

**INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**

**A STUDY ON STRESS, ITS IMPACT AND EMOTIONAL WELL BEING OF SOCIAL
WORK STUDENTS: STRESS MANAGEMNT GUIDELINNES TO FUTURE STUDENTS**

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**A Study on Stress, its impact and emotional well being of social
work students: Stress Management Guidelines to Future Students**

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**A Thesis Submitted to Indira Gandhi National Open University School of
Social Work in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for The Degree of
Master in Social Work (MSW)**

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled *A Study on Stress, its impact and emotional well being of social work students: Stress Management Guidelines to Future Students* submitted by me for the partial fulfillment of the MSW to Indira Gandhi National Open University,(IGNOU) New Delhi is my own original work and has not been submitted earlier, either to IGNOU or to any other institution for the fulfillment of the requirement for any other programme of study. I also declare that no chapter of this manuscript in whole or in part is lifted and incorporated in this report from any earlier work done by me or others.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Miss. Fedayit Abebe Kahsai, student of MSW from Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi was working under my supervision and guidance for her Project work for the course MSWP-001. Her Project Work entitled *A Study on Stress, its impact and emotional well being of social work students: Stress Management Guidelines to Future Students* which she is submitting, is her genuine and original work.

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Abstract

There is a lack of direction and suggestions passed down from recent Social Work graduates to current Social Work graduate students in regards to managing stress in graduate school. There is sufficient amount of data regarding the causes of stress on Social Work graduate students; however, there were no studies that investigated the impact of stressors related to the poor economy. Given the various stressors experienced by Social Work graduate students such as balancing work schedules, field placements, class load, and personal factors, it would be beneficial to also analyze what impact, if any, the economy has had on stress levels among graduate level Social Work students and what interventions can be developed to address this issue.

The population for this study was social workers that graduated in the last five years from an accredited university program IGNOU Saint Mary University. In order to participate in this study the participants needed to meet the criteria noted above. A total of 14 MSW graduates aged between 25 to 48 participated in this study.

My findings contribute to the Social Work Department and future students in regards to identifying the types of stressors they may encounter and coping methods to address these stressors. Based on the responses provided by the research participants, the top stressors while completing the MSW program were reported as follows: balancing coursework, internship, thesis/project, and work responsibilities, personal problems (i.e. divorce, living far from home)/lack of social support, financial problems, lack of preparation for work and internship, and health problems. The advice provided to current and future students from recent graduates in regards to how to cope with stressors related to the MSW program were as follows: balance of work and play, maintain social life, vent to supportive people, self-care, maintaining perspective, maintain peer and family relationships, and stay organized.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Graduate students are especially susceptible to stress and anxiety during their educational career given the pressures of balancing multiple roles. While at times stress can be motivating, stress can also have a negative impact on students when it becomes overwhelming and serves as a barrier to reaching goals and hinders their ability to function to their greatest potential. Social Work graduate students in particular tend to experience higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to other programs, given the added responsibility of professional fieldwork (Ngal & Cheung, 2009; Wilks, 2008; Moran & Hughes, 2006; Collins, 2006; Collins, et al., 2010; Tobin & Carson, 1994).

Multiple studies offer data regarding stress experienced by Social Work graduate students and solutions to reduce stress and anxiety levels during their educational career. However, there has not been a study on the influence that the recent situation of the Ethiopian economy has had on Social Work graduate students' stress levels and morale, given the added pressure of facing a job market with dwindling prospects. This study aims to analyze the factors that contribute to stress experienced by Social Work graduate students as perceived retrospectively by recent graduates with the goal of providing future students with solutions to better manage stressors during their educational career.

1.1. Background of the study

For most, pursuing higher education involves dedication and acceptance of the stress and anxiety posed by the challenges of being a student. For students of Social Work there is typically the added responsibility of professional fieldwork, which can be equally stressful as it is rewarding and educational. In a review of the literature related to stress among social work students, it is consistently acknowledged that students of social work struggle to balance the responsibilities of their multiple roles that come from being an employee, a member of a family, and even a friend

(Ngal & Cheung, 2009; Wilks, 2008; Moran & Hughes, 2006; Collins, 2006; Collins, et al., 2010; Tobin & Carson, 1994).

A review of the literature regarding stress levels among Social Work graduates suggested that, when left unaddressed, stress can manifest in more serious symptoms beyond low morale. Of particular concern was data from a recent study, which suggests that 34% of Social Work students reported high levels of depressive symptoms, 12% had a history of suicidal ideation, and 4% reported having recent thoughts about suicide (Horton, Diaz & Green, 2009). Students of social work are also at risk of experiencing vicarious traumatization as they enter their professional internships, ill prepared to cope with exposure to situations which can have a lasting negative impression. It is the goal of this research study to better understand the experience of Social Work graduate students in order to use their experience and suggestions to develop solutions towards effective stress reduction and to strengthen coping skills for future graduate students.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of direction and suggestions passed down from recent Social Work graduates to current Social Work graduate students in regards to managing stress in graduate school. There is sufficient amount of data regarding the causes of stress on Social Work graduate students; however, there were no studies that investigated the impact of stressors related to the poor economy, such as dwindling career opportunities, Given the various stressors experienced by Social Work graduate students such as balancing work schedules, field placements, class load, and personal factors, it would be beneficial to also analyze what impact, if any, the economy has had on stress levels among graduate level Social Work students and what interventions can be developed to address this issue.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the sources of stress experienced during the graduate social work program from the perspective of recent social work graduates and their opinion of effective stress relieving interventions. The secondary objective of this study is to help future social work graduate students with their stress by providing coping techniques suggested by

the recent graduates along with how to deal with the current the stressors related to the economy (high cost of living).

1.4 Significance of the study

The researcher hope that this Project will benefit future social work students by providing analysis of the experience from recent social work graduates who have experienced similar stressors related to their academic program. It will normalize the academic stress and allow future social work students to utilize the advice from former students as a coping skill

1.5 Scope of the study

Some of the limitations of this study include: demographics, such as all of the participants being residents of Addis Ababa. Secondly, the research is a qualitative study that limits the data to 10-15 participants. Thirdly, students are all graduates from a SW program of an accredited university and have obtained their MSW within the five years. Results may not apply to all social work graduate students of other universities. Answers are limited to the participant's individual understanding and interpretation of their stress and the data is limited to the information that the participant is willing to divulge.

1.6 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are utilized in the work and are defined as follows:

Stress: "A physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes bodily tension and may be a factor in disease causation or a state resulting from a stress; especially one of bodily or mental tension resulting from factors that tend to alter an existent equilibrium" (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

Stressor: "A stimulus that causes stress" (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

Coping: "To deal with and attempt to overcome problems and difficulties.

