress, Self compassion, Coping mechanisms, Social Work

Introduction

Human beings suffer from an extensive variety of daily stressful events, such as academic failure, social embarrassment, and traumatic events. Stress is defined as a state of threatened homeostasis that is induced by the internal or external environment, thereby threatening an individual's physical and

1. Gibimol Babu: Department of Social Work, Bishop Chuaparambil Memorial College, Kottayam, Email: jibibabu45@gmail.com

2. Jeslet T Mathai: Department of Social Work, Bishop Chuaparambil Memorial College, Email: jesleJoseph2020@gmail.com

mental health and further calling for restoration. Self-compassion has been increasingly recognized as a positive quality to facilitate mental well-being. Self-compassion is described as the disposition of accepting and caring for oneself, particularly as treating oneself with kindness and concern in adversity (Neff, 2003). During the process of self-compassion, individuals are encouraged to recognize related experiences to one and others with metacognitive activities. Social work students may experience many stressors that can affect their practice effectiveness and learning capabilities. Self-Compassion can be a coping strategy beneficial to students. Furthermore, self-compassion is an area that has not been explored with MSW students. This research study focused specifically on MSW students from Kerala.

Scope of social work

Social work in today's world has established itself as a significant full-fledged profession at par with any other profession. There is a great satisfaction in doing something for others, which cannot be equaled or compensated by any remunerative job. Even those working in full-time jobs want to do some social work in their spare time. Social work practice can take place at the micro, mezzo, or macro level. Micro social work is practice that concentrates on the individual and family levels. Macro social work is focused on driving change in community systems, institutions, and larger group units, commonly through government or other non-profit agencies. Mezzo social work is focused on groups that fall between the individual and the community, such as neighborhoods, task forces.

Fieldwork in social work education: Issues and challenges

Fieldwork component in Social Work is continuously supervised by Social Work educators and carries substantial weightage in the evaluation of student's performance in the programme. Students undergoing fieldwork may be placed in settings in which they are engaged in direct practice or indirect service provision. All student social workers are expected to develop certain competencies that are considered essential. These include the application of

the ethics of social work practice, the use of critical thinking to guide decision-making, the acceptance and understanding of diversity in practice, the advancement of social justice, the participation in the development of policies that impact social service provision and the engagement, assessment and intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities.

General structure of fieldwork

Social work training institutions generally use these forms of fieldwork in Kerala, namely exposure visits, concurrent, block, a combination of all three and in-service placements. A block fieldwork placement refers to a continuous full-time engagement of a social work student at a fieldwork agency for a period of 25-30 days. Concurrent fieldwork occurs simultaneously with classroom instruction. Typically, students spend two days in a week at the field agency and the remaining four days in the classroom.

Supervision

Learning through social work practicum takes place through regular and continuous facilitation. Usually the term employed is supervision. It is an integral and essential part and aims at developing core skills such as observation, listening and communication, intervention, relationship building, skills in fact finding, recording, analysis, administrative procedures, planning, organization, and implementation in students. At the social work schools, generally every student is placed with a faculty member such as a faculty supervisor and an agency supervisor, who is generally a trained social worker. The facilitation takes place through periodic individual and group conferences, scrutiny of the weekly reports; faculty visits to the agency and discussion with the agency supervisor/personnel. Guidance and support are inevitable in the process of the supervision.

Fieldwork presentation

Fieldwork gives a reality check to the students. At the end of each semester, the students have to present their fieldwork experiences generally before

the panel of teachers and agency supervisors. Students are expected to make presentations creatively using the different media. Field supervisors play the major role in the training of social workers. They are partners in the training process with responsibility to manage the transition from the classroom to the field and this requires support and continuous dialogue between the training institution, the agency supervisor and the agency. It is probably in recognition of this fact that the IASSW and IFSW spell out the need for training institutions to provide fieldwork manuals and orientation to agency supervisors. This enables them to appreciate the expectations of their role and also ensures that students are given optimum opportunity to develop professional knowledge and skill. Though the use of qualified and experienced supervisors is quite critical in any professional training, the supervision of students by non-social workers remains a common practice in Kerala. Some of the field supervisors even do not know the purpose of fieldwork.

Compassion fatigue among social work students in field placement

Compassion fatigue is a condition characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion leading to diminished ability to empathize or feel compassion for others, often described as the negative cost of caring. Individuals may experience compassion fatigue when they are exposed to others who are suffering and the emotional toll of the event expands to physical pain, according to Dr. Charles Figley, editor of *Compassion Fatigue: Coping With Secondary Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized*. Sometimes referred to as secondary or vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue results from physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion. Social workers are in regular contact with suffering and traumatized clients who have experienced negative life events such as child abuse, domestic violence, natural disasters, violent crime, accidents, and physical injury. The physical and emotional effect of chronic vicarious exposure to negative life events on helping professionals is an ongoing focus of research. Many studies confirm that those in the helping professions are at high risk of experiencing compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue can be considered an occupational hazard for social work practitioners. An in-

dividual's decision to enter the profession of social work often is motivated by empathetic concern and the desire to respond to people in need. It is well understood that empathy and the development of professional relationships with clients are necessary to develop a therapeutic alliance and deliver effective service.

