

A Study on Psychological Distress and Stress Resilience of MSW students in Delhi NCR

OPEN ACCESS

Manuscript ID:
ASH-2022-10014959

Volume: 10

Issue: 1

Month: July

Year: 2022

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Received: 25.05.2022

Accepted: 18.06.2022

Published: 01.07.2022

Citation:

Vanita, Godara, and N. Ramya. "A Study on Psychological Distress and Stress Resilience of MSW Students in Delhi NCR." *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2022, pp. 60–66.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v10i1.4959>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Godara Vanita

Research Scholar, School of Social Work, Social Work Indira Gandhi Opern University,, New Delhi, India

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1554-3441>

N. Ramya

Assistant Professor, School of Social Work Social Work Indira Gandhi Opern University, New Delhi, India

Abstract

Aim: To find out the level of psychological distress and stress resilience and the relationship between psychological distress, stress resilience and background characteristics of MSW students in Delhi-NCR.

Method: The sample size is 297 (male-123 and female-174) by adopting non-probability purposive method. A survey among the Master of social work students (first year and second year) of four Universities in Delhi-NCR was carried out.

Result: The result shows overall medium level of psychological distress and stress resilience.

Conclusion: The dimensions of psychological distress and stress resilience are influenced by the background characteristics of the respondents. It shows that there is a need for the appropriate interventions particularly amongst the 1st Yearr MSW students and include components for effective stress management and stress resilience by introducing changes in curriculum.

Keywords: Psychological Distress, Stress Resilience, Stressors, Stress Symptoms, Background Characteristics

Introduction

Social workers like any other helping professionals, face traumatic and painful situations with respect to their clients that may lead to psychological distress while at the same time they have the duty to engage empathetically with the client (Thomas & Otis, 2010). This is also often experienced by Master of Social Work (MSW) students during their field placements which may lead to psychological distress and impact their academic and future professional life (Collins, Coffey, & Morris, 2010). Further, MSW students face high demand of complete professional conduct, strict adherence to code of ethics and values of social work and pressure associated with improving and honing essential skills required as a professional social worker during the exhaustive field work experience (Kinman and Grant, 2011). In addition, research indicates that social work students are likely to experience more psychological stress than those of traditional university students (Mathew, 2017). To deal effectively with psychological distress, it is important that the students develop resilience to the stress which act as a protective shield for reducing the adverse effects of stress especially in case of helping professions that work in challenging and traumatic environment (Heugten, 2011). However, few studies have been carried out with regard to stress in MSW students in Indian scenario (Stanley & Bhuvanewari, 2016) Therefore, an attempt has been made in this study to understand the level of psychological distress and stress resilience and also the relationship between distress and the background characteristics of Social Work students in Delhi NCR.

Review of Literature

Stress is the psychological, behavioural, emotional and physiological reaction (positive or negative) to an adverse situation which disturbs the equilibrium of an individual (Zastrow, 1984). The negative reaction is called as psychological distress which is the focus of this research (Hudd, et al., 2000). The overall response to psychological distress depends on the nature of the factor causing the stress, that is, stressors (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). In the field of social work education, Ying and Hans (2009); Harr, Brice, Riley and Moore, (2014); Mazumdar et. al. (2012); Wilson (2013) and Ying (2011) have identified various stressors such as unique nature of social work curriculum (a combination of theory and on field work); common course related concerns such as attendance, assignments and challenge of succeeding in course; field work related issues such as report writing, client related issues and compassion fatigue; future career concerns and personal family issues. In Indian scenario, Stanley and Bhuvanewari (2016) have highlighted unique factors related to social work students in India such as demands of optional subjects, less reflective practice in the course as compared to that taught in the West, focus on rote-learning and knowledge, field work placement issues and examinations related issues such as mid-term or end of semester examination rather than continuous assessment and the fear of failing in the exams. Heugten (2011) has stated that apart from stressors, individual differences such as perception of stressor, level of stress resilience, background characteristics such as age, gender etc. can also impact expression of distress. Collins (2015) have reported that unmanaged stress leads to exhaustion, absenteeism, non-performance in field training, lack of interest in studies and ultimately lack of development of skills to deal with challenging situations as a social work professional in social work students. Kinman & Grant (2011) have defined stress resilience as is a “complex and multi-faceted construct, referring to a person’s capacity to handle environmental difficulties, demands and high pressure without experiencing negative effects” and have emphasized stress resilience as “potential important resource for managing work-related stress in the context of