Thesis: The California State University Education Code defines a thesis as the written product of a systematic study of a significant problem. It identifies the problem, states the major

assumptions, explains the significance of the undertaking, sets forth the sources for and methods of gathering information, analyze the data, and offers a conclusion or recommendation. The finished project (product) evidences originality, critical and independent thinking, appropriate organization and format, and thorough documentation” (Title V Section 40510).

Qualitative: “The process of data collection is open-ended and allows clients to express their reality and experience. In the assessment and evaluation process the goal is to explore the individuals (or families or groups) experience, frame of reference, beliefs, values, and cultural realities. In essence, the client is considered to be the key informant or expert regarding his or her problem and the desire to change” (Hepworth et al, 2010, p. 338).

Burnout: “A syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity” (Ying, 2009).

Self-care: “Means to enhance mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being” (Ying, 2009).

Suicide: “The act or an instance of taking one’s own life voluntarily and intentionally especially by a person of years of discretion and of sound mind” (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

Eating Disorders: “Any of several psychosocial disorders (as anorexia nervosa or bulimia) characterized by serious disturbances of eating behavior” (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

1.7 Assumptions

The premises upon which researcher base her logical assumptions: 1) The participants experienced stress during their academic career; 2) The participants experienced stress related to personal life events; 3) Depending on their interpretation of their stress levels, they utilize the coping skills they developed; 4) The participants chose what coping skill to utilize depending on the source of stress; 5) The economy(high cost of living and housing problem) has been an added stress on top of the common personal and academic stressors experienced by the participants.

Chapter 2

2. .Review of Related literature

2.1. Stress Themes

2.1.1 Work schedules

The growing scarcity of jobs, there is some literature focused on the prevalence of social work students that have chosen to keep working while completing their program and the impact this has on their academic performance and on their psyche. The general consensus concluded that employment, whether part-time or full-time, has a negative impact on the social work student's academic performance (Cheung & Tang, 2009; Collins, Coffey & Morris, 2010; Munson, 1987). One study found that 72 percent of younger bachelor of social work students (BSW) and 62 percent of older BSW students had challenges balancing their student and work responsibilities and that students working part-time with a full course load were typical for the sample that was surveyed (Hawkins, Smith, Hawkins II & Grant, 2005). In response to the existing research regarding the significant impact of employment on a student's academic performance, this study plans to explore solutions to address this pertinent issue.

2.1.2 Field Placements

In addition to stressors originating from employment, students may also experience anxiety that is distinct in comparison to other programs, especially when considering that social work students typically balance their academic work with their fieldwork (Ngal & Cheung, 2009; Wilks, 2008; Moran & Hughes, 2006; Collins, 2006; Collins, et al., 2010; Tobin & Carson, 1994). Although an education that combines schoolwork with fieldwork provides a holistic experience for the social work student, it is important to prepare the student for the realities of fieldwork and the influence it can have on them emotionally. The research has found that professional education programs that combine academic and professional instruction, such as nursing and social work, tend to evoke more stress than traditional educational programs (Collins, 2006; Collins, et al., 2010). Another study found that social work students might

experience higher levels of stress in their educational career than in their career as a social worker, is attributed in part to learning to cope with stressors associated with professional placement (Wilks, 2008).

Maidment (2003) discusses the stress levels of students in field placements, noting that students stress levels are high when they do not have a set of clear expectations and role clarification, when there is a problem in the relationship between supervisor and student, and when field does not integrate practice and theory. Therefore, it is suggested, that students are prepared in their programs to set realistic expectations in the field to be exposed to both the positive and negative aspects of field placement. Overall, stress levels are reduced and students respond well when they have regular feedback and when they have good role models in their field placements.

2.1.3 Class Load

Several studies found that a large number of social work students experience anxiety in regards to completion of courses related to research (Ying, 2009; Ying, 2008; Davis, 2003). One study in particular that surveyed 41 MSW students asserts that because social work students have a “propensity toward humanistic values and social interaction”, they have a tendency to experience stress and anxiety in taking a course related to mathematical computations (Davis, 2003).

Green et al’s (2001) study discusses the stress of MSW students when it comes to research and computer anxiety. MSW students generally have this belief compared to psychology and business students that research is less important to their profession, therefore, while in those classes they report higher levels of stress and anxiety.

2.1.4 Personality Types

In a study regarding idealism among social work students, it was found that students tending towards idealism reported higher levels of emotional exhaustion (Ngai & Cheung, 2009). It was found that the causes of emotional exhaustion were derived from a gap between the social work student’s expectation of fieldwork and the reality of their actual experience (Ngai & Cheung, 2009).

Multiple studies found that students that had experience in volunteer work were found to report lower levels of stress in regards to their field placement and noted increased competence (Cheung & Tang, 2009; Collins, et al., 2010; Rompf, Royse & Dhooper, 1993). Similarly, an early study suggests that in regards to reducing risk factors of burnout, experience outweighed age (Rompf, et al., 1993). The study contends that those students that had prior experience in volunteer work or even part-time summer jobs were better prepared and more confident in beginning their internship (Rompf, et al., 1993).

Carvalho et al (2009) discusses student's levels of stress in correlation to their locus of control. They found that students with very high levels of severe stress associate their stress levels to chance, where as students with mild or moderate stress levels do not associate too much of their stress to chance.

One recent study of 37 entering and 28 graduating masters of social work students found that students in their last semester reported lower self esteem and sense of coherence and poorer mental health than incoming first year students (Ying, 2008). The study asserts that as students progressed in the program they became less mindful, which had a direct negative impact on the student's sense of competence and caused stress. This points to why many universities recently began educating students on the practice and value of mindfulness and spirituality as a resource when faced with stressors (Csiernik & Adams, 2003).

2.1.5 Personal Factors

Negga's (et al 2007) study of college students and stress levels reports that the top five stressors for students while they were enrolled in college were death of a family member, getting low grades, time management, intimate relationships problems, and missing class. In addition, there was a correlation between students stress levels and their self-esteem and social support. Students with high self-esteem have lower academic and life stress. It was also found that stress levels lowered cognitive abilities and immune systems. Some of their recommendations to reduce stress levels for students were tutorial sessions, mentoring between peers and faculty, counseling for interpersonal and intrapersonal issues, and academic counseling in order to help students determine their academic strengths and weaknesses.