Stress among students

Stress is the body's natural defense against predators and danger. It flushes the body with hormones to prepare systems to evade or confront danger. This is known as the "fight-or-flight" mechanism. In today's world of competition, stress has its roots deep into the society spreading its ill effects to the productive section of the society that is the students. Students or our youth in order to become something and attain an identity of their own thrive day and night to reach their goals and work hard as much as they can. This process even though might prove fruitful later on makes the students face a lot of tension which ultimately leads to stress. Social work students may experience many stressors that can affect their practice effectiveness and learning capabilities. Self-Compassion can be a coping strategy beneficial to students. Furthermore, self-compassion is an area that has not been explored with MSW students. Social Work students experience high levels of stress and without the appropriate resources to manage stress; their psychological well-being can be impacted. Thus, self-compassion can enable them to add another resource to their toolbox of healthy coping strategies.

This research study focused specifically on MSW students from Kerala. The current study pursued the following question: Is there a relationship between self-compassion and stress among graduate social work students in Kerala. The study can inform future assessments at the micro level if self-compassion helps MSW students cope better with stress. On a community-level, MSW students can introduce self-compassion to their clients and to the communities in general.

Methodology

The study aims to assess the stress, self-compassion and coping mechanisms among the social work students. Simple Random Sampling method was

used to get the sample from the population. Random sampling is the purest and the most straightward probability sampling strategy. In simple random sampling each member of population is equally likely to be chosen as part of the sample. The data is collected from social work students in Kerala. 100 samples were collected. The unit of this study is a social work student. The data is collected through standardize questionnaire. First 5 items were intended to understand socio demographic details of respondents. The rest 38 items were meant for exploring the self-compassion, stress, coping mechanisms among social work students.

Major findings

Based on the objectives of the study, the major findings of the research were summarized by using the table and graph. The data was processed with the support of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analyzing the data. The major findings of the study is presented below.

Demographic Details of the Respondents

Variables	Frequencies & Percentage
Age category	
25-30	9 (9%)
21-25	54 (54%)
18-21	37 (37%)
Education	
MSW	92 (92%)
BSW	8 (8%)
Domicile	
Rural	63 (63.0)
Urban	37 (37.0)

Table 1 shows the basic details of the respondents. Majority of respondents belongs to the category of 21- 25 and 37% of respondents are belongs to 18-21 and 9% of respondents based on 25-30 age category. Among the respondents 92% are MSW students and 8% are BSW. The table also shows 63% of respondents are belongs to rural family and 37% of respondents are belongs to urban family.

Perceived stress scale

Stress is a normal part of life. Understanding the amount of stress we are experiencing is vital in maintaining health and wellness. The Perceived stress scale (PSS) is a widely used stress assessment instrument designed to quickly evaluate how different situations affect our feeling and our perceived stress. The questions on this instrument ask about feelings and thoughts during last months. Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 ranging from with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress. Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress. Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress. Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress. Through this study researcher found that most the respondents have high perceived stress.

Self-compassion scale

A score of 1-2.5 indicates respondents are low in self-compassion, 2.5-3.5 indicates respondents have moderate self-compassion, and 3.5-5.0 indicates high. Through this study researcher understood that respondents have low self-compassion.

Coping mechanisms scale

Scores are presented for two coping styles. Avoidant coping is characterized by the subscales of substance use, behavioral disengagement, self-distraction, and self-blame. Approach coping is characterized is associated by the substances of active coping, acceptance, positive thinking and seeking informational support. In this study most of the respondents shows the ap-

proach coping style and approach coping style is shown to be more effective at managing stress.

Table 2
Correlation between stress level and self-compassion.

Stress level	Pearson Correlation	1	.384**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Self-compassion	Pearson Correlation	.384**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

The P Value of stress level and self- compassion is .000.A correlation of -1.0 shows a perfect negative correlation, a correlation of 0.0 shows no relationship between the movements of these two variables.

Table 3
Correlation between stress level and coping mechanism.

Stress level	Pearson Correlation	1	.379**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	100	100
Coping mechanism	Pearson Correlation	.379**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	100	100

The P. Value of stress level and coping mechanisms is .000.The value of stress level and coping mechanism are not correlated. A perfect correlation represented by the correlation coefficient value +1, while o indicates no correlation.

Table 4
ANOVA for finding the relation between self-compassion and coping mechanisms with stress

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Self-compassion	Between Groups	2352. 225	18	130. 679	4.055. 000
	Within Groups	2610. 525	81	32. 229	
	Total	4962. 750	99		
Coping mechanism	Between Groups	493. 368	18	27. 409	2.462. 003
	Within Groups	901. 632	81	11. 131	
	Total	1395. 000	99		

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to determine whether there is any statistically significant differences between the means of two or more independent groups. Researcher assumed that social work students in Kerala have self-compassion for reducing their stress but the study show that The P. value is .003 it is less than the value .05 so coping mechanisms has relation with the stress and self- compassion has no relation with the stress.

Suggestions

- Social workers need to improve their self-compassion then only social workers can use self-compassion as an intervention.
- Self-compassion enables us to reduce the stress by more effectively identifying and addressing our needs.
- Improve coping skills and reduce stress

Conclusion

In the present study, the researcher has made an attempt to study the stress, self-compassion and coping mechanisms among social work students in Ker-

ala. Self-compassion may be a valuable coping resource when people experience negative life events. People who are self-compassionate are less likely to catastrophize negative situations, experience anxiety following a stressor, and avoid challenging tasks for fear of failure. Research suggests that self-compassion can play an important role in the coping process. On the basis of the findings, analysis and interpretation of data collected through questionnaire conducted among the social work students has arrived the conclusion that social work students has lack of self-compassion and there is relationship between stress and coping mechanisms. Through the questionnaire the researcher has find out the relation between self-compassion and coping mechanisms.

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Educere-BCM Journal of Social Work (EBJSW), 16 (1), June 2020

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