social care”. Bunce et. al. (2019) have highlighted that stress resilience improves physical and mental health and resilient individuals are able to balance a sense of control so as not to be burdened by the situations and consequently experience less impact of distress in stressful situations. Grant and Kinman (2012) have highlighted that stress resilience is predicted by individual factors such as background characteristics, self-coherence and self-confidence in MSW students.

Methodology

Objective: To assess the level of psychological distress and stress resilience in MSW students. **Methods and Materials:** During the year 2018, four Universities were offering MSW in Delhi NCR. 297 students who have enrolled in Masters of Social Work Programme were selected as respondents, during the year 2018, for the study. Thus, the sample respondents have been selected by using the non-Probability purposive sampling technique. To collect the data from the individual respondents the self-prepared questionnaire was administered by the researcher to collect the background characteristics of the respondents. Level of Psychological distress was assessed using General Health Questionnaire (GHQ 12) developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988) and level of resilience was assessed using Resilience scale developed by Wagnild and Young (1993).

Results and Discussion

In this study, the five major background characteristics of the respondents namely year of study, gender, age, nature of family and work experience were considered for assessing level of psychological distress and stress resilience. Among the 297 respondents, 147 respondents were from first year of MSW and the remaining 150 respondents were from second year comprising 123 (Male) and 174 (female) students. There were 102 and 195 respondents from joint and nuclear family respectively. There were 232 respondents with no previous or current work experience and 65 respondents with work experience. The age profile shows that 120, 134 and 43 respondents were from age group of 22 years and below (AG1), above 22

and below 25 years (AG2) and 25 years and above (AG3) category respectively. These background characteristics of the respondents were analyzed to assess the level of psychological distress and stress resilience by using standardized tools. Since the samples size of the selected five background characteristics were unequal and homogeneity of variances was violated, Mann-Whitney U for year of study, gender, family type and work experience and Kruskal-Wallis tests for age group were employed. Further, level of psychological distress was also assessed by analyzing the symptoms of distress and the results are given below:

Respondents' Background Characteristics and Psychological distress and Stress Resilience

In the present study, the level of psychological distress was measured using GHQ (12) which includes 12 questions related to expression of distress. Higher scores denoted higher levels of psychological distress faced by the respondents and lower scores represent higher levels of psychological well-being. For assessing the level of psychological distress and correlating with background characteristics the 'Likert' method of assessing the responses was used. Results based on Psychological distress level of Respondents across their background characteristics are provided in Table-1.

Table 1 Mean Score of Psychological Distress and Significant Differences Across Respondents' Background Characteristics

Background Characteristics of the Respondents		Psychological distress			Assessment of differences		
		Mean score (Total score 30)	Standard deviation	Category	Mean rank	Mann Whitney U/ Kruskal Wallis	p- value
Total sample		14.12	3.82	Mod	minimum score - 5 maximum score - 24		
Year of study	First	14.50	3.63	Mod	156.81	9877.50	0.120
	Second	13.76	3.98	Mod	141.35		
Gender	Male	14.59	3.57	Mod	161.04	9220.50	0.042
	Female	13.79	3.97	Mod	140.49		
Work Experience	Nil	14.71	3.77	Mod	161.93	4540.00	0.000
	Yes	12.05	3.28	Mod	102.85		
Family type	Nuclear	14.64	3.89	Mod	160.37	7728.50	0.002
	Joint	13.14	3.51	Mod	127.27		
Age group	AG-1	15.24	3.72	Mod	171.87	33.72	0.00
	AG-2	14.05	3.66	Mod	149.53		
	AG-3	11.23	3.06	Low	83.52		

*mod- moderate

For assessing stress resilience, a 25 item Resilience Scale developed by Wagnild and Young (1993) which focuses on the efficient adaptation to adverse situation and involves five components of equanimity, perseverance, self-reliance, meaningfulness and existential aloneness

consisting of two dimensions- personal competence and acceptance of self and life. Results of the mean score of stress resilience across the respondents' background characteristics have been given in Table-2.