2.1.6 Gender Roles

Role strain is discussed in an earlier study conducted by Mallinckrodt & Leong (1992), who investigated the influence of social support on graduate students and questioned if there was a difference between men and women in regards to role conflict. The study found that female graduate students were more likely to experience role conflict than their male counterparts. The study suggests that women are traditionally expected to not only take on more responsibility, like work and school, while maintaining their other duties as mother and wife, but they also have the added stress of the “superwoman syndrome”, with the expectation that she excel at all of her duties (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). In response to the existing research regarding the significant impact of role strain on a student’s psyche, this study plans to explore solutions to address this pertinent issue.

2.2 Risk Factors

2.2.1 Suicide

A recent study of social work students found that 34 percent reported high levels of depressive symptoms, 12 percent had a history of suicidal ideation, and 4 percent reported having recent thoughts about suicide (Horton, Diaz & Green, 2009). These statistics are particularly concerning given that students are working with vulnerable clients that seek support and resources. Given the level of stress that a social work student might experience during the program, some studies call for social work programs to take on the responsibility of monitoring their students’ mental health, especially when commencing fieldwork. One study even recommends for the selection process of social work programs to be more meticulous in an attempt to weed out applicants that may not have the capacity to cope with the all too often emotionally exhausting nature of the social work profession (Collins, 2006). This could be complicated given that the program would want to avoid discriminating against those students living with mental health disabilities. Additionally, students might not be open to sharing their mental health concerns with the school or field staff for fear that they may be judged as being incapable of helping others.

Ugurlu and Ona (2009) studied the “Relationship Between the Stress-Coping Levels of University Students and Their Probability of Committing Suicide.” Their study showed many correlations to suicide. For example, males are more likely to commit suicide where as females are more likely to attempt suicide. This study also found that students with mothers with high rates of illiteracy had the worst stress coping techniques where as students with highly educated mothers had much better and healthier stress coping methods. Being raised with one parent also contributes to students’ likelihood to attempt suicide. Students from split families or single parent households also have a higher likelihood of attempting suicide because of their high stress levels. Single parent households is attributed to having no social support for students therefore, feelings of loneliness and not being able to cope with stress is more prominent. Students who had other family members attempt or commit suicide have a greater chance of trying and or succeeding at committing suicide themselves. Finally, one other factor that contributes to the level of suicide attempts is the college department the student is enrolled in and how satisfied they are with their department (Ugurlu & Ona, 2009).

2.2.2 Eating Disorders

Another high risk factor and theme found with students experiencing stress was eating disturbances or disorders. For example, Wichianson’s study (et al 2009) looks at the stress levels of students and their coping methods such as night-eating. Over 60 percent of college students report experiencing either high or very high levels of stress and therefore turn to alcohol. They report depressive symptoms including anxiety and problem eating behaviors. It has been found that perceived high levels of stress have a positive relationship with problem eating or eating disorders. Maladaptive coping was a mediator to problem eating in students who perceived high levels of stress and adaptive coping was a moderator for it.

Furthermore, Meyer (2005) discusses that women with healthier help seeking behaviors tend to seek help for their eating disorders compared to those who do not believe that their symptoms require treatment. Overall, positive help seeking behaviors tend to benefit students who are stressed and have eating problems related to stress. This research suggests that students might not seek help or treatments because societal stigma or the lack of available resources.

2.3 Possible Stress Prevention Strategies

2.3.1 Mental Health Screening and Support

DiRamio and Payne (2007) discuss how campus programs are related to self-efficacy, stress and substance abuse. When current students mental health screenings are compared to 10 years ago more are getting screened for anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, grief issues, sexual abuse, and other even more severe disorders such as bipolar and schizophrenia disorders. Studies show that when students are mentally healthy they achieve higher academic status and give back more to their schools and communities. These authors suggest using a more proactive approach to mental health on college campuses such as student affairs setting up programs to help college students with the problems that they are facing.

Social support can provide sufficient stress relief for some students, however others might require professional help to tackle complicated emotions that surface in the course of a social work program. One study recommends for programs to provide individual and group counseling for students as needed and contends that programs need “..To consider risk and to be mindful of the risk of exposing users/clients to students or workers who have no fully resolved their own difficulties” (Collins, 2006, p451). It is argued that when a student struggles with complicated emotions that are left unaddressed they are not only putting themselves at risk of emotional exhaustion, but they are also doing a disservice to the client as the focus would be some where other than the client’s needs. Mental health screenings would be a beneficial tool to reduce incidences of vicarious trauma and evaluate the student’s ability to cope before exposing them to vulnerable clients.

2.3.2 Emotional Preparedness

Some of the literature regarding stress among social work students focuses on solutions that have been developed to address this prevalent issue. One study found that a pilot seminar educating students on stress and burnout prevention was beneficial to social work students in that they were better prepared and more confident in dealing with challenging situations given

the tools and coping skills they learned in the seminar (Dziegielewski, Roest-Marti & Turnage, 2004). Another study found that something as basic as the use of humor served to enhance coping skills among social work students (Moran & Hughes, 2006).

Segrin (et al 2007) discusses the importance of social skills and one's psychological well-being. Good social skills or communication is associated with having lower experiences of stress because they tend to have higher self-esteem. Poor social skills result in psychological problems such as higher levels of loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Those with good social skills tend to have a better understanding of how to deal with problems more effectively and learn from their past success or mistakes. This again has a positive result because they feel more adequate and have higher self-confidence. Those with good social skills have lower perceived stress, which helps students have lower levels of depression.

Finally, a theme in the literature regarding stress among social work students is the risk of vicarious traumatization. In fieldwork there is a high probability for a student to be exposed to a client that has experienced a traumatic event that has led them to seek resources. If a student is not prepared to handle the impact this encounter can have on their psyche they may put themselves at risk of absorbing the client's trauma vicariously. One study suggests that students are also at risk of vicarious traumatization in the classroom, given the amount of exposure to graphic case samples presented in class through presentations and class discussions (Cunningham, 2004). An understanding of these factors points to the need to prepare students and provide sufficient support throughout their duration of the program, which is what we intend to do with our study.

2.3.3 Social Support

The most common and main theme in regards to prevention of stress among social work students is the support of family, friends, school/field staff, and peers. There was an overall consensus that social support serves as a vital tool for the student to decompress and vent about challenges experienced in their academic career. One study that specifically looked at reliance among social work students found that there was a positive correlation between a student's support system and their capacity for resilience (Wilks, 2008). Another study notes that in workplaces where there is a high level of stress, especially in regards to dealing with

clients, social support among peers served to dilute the stressors (Moran & Hughes, 2006). In a study of 50 MSW students it was found that social support protected against emotional exhaustion (Yang, 2008).