Table 2 Mean Score of Stress Resilience and Significant Differences Across Respondents' Background Characteristics

Background Characteristics of the Respondents		Stress resilience			Assessment of differences		
		Mean score (Total score 175)	Stand ard deviation	Category	Mean rank	Mann Whiteny U/ Kruskal Wallis	p-value
Total sample		144.06	12.63	Mod	minimum score - 107 maximum score - 173		
Year of study	First	141.89	11.95	Mod	134.16	8843.50	0.003
	Second	146.19	12.95	High	163.54		
Gender	Male	142.13	12.80	Mod	135.65	9059.50	0.024
	Female	145.43	12.36	Mod	158.43		
Work Experience	Nil	142.97	12.55	Mod	141.53	5807.500	0.005
	Yes	147.95	12.22	High	175.65		
Family type	Nuclear	142.84	12.90	Mod	141.02	8389.00	0.027
	Joint	146.41	11.81	High	164.25		
Age group	AG-1	140.81	12.07	Mod	128.03	22.53	0.00
	AG-2	144.62	12.57	Mod	151.37		
	AG-3	151.42	11.15	High	200.15		

*mod- moderate

It is observed from Table-1 mean score of psychological distress for respondents of first year is slightly higher their second-year counterparts, however, the difference is not significant. As such, year of study is not found to be a significant background characteristic influencing level of psychological distress in MSW students in this research. Similar results have been found by Stanley and Bhuvanewari (2016) in their study on undergraduate social work students in which students of both first and, final year students reported similar level of psychological distress although reasons attributed were different for first year students (adjustment issues related to taking up a new course) and for final year students (stress related to final academic performance and also about future career prospects. It is found from the above analysis in Table-2 that the first year students have exhibited moderate level of stress resilience as compared to second year students who exhibit high level of stress resilience. Similar results have been obtained by Stanley and Bhuvanewari (2016) and Palma-García and Hombrados-Mendieta (2014) who reported gradual increase in resilience of students along with year of study.

It is also observed from Table 1 that the mean score of psychological distress for females is significantly lower as compared to their male counterparts and from Table-2 that the mean score of stress resilience for females is significantly higher as compared to their male counterparts. A study done by Kumari and Mishra (2014) in India exploring the role of gender in academic psychological distress and stress resilience in college students has also reported similar differences. Further, as observed from Table 1 and 2, age and work experience are significant background characteristics where psychological distress decreases and stress resilience increases with increase in age and in presence of work experience. Similar results have been obtained by Kinman and Grant (2011) and Bunce et.al. (2019) who have reported that all the social work students moving to next year or graduated or having work experience showed increase in their level of resilience and exhibited increased “personal competence, acceptance of self and life, perceived social support and experience of dealing with adverse situations”. From Table 1 and 2, it is observed that respondents belonging to nuclear family exhibit higher psychological distress and lower stress resilience as compared to their counterparts belonging to joint

family. Similar results have been reported by Gore et.al. (2019) where social support provided by joint family is reported to act an important coping strategy to distress.

Further, Spearman correlation coefficient was calculated for analysis of relation psychological distress and stress resilience. It was found that the correlation (coefficient value--0.0595 significant at 0.01 level of significance) is significant and negative indicating that level of psychological distress decreases with increase in stress resilience. Similar results have been found by Stanley and Bhuvanawari (2016), Bunce et. al. (2019) and Kinman and Grant (2011).