Moreover, Redmond et al (2008) identifies the attitudes, perceptions, and concerns of social work students. Some of the stressors mentioned by students are stressful work environments, lack of resources, and lack of support. Students satisfaction levels are raised when they are acknowledged for their job roles, have a good supervisor, and colleague support. Students also tend to pick certain social work careers based on their perceptions of levels of autonomy, flexibility, challenge and status. For example, child protective and welfare services are seen as stressful areas to work in, therefore, many are drawn to private practice. However, as social work students become acquainted with these areas the more their stress levels decrease. This study suggests that social work students' stress levels change as their perceptions change over time especially when it's related to work and different social work arenas.

There has been much research conducted on the stress levels and coping strategies of college students. Academia adds tremendous stress to people's lives. Students experience stress in different ways. MacGeorge et al (2005) discuss how academic stress is related to depression and physical illness. This study showed positive correlation between academic stress, depression and physical illness. They found that supportive communication and emotional support were associated with lower depression levels. Their study suggests that through supportive communication, whether or not it's emotional support from others or active listening from their social network, helps lower depression levels and overall reduces physical illnesses.

In addition to stress levels being reduced by support networks, Prouty et al (2002) discuss how important supportive friends and family are to college women who have eating disorder issues. They also discuss the importance of colleges having interdisciplinary teams to address all kinds of mental health issues, including eating disorders. They suggest that when resources are available women are more likely to turn to them for support. Women in the study reported that they would benefit from individual assistance when it comes to their needs. They also report that their social network is the number one place they would turn to, for example starting with their close friends, parents, and then significant others. These are all things for friends, families, and college administrators to remember when it comes to

providing support for college students, especially those who are struggling with stress, mental health, or eating disorders.

Kling et al (2008) studied the relationship between perceived family support and coping effectiveness in premedical students. The results showed that family support has a strong impact in the way students were able to cope with academic stress. Students gain more confidence in their academic career with family support. This study shows that family support is one of the best resources for a student to have and it helps them cope and overcome academic challenges.

Ye's (2006) article discusses the importance of social support networks and how they help to lower levels of depression, hopelessness, and even suicidal ideations among students. Students with a good social support networks are better able to cope with stress. Ye discusses two types of support: informational support and emotional support. Informational support refers to the advice or guidance given to someone regarding his or her questions or problems. Emotional support is when someone receives verbal or nonverbal caring support regarding their situation or problem. In this study Ye found that women are more satisfied with their support networks than men. Also, students who had used social networks perceived less stress than those who did not have any informational or emotional support.

Laurence et al (2009) offer statistics regarding college students stress levels. For instance, 19 percent of students report depressive symptoms and 15 percent report that their depression symptoms affect their academic performance. Also, about 1/3 of college students state that stress has in one way or another effected their academic performance. In another survey with just graduate students, 25 percent reported having depressive symptoms. Furthermore, they found that students with these stress levels benefit from social support. Even though their study focused on dental students, all the statistics were for undergraduate and graduate students from different disciplines. It can be concluded from the studies discussed that social support might be the main ingredient for reducing stress levels among college students especially graduate students.

Lin's (2009) study also focused on the effects of social support on college student's stress levels. They looked at students who had social support from kin such as parents and relatives and non-kin such as friends, classmates, and teachers. Once again this study also found that the Chinese college students in Taiwan had less stress and their stress levels were alleviated

because of their social support. In an earlier study regarding student's preference of support, formal vs. informal, it was found that even when formal support was readily available to students, there was an overwhelming preference towards informal support from friends and family. The study found that while 70-95 percent of students sought informal support from family and friends, only 7-15 percent sought support from a therapist or a clergyman (Robbins & Tanck, 1994).

Although there was an overwhelming amount of literature noting the positive influence social support has on a student's psyche and academic performance, one study notes that not all social relationships are supportive and some may even be harmful. This study contends that the student obtains the greatest positive influence from positive social support when there is an absence of negative relationships in their lives (Edwards, Hershberger, Russell & Markert, 2001). This research study plans to further explore the influence of positive and negative relationships on a student's academic performance and psyche.

In reviewing the literature regarding the importance of social support for social work students it is evident that a positive relationship with the practice instructor is highly beneficial to the student (Collins, et al., 2010; Koeske & Koeske, 1991; Munson, 1987). One study found that when a student considered their relationship with faculty as supportive they were less likely to experience burnout and were less likely to consider quitting school (Koeke & Koeke, 1991). In this research study, the intent is to better understand the valuable elements of faculty support that help to reduce anxiety and stress among students.

Although a positive relationship with a field instructor can be beneficial for some social work students, others might not feel comfortable being open with their instructor about challenges they are facing in their practice for fear that they will be perceived as less capable. A review of a pilot student mentoring program found that students were open to addressing concerns and issues that they were experiencing with the peer mentor without worry that doing so would have an adverse impact on their assessment (Topping, McCowan & McCrae, 1998). Additionally, the study found that the interaction with the peer mentors lead to lower levels of stress about the field practice in that the mentor provided realistic advice on what the student should expect in their placement. Students reported higher levels of confidence in starting their internship with the support of their peer mentor noting that the mentor served as a model

of one that was able to endure through the program successfully (Topping, McCowan & McCrae, 1998).

2.3.4 Spirituality

When researching solutions to reduce stress among social work students, spirituality is frequently mentioned. As noted earlier, spirituality is a technique becoming steadily popular in the social work field and classroom, and has proven to be beneficial in not only reducing stress but also in enhancing coping skills. One study that interviewed 66 entering MSW students found that a student's practice of self-compassion served as better stress relief and greater satisfaction than a student's association with their religion or spirituality (Ying & Han, 2009). This research study plans to explore specific elements of self-care and spirituality that students have found beneficial to alleviating stress and/or anxiety.

Calicchia and Graham also discuss the importance of social support and effective coping strategies for college students and their well-being. The areas of stress for graduate students are home, work, children, and negative life events. Graduate students who have social support report lower physiological and physical stress symptoms. This study focuses on spirituality as a support and found that those students who report higher levels of religiosity and spirituality have better ability to cope with stress, however, existential well-being was the most significant when it came to measuring stress scales and its relationship to well being.

Moreover, Ayalon and Young's (2005) study focuses on the differences between African-American and Anglo-Saxon student's and their help seeking differences. Their study found that 24 percent of African American and 30 percent of Anglo students report as high stress levels as outpatient psychiatric patients. Both groups also report that they have used psychological or social services in the past year, with Anglo students utilizing those services more than African-American students. However, the difference was that 87.1 percent of African-American students reported that they used religious services as a coping tool where as 74.2 percent of Anglo students reported using religious services as a coping tool. There were no real differences for their use of medical, emergency, clergy, and psychiatric resources, but the main finding was that African-American students used religious services more frequently when it came to help seeking behavior rather than turning to psychological or social services.

Furthermore, Turner-Musa and Wilson (2006) studied “religious orientation and social support on health promoting behaviors of African-American college students.” Their study found that African-American students who viewed religion positively had better health promoting behaviors compared to those who were antireligious. Students who perceived themselves to have high levels of support scored higher on spiritual growth, interpersonal relationships, stress management and other healthy coping behaviors compared to students who perceived themselves to have low levels of support.

The literature reviewed and other existing research indicates that students are faced with different stressors. Each social work student has unique stresses and it is important for each stressor to be considered and evaluated on a needs basis on a personal or professional level. As social worker students face challenges in their academics, personal lives, and field placements it is important to remember that social support, support from internship supervisors and academic support from professors can be some of the greatest stress relief. Universities can consider organizing support groups and encouraging field supervisors to encourage and guide students on a regular basis. Family and friends are the best support system and when students utilize them for extra encouragement their stress levels are minimized.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are used in studies to better explain why a phenomenon occurs; in this case stress. The two theoretical frameworks that help better explain stress are the ecological systems theory and stress theory. Ecological systems theory framework is defined as

“the approach in which one studies human development that consists of the 'scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p188).

Moreover, ecological systems theory studies the human development in four different systems settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings such as the micro, meso, exo, and macrosystems. In order to

understand and assess human problems and stressors one needs to understand how people and the environment influence one another (Hepworth, 2010).

Furthermore, stress theory is defined by Matthiew and Ivanoff (2006) as, “Stressful life events are linked to the onset of distress or disorders. The stress response begins with a stressor, which is defined as any real or imagined event, condition, situation, or stimulus that instigates the onset of the human stress response process within an individual (p340).” This research will incorporate stress theory by identifying stressful life events. Furthermore, as these sources are identified then ones perceived stress can be altered through different coping mechanisms.

Students of Social Work are often faced with multiple stressors during their academic career given the challenges of balancing not only school work and employment with social lives, but also with the added responsibilities that come with the field internship. Findings on the predominant origins of stress among social work students can be inconsistent, however certain themes are observed as more common than others. Work schedules, field placements, class load, personality types, personal factors, and gender roles are among the factors discussed in the literature reviewed (Cheung & Tang, 2009; Moran & Hughes, 2006; Davis, 2003; Ngai & Cheung, 2009; Negga et al 2007; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Risk factors associated with social work students stress are physical and emotional and can range from suicide to eating disorders (Horton, Diaz & Green, 2009; Wichianson, et al 2009). Additionally, some of the studies reviewed offered possible solutions to address these significant issues such as mental health screening and support, emotional preparedness, and social support (DiRamio & Payne, 2007; Dziegielewski, Roest-Marti & Turnage, 2004; Wilks, 2008; Yang, 2008).

Chapter 3

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The basic purpose of this study is to explore the sources of stress experienced during the graduate social work program from the perspective of recent social work graduates and their opinion of effective stress relieving solutions. This study design is a qualitative method content analysis. . At the most basic level quantitative research usually contains numbers and statistics and is used when something needs to be measured. Whereas Qualitative research usually has no measurements or statistics, instead it uses words, descriptions and quotes to explore meaning (Shields & Twycross, 2003). It is concerned with the behavior, experiences and opinions of individuals; and aims to explore subjective patterns of an individual, group or organizational experience in order to gauge the meanings for people involved. More specifically qualitative social work research, by its very nature can be seen as process orientated, whereby the researcher enters the natural setting and touches, feels, lives and observes the subject of study in an attempt to gain a better understanding of social realities and to draw attention to processes, meanings and structural features (Davies, 2007; Matthew & Ross, 2010). A qualitative design was chosen by the researcher in order to explore and analyze individual experiences of the participants rather than gathering statistical data from a greater pool of participants. In doing so the researcher was able to decipher commonalities in the participants' responses. Through this approach, the researcher was also able to gather perspectives related to the high cost of living of the Ethiopian economy and its impact on the MSW graduates. Both primary and secondary sources were used in order to gather pertinent data for the study.

This chapter focuses on the study design, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, instruments; data analysis approaches, organizing principles. The structure of this study was administered using both a qualitative and exploratory design field observation were carried out to collect primary data. Besides, secondary sources such as books, journals, and other relevant documents were reviewed in the study.

3.2 Sampling procedure

The sampling technique which I adopted was purposive sampling. This type of sampling is concerned with the exploration and interpretation of experiences and perceptions and is therefore ideally suited for small in-depth qualitative studies. Purposive sampling does not attempt to create a sample which is statistically representative of a population. Instead respondents are selected on the basis of characteristics or experiences that are directly related to the research question (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

The total number of participants for this study is 14. They are all social workers that graduated in the last five years from an accredited university program IGNOU Saint Mary university. In order to participate in this study the participants needed to meet the criteria noted above. The participants of the study were selected using snowball sampling method, and the practitioners were selected using purposive sampling method. All the necessary data from the participants were collected using data collecting instruments prepared for the study.

3.3 Sample

A total of 14 MSW graduates aged between 25 to 48 participated in this study. Of the participants the overwhelming majority (85.7 percent) were female compared to only 14.3 percent male. The mean age of the participants was 32. Of the participants interviewed 71.4 percent were working full time, 21.4 percent were unemployed, and the other 7.1 percent were working part time. The majority, 42.9 percent, of the participants associated themselves as being Christian, 28.6 percent were Catholic, 14.3 percent stated that they had no religious preference, 7.1 percent were No religion, and 7.1 percent spiritual.

The reason why I decided to only use students from one university was to enable me to examine what measures the university had in place to support students and to enhance their

resilience. Due to the time restrictions of the research my sample consisted of fourteen previous students, although the sample was only relatively small Davies (2007:147) believes that:

“The smaller the sample, the more detailed, intense and sophisticated the process of exploring psychosocial reality will be”.