Symptoms of Psychological Distress

For analysis of symptoms of psychological distress in the respondents, the ‘caseness’ method denoting presence or absence of a symptom in GHQ 12 has been used which allows researchers to detect the percentage of a sample group that meets the threshold for ‘caseness’ levels of psychological distress, (where some degree of intervention is recommended). Results of the assessment of symptoms of stress and percentage of students exhibiting each symptom have been given in Table-3 and Table-4 respectively

Table 3 Analysis of Symptoms of Psychological Distress in the Respondents

Number of symptoms shown	Number of students	% of students
Zero	20	7
One to two	94	32
Three	43	14
Four	48	16
Five to seven	81	27
Eight to nine	30	10
Ten or eleven	4	1
All	0	0

It is observed from Table-3 that 7 percent of respondents do not show any symptom and rest of the students show one or more symptom and none of the students show all symptoms. Also, 55 per cent of respondents show four or more symptom which indicates caseness as proposed by Mullarkey

et al (1999). In Indian scenario, Collins, Coffrey and Morrison (2010) used same psychological distress scale and reported that nearly 94 per cent of respondents (under graduate social work students) show more than four symptoms which is significantly more than findings of this research.

Table 4 Percentage of Respondents Exhibiting Symptoms of Distress

Symptom of distress	% of respondents
Not been able to enjoy normal day-to-day activities	46
Felt couldn’t overcome difficulties	43
Felt constantly under strain	38
Not been able to face up to problems	36
Lost much sleep over worry	36
Been losing confidence in self	36
Not been able to concentrate on the task	33
Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person	32
Been feeling unhappy and depressed	28
Not feeling a useful part in things	23
Not feeling capable of making decisions about things	20
Not feeling reasonably happy, all things considered	16

From Table-4, it is observed that main symptoms experienced by the respondents include inability to enjoy normal day-to-day activities; inability to overcome difficulties, constantly under strain, not been able to face up to problems and losing self-confidence, concentration and sleep over worry. This shows that there is significant prevalence of symptoms of psychological distress in the respondents. Kumaraswamy (2013) also listed similar symptoms of anxiety, loss of confidence and self-worth, inability to concentrate on task and being generally worried.

Stressors in Respondents

For analysis of psychological distress in MSW students, it is important to identify the main factors

causing stress (Ying, 2011). In this study, for assessment of stressors in respondents, an open-ended question was included asking respondents to list main stressors. The results show that students identified main academic and non-academic stressors. Among academic factors, majority of the respondents have listed preparation of field reports, exhaustive field experience or field placement or client problems and lack of proper supervision as major stressors. For non-academic factors, majority of respondents (those residing in hostel) have listed being away from family as a major factor of psychological distress. Some respondents have also listed the problem of transportation and family issues as a factor causing psychological distress. Similar results were obtained by Ying and Hans (2009); Harr et. al., (2014); Mazumdar et. al. (2012); Wilson (2013) and Ying (2011)

Conclusion

The results show that the respondents have moderate levels of psychological distress and stress resilience. However, the respondents of first year have exhibited less stress resilience as compared to second year. Further, it has been proved from the Mann-Whitney U test, female respondents, respondents belonging to joint family and respondents with work experience show lower level of psychological distress and higher level of stress resilience. Similarly, Kruskal- Wallis test have proved that there is a significant difference in level of psychological distress and stress resilience across the various age groups with psychological distress decreasing and stress resilience increasing with increase in age. Further, analysis of symptoms of psychological distress shows ‘caseness’ of psychological distress in the respondents indicating that the moderate level of psychological distress. Also, the correlation analysis show that psychological distress decreases with increase in stress resilience. Therefore, there is a need for the appropriate interventions amongst the 1st year MSW students for effective stress management and stress resilience and also there is need to incorporate suitable changes in the curriculum focusing on resilience and stress management.