This notion is in keeping with qualitative research about quality not quantity. In order to enhance the credibility of the findings I interviewed individuals with varying demographics and who reflected a variety of perspectives. This is also known as heterogeneity purposive sampling. Heterogeneity is a sub type of purposive sampling which is used to enable the researcher to look at the views and opinions of a mixture of different people. However Trochim (2006) points out that while heterogeneity sampling will result in a broad spectrum of ideas it is important to remember that it will not result in a sample that is proportionately representative. The significance of obtaining a sample which represents a wide range of opinions is emphasised by Rubin and Rubin (2005:67) who state that:

“The philosophy of responsive interviewing suggests that reality is complex; to accurately portray that complexity, you need to gather contradictory or overlapping perceptions and nuanced understandings that different individuals hold”

Although it could be argued that by using purposive sampling my sample could be viewed as being biased. My aim has been to achieve a strategically controlled bias, which would enable me to have a sample which would allow me to obtain more comprehensive findings and result in data that may challenge any preconceived notions. This supports qualitative methodology which is concerned with the quality of experience of this sample to gain insight of their subjective experience rather than seek to generalise to whole populations.

The researcher interviewed 14 people selected from a snowball procedure. The researcher began by asking interested graduates from their work place and field placement and have them suggest others who may be interested in participating. Participants were either asked in person, by phone, email, or social network websites such as Facebook.com. An interview date and time was scheduled and the consent form was provided before the

interview began. Interviews were conducted outside of agencies and institutions. Participants received no compensation for completing this interview.

3.4 Data collection methods

Qualitative research can be conducted using many forms of data gathering methods such as observations, interviews and questionnaires. The data collection method which I selected was interviews. May (2011) notes how interviews are a popular choice in qualitative research as they yield rich insights into people's experiences, opinions and values. Interviews allow the researcher to gain in-depth and detailed information on a specific topic and can be conducted in various settings and take a range of different forms. Bryman (2004) suggests that there are three main types of interviews which include; structured, semi-structured and unstructured.

In order to undertake my research I decided to use semi-structured interviews. As semi structured interviews are particularly effective at gathering data when the subject matter is multi-dimensional, such as the topic of stress. They will enable me to view the situation from the perspective of the interviewee, thus gaining more in-depth answers (Matthew & Ross, 2010).

By selecting a qualitative method it enables me to submerge myself in the views and experiences of the respondent and to gain a wider breadth and depth of information (Mason, 2002). Semi-structured interviews represent an opening up of the interview method to provide an understanding of how interviewees generate and deploy meaning in social life (Davies, 2007).

Semi structured interviews use techniques from both unstructured and structured interviews. Therefore by combining aspects from both, semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the participants to answer questions in their own way, while still providing a general structure for comparability for the interviews (May, 2011). In semi-structured interviews the interviewer is encouraged to probe beyond initial answers and seek both clarification and elaboration on the answers given. This will enable me to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewees (Byrne, 2004; May, 2011; & Rubin & Rubin 2005). May (2011) remarks how the concept that interviewees may be

answering questions other than those we are asking them and making sense of the social world in ways we had not thought of, reinforces the value of qualitative semi-structured interviews. The idea that we should be receptive to what interviewees say, and to their ways of understanding, underpins much of the ‘qualitative’ critique of structured interview methods (Mason, 2002:231 b).

The interviewer can be viewed as a primary instrument in semi-structured interviews, in the sense that the researcher both asks questions and enables the researcher participant to give their answers. Therefore I can be viewed as a central tool within the interview as I ‘am able to develop and work with the questions within the interview itself and be responsive in a way to enable the interviewee to tell their story (Matthew & Ross, 2010).

According to emotionalism interviewees are viewed as experienced subjects who actively construct their social worlds (Bryman, 2004). For emotionalists their concern is not with collecting statistics and figures but with “eliciting authentic accounts of subjective experience” (Silverman, 2006:118). As noted earlier, the primary aim of interviews is to generate data which gives a frank and honest insight into people’s experiences. In order to do this I used a range of open-ended questions, thus providing the participants with an opportunity explore and expand on the issues (Matthew & Ross, 2010). Patton (1990) observes how there is an art to asking truly open-ended questions and being able to link the questions so that it seems like a continuous flow of conversation rather than an interview. In order to attempt to engage the interviewee in free-flowing conversation I made sure that my Interview guide (Appendix C) was not used simply as a list of questions to be worked through, but rather as an agenda for the interview.

One of the disadvantage of using interviews as a data collection method is that due to the large amount of raw data which is generate they are often very time consuming to complete and to analyze. This often means that researcher will only be able to use a small number or interviewees, which therefore results in the sample being less representative. Similarly I found that due to the large amount of data that my interviews produced that I had to restrict my sample to fourteen participants.

In this research study the researchers utilized an interview questionnaire (Attachment C). The interview questionnaire served to analyze the experiences of MSW graduates based

on their views of causes of stress, effective coping methods, and to obtain advice and suggestions for effective stress relief for current and future MSW students. The interview questionnaire was also utilized to acquire demographic information such as age, gender, ethnic background, education, religious affiliation, year of MSW graduation, undergraduate major, current employment status, and ten open ended questions that were specifically related to MSW students and their experiences in graduate school. The interviews took approximately thirty to forty five minutes to complete. There were no other equipment, instruments, or any used in this study.

3.5 Measurement

The interview guide had two sections. The participants were asked ten open ended questions related to their experiences while in the MSW program. The second section of the guidee was composed of eight demographic questions regarding the participant's age, gender, ethnic background, education, religious affiliation, year of MSW graduation, undergraduate major, and current employment status.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The research participants signed an informed consent form prior to being interviewed. A copy of the consent to participate can be found as Attachment B. The participants received their own copy of the consent form after signing and were verbally informed of the purpose of this study. Through the informed consent document and procedure, potential interviewees were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. Those that consented to participate were interviewed individually, in a private setting, and were asked the structured open-ended questions as well as their individual demographic information. The researcher wrote down responses verbatim and later transcribed each participant's responses. Responses to interview questions were kept confidential. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed at which time the recordings were destroyed. The participants were interviewed at different locations in the community.

Prior to the commencement of the interview, the researcher informed each participant that they had the right to end the interview at any time and they were not required to answer

any questions that they were not comfortable responding to. There was minimal risk of discomfort to the participants in the administration of this interview. Consent forms and all data were secured at the researcher's home until the project was finished, at which time all consent forms were destroyed.

The results of the interviews were transcribed and the audiotape and written materials were destroyed. This study design is a qualitative method. The benefit of implementing qualitative analysis was to look at the individual experiences of each participant while in their MSW program. In doing so the researcher was also able to analyze the commonalities and suggestions given by each participant. Common themes were identified and analyzed in an attempt to clarify the sources of stress and to perhaps suggest further areas of study, including the stressors and coping of the economic situation. There were no physical procedures used in this study. The data was analyzed to determine which stressors experienced by Social Work graduate students caused the greatest levels of stress and anxiety and whether the current state of the economy had any influence on that determined level.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Any research I conduct will need to adhere University's code of Ethics .Therefore before undertaking my research I gained ethical consent from the university and considered any ethical decisions that may arise throughout the course of the research. Barnes (1979:16) defines ethical decisions in research as those which:

Arise when we try to decide between one course of action and another not in terms of expediency or efficiency but by reference to standards of what is morally right or wrong"

In order to address some of the ethical issues and before interviewing the research participants I designed an information sheet for the participants. This outlined all of the relevant information in regards to the research and outlined how the participants would be protected. As otherwise they may feel pressured into being involved with the study.

There are also several ethical issues surrounding the use of interviews as a data gathering method. Interviews are often used to elicit people's personal experiences and feelings and therefore care should be taken to ensure that all the data which is provided in kept confidential and only accessible to authorised people (Matthews & Ross, 2010). In relation to my research

I made sure that the verbal and transcribed interviews were kept securely on a computer and password protected. In addition to providing this information on the participant's information sheets, I also protected the interviewees by making sure that they were aware that they had the right to look over the interviews after they had been completed.

Another ethical issue is in regards to the participant's anonymity, care must be taken to ensure that any information, which is made available from, the research does not include any data that could lead to the identification of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For instance, Matthews and Ross (2010) note how quotes from interview data will often be used in qualitative research to illustrate findings therefore additional care must be taken when selecting quotes to make sure that they contain no identifying information.

When conducting research it is important to gain the expressed informed consent of the participants, without it the research would be considered unethical. Kumar (2011) observes that informed consent means that respondents need to be made adequately aware of the type of information that will be sought, the reasons for it and what they will be expected to do in order to participate in the study. It is vital that the consent should be voluntary and without pressure, in addition to ensuring this I also made the respondents aware that they were free to withdraw from the research at any point.

Interviews are often used to gather data about sensitive personal issues. One of the strengths of the format of semi-structured interviews is that they are flexible and adaptable to the needs of the interviewees. However care must be taken to ensure the well-being of participants and the questions need to be written in line with anti-discriminatory practice (Matthews & Ross, 2010).

As well as considering the Ethics and Code of practice of the university it is also important to be aware that everyone has their own values and beliefs and that certain issues may be sensitive to certain people. It is important to protect the interviewees from harm including physical, mental and emotion (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

3,8 Reliability and Validity

In qualitative research reliability refers to the degree to which other researchers carrying out a similar study with comparable methods would generate similar interpretations and results. In other words the replicability and consistency of the findings (Kirk & Miller, 1986; & Franklin et al. 2010). Whereas validity is concerned with the accuracy and the truthfulness of the findings. According to Padgett (2008) most threats to validity fall within three broad headings first of which is reactivity which refers to the potentially distorting effects of the researcher presence. In order to obtain the information from the interviewees I therefore needed to be present during the interviews to ask the questions and obtain the data.

Nonetheless the researcher's presence within the interview can affect the information that the respondent is willing to provide. However in regards to my research I believe that I have the advantage of being a fellow MA social work student and therefore have in-depth knowledge of the topic. In order to be able to limit the effects of any biasness I was careful not to let my preconceived ideas and thoughts impact on the questions and to use neutral probes to ensure that I did not lead the participants into making 'acceptable' comments.

Davies (2007) also believes that there is a risk that in these instances the researcher may think they already know what they want or expect to find in such a context the researcher needs to work hard at being open to interpretations and patterns that may differ from their person assumptions. One way in which I have attempted to tackle this is by using a sampling technique which identifies the views of a range of different people.

Padgett's (2008) third perceived threat is that of respondent's bias, he notes that respondents may sometimes withhold information or present facts differently in order to present answers which they believe the researcher is seeking to find.

Despite all of the above the reliability and validity in qualitative studies depend on the skill of the researcher and their abilities to design the study using appropriate data collection methods. They need to strive to use data collection methods that ensure that the data recording is accurate and that the interpretations of the data are empirical, logical and replicable (Franklin et al. 2010). It is important for researchers to be aware of the strengths of their study as well as the limitations. This enables them to reflect in a positive manner and in turn allow the practices to inform their thinking (May, 2011).

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

This chapter analyzes the responses from the administered interviews. The demographics of the participants were examined, however, the emphasis was to address the ten major questions and the purpose of the study as stated in chapter 1. This analysis focuses on the stress levels students experience while completing their MSW graduate studies and the advice they provide to current and future students.

4.1 Demographic Data of Respondents

A total of 14 MSW graduates aged between 25 to 48 participated in this study. Of the participants the overwhelming majority (85.7 percent) were female compared to only 14.3 percent male. The mean age of the participants was 32. Of the participants interviewed 71.4 percent were working full time, 21.4 percent were unemployed, and the other 7.1 percent were working part time. The majority, 42.9 percent, of the participants associated themselves as being Christian orthodox, 28.6 percent were Catholic, 14.3 percent stated that they had no religious preference, 7.1 percent were Protestant, and 7.1 percent spiritual orthodox.

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Religious Affiliation	Year MSW Graduation	Employment Status
1	48	F	BSW & MSW	Protestant	2014	Employed
2	29	F	Psychology & MSW	Christian Orthodox	2011	Employed
3	42	M	Ethnic Studies/ MSSW Clinical Social Work	Catholic	2011	Unemployed
4	30	F	Sociology/Psychology & MSW	Catholic	2010	Employed
5	25	F	Social Work & MSW	Christian orthodox	2013	Unemployed
6	33	F	Sociology & MSW	Catholic	2012	Employed
7	25	F	Psychology & MSW	None religion	2014	Employed

8	26	F	MSW	Christian Orthodox	2014	Employed
9	29	F	Psychology & MSW	Spiritual Christian Orthodox	2011	Employed
10	38	F	Psychology & MSW	Christian Protestant	2010	Unemployed
11	35	M	Communications & MSW	None religion	2014	Employed
13	30	F	Psychology & SW & MSW	Christian Orthodox	2011	Employed
14	28	F	BSW & MSW	None religion	2010	Employed

Figure 1. Demographic Data of Respondents

4.2 Overall Findings

When the participants were asked to identify their greatest sources of stress while in graduate school, 92.9 percent reported that they experienced the greatest amount of stress while trying to balance coursework, internship,(placement),courseload, thesis/project, and work responsibilities. Some of the other reporting's were health problems (14.3 percent), lack of social support (7.1 percent) and financial problems (28.6 percent). While some participants noted stress related to their personal life (28.6 percent), such as going through a divorce and being far from home, others indicated that their stress stemmed from their work and internship in that that they felt a lack of preparation in their position (21.4 percent).