References

- Bunce, L., et al. “Emotional Intelligence and Self-Determined Behaviour Reduce Psychological Distress: Interactions with Resilience in Social Work Students in the UK.” *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 49, no. 8, 2019.
- Carver, Charles S., and Jennifer Connor-Smith. “Personality and Coping.” *Annual Review of Psychology*, vol. 61, 2010, pp. 679-704.
- Collins, Stewart, et al. “Social Work Students: Stress, Support and Well-Being.” *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 40, 2010, pp. 963-82.
- Collins, Stewart. “Alternative Psychological Approaches for Social Workers and Social Work Students Dealing with Stress in the UK: Sense of Coherence, Challenge Appraisals, Self-Efficacy and Sense of Control.” *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2015, pp. 69-85.
- Goldberg, David, and Paul Williams. *A Users Guide to the General Health Questionnaire*. NFER-Nelson, 1988.
- Gore, Alka D., et al. “A Comparative Study of Emotional Intelligence and Stress, Depression, Anxiety between Medical and Engineering Students.” *International Journal of Health Sciences & Research*, vol. 9, no. 6, 2019.
- Grant, Louise, and Gail Kinman. “Enhancing Wellbeing in Social Work Students: Building Resilience in the Next Generation.” *Social Work Education*, vol. 31, no. 5, 2012, pp. 605-21.
- Harr, Cynthia Rae, et al. “The Impact of Compassion Fatigue and Compassion Satisfaction on Social Work Students.” *Journal of the Society for Social Work & Research*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2014, pp. 233-51.
- Heugten, Kate van. *Social Work Under Pressure: How to Overcome Stress, Fatigue and Burnout in the Workplace*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011.
- Hudd, Suzanne, et al. “Stress at College: Effects on Health Habits, Health Status and Self Esteem.” *College Student Journal*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2000, pp. 213-38.
- Kinman, Gail, and Louise Grant. “Exploring Stress Resilience in Trainee Social Workers: The

- Role of Emotional and Social Competencies.” *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 41, 2011, pp. 261-75.
- Kumaraswamy, Narasappa. “Academic Stress, Anxiety and Depression among College Students- A Brief Review.” *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2013, pp. 135-43.
- Kumari, Mamta, and Sunita Mishra. “Mental Stress of College Students across Gender.” *Advanced Research Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2014, pp. 180-83.
- Mathew, C.P. “Stress and Coping Strategies among College Students.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 22, no. 8, 2017, pp. 40-44.
- Mazumdar, Harajyoti, et al. “A Comparative Study on Stress and its Contributing Factors among the Graduate and Post-Graduate Students.” *Advances in Applied Science Research*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2012, pp. 399-406.
- Mullarkey, Sean, et al. *Measures of Job Satisfaction, Mental Health and Job-Related Well-Being: A Bench-Marking Manual*. University of Sheffield, 1999.
- Palma-Garcia, Maria de las Olas, and Isabel Hombrados-Mendieta. “The Development of Resilience in Social Work Students and Professionals.” *Journal of Social Work*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2014, pp. 380-97.
- Stanley, Selwyn, and G. Bhuvanewari. “Stress, Anxiety, Resilience and Coping in Social Work Students (A Study from India).” *Social Work Education: The International Journal*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2016, pp. 78-88.
- Wagnild, G.M., and H.M. Young. “Development and Psychometric Evaluation of the Resilience Scale.” *Journal of Nursing Measurement*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1993, pp. 165-78.
- Wilson, George. “Evidencing Reflective Practice in Social Work Education: Theoretical Uncertainties and Practical Challenges.” *The British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2013, pp. 154-72.
- Ying, Yu-Wen, and Meekyung Han. “Stress and Coping with a Professional Challenge in Entering Masters of Social Work Students: The Role of Self-Compassion.” *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2009, pp. 263-83.
- Ying, Yu-Wen. “The Effect of Educational Disequilibrium in Field Work on Graduate Social Work Students’ Self-Concept and Mental Health.” *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2011, pp. 278-94.
- Zastrow, Charles. “Understanding and Preventing Burn-out.” *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1984, pp. 141-55.

Author Details

Godara Vanita, Research Scholar, School of Social Work, Indira Gandhi Open University, New Delhi, India
Email ID: vanita.godara@gmail.com

Ramya N, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work, Social Work, Indira Gandhi Open University, New Delhi, India
Email ID: ramya@ignou.ac.in