Another emerging theme from the student's responses was in regards to the financial pressure associated with the demands of the course. Several students stated that they had been required to use their personal savings to supplement their bursaries in order to be able to support themselves through the course. Two of the students even said that the financial pressure had resulted in them having to move back home part way through the course in order to be able to

support themselves and be able to afford the travel expenses occurred during placement.

Nearly all of the students said that the high demands of the course had affected their ability to apply for future social work jobs. The respondents said that they had found the prospect of looking for future employment stressful and that they had prioritised their placements and course assignments over that of their dissertation and of seeking future employment.

Low income and financial concerns was also a highly rated stress factor which was identified in Patchner's (1983) study. Patchner believed that the findings highlight the need for better provision in regards to social work , thus reducing the financial pressure and burden.

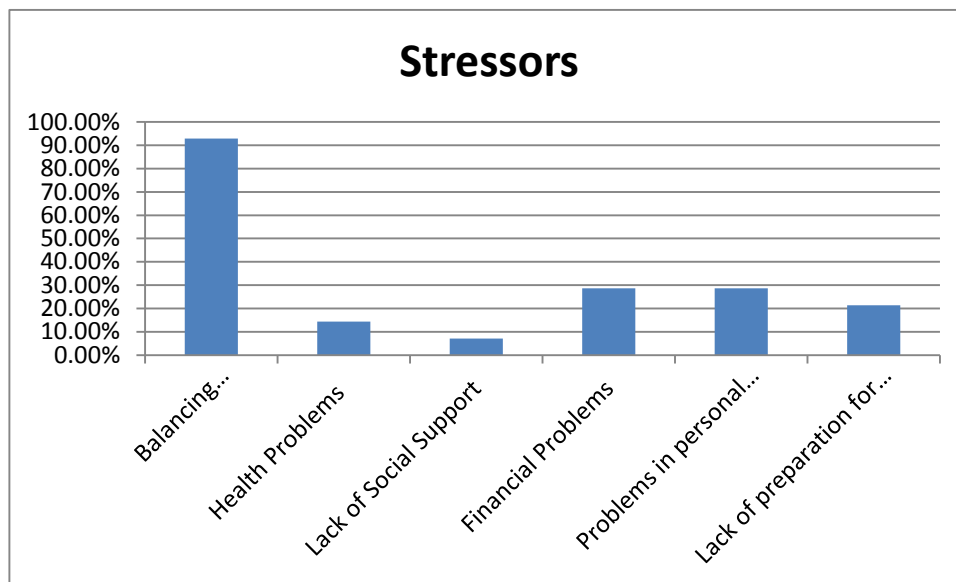


Figure 2. Stressors

When questioned about which coping skills were most effective during stressful times in graduate school, the majority of the participants indicated that self-care was their greatest source of stress relief. More specifically, participants noted self-care activities to include exercise (i.e. gym, yoga, walking), professional therapy, going to church, and escaping through music and movies. Others admitted to partaking in negative activities, such as drinking excessively and eating to cope with stress. Some of the participants reported that the most effective coping skill to reduce stress was derived from social support, support from peers, and support from professors, thesis advisors, and field instructors.

The participants were asked what they considered to be their top five resources to reduce stress while in graduate school. In analyzing their responses, it was found that the top 5 resources utilized, in order of significance, were: (1) Friends support and Self-Care (i.e. exercise, therapy, dancing, massage, time away, healthy eating, eating out, cooking, support groups, music, movies, vacation, pleasure reading), (2) Peer Support, (3) Family Support, (4) Spirituality and Support from Field Instructor/Thesis Advisors/Professors, and (5) Support from Spouse/Partner/Significant Other.

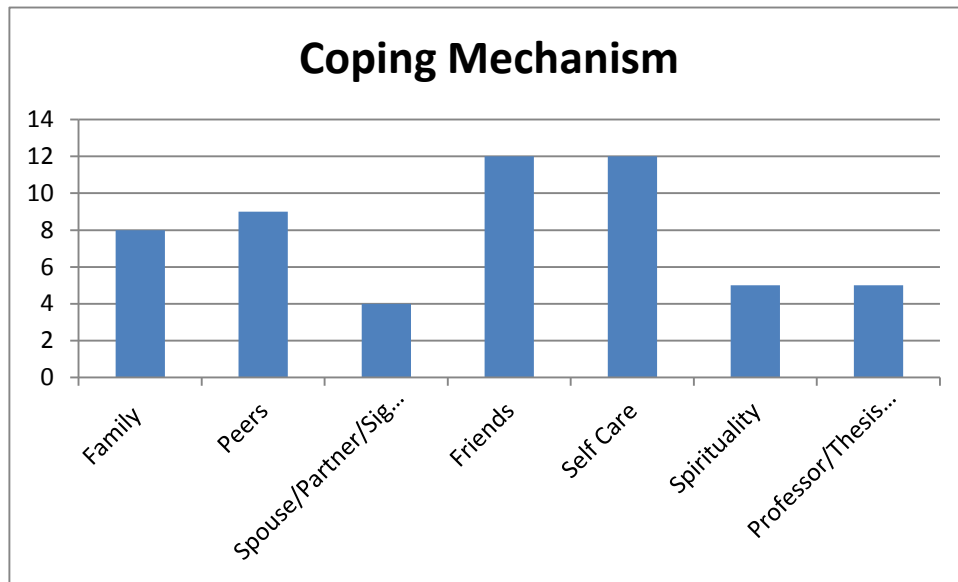


Figure 3. Coping Mechanism

The participants were asked in what ways their coping styles/practices/ experiences were helpful to them during their graduate studies. Some of the common themes mentioned were that it helped them keep grounded and focused, and helped maintain a healthy perspective and be positive. Others reported that they reduced stress and got their mind off of stress, helped maintain balance, gave them hope for the future, and helped them avoid burnout.

Significant non-academic stress experienced by the participants while in graduate school included issues with family such as health problems, substance abuse, and death. It was evident that many of the participants experienced personal life changing events while in the program such as pregnancy, divorce, and purchasing a home. Additionally, some of the

participants mentioned that finances and having to work full time contributed to their non-academic stress.

In regards to their experience in graduate school, the participants were asked how their academic and non-academic stress impacted them. It was found that the participants had polarized responses in that they overwhelmingly felt that stress either had a positive or negative impact. The participants that noted a positive correlation stated that the stress enabled them to prioritize their responsibilities, helped learn their strengths, and helped them adapt to challenging situations. Those that reported a negative correlation indicated that stress made it difficult to focus on academics, made it challenging to have a social life, and reduced motivation to learn in that they did only what was needed to pass.

The participants were asked to note what factors they considered to have influenced their coping skills and ability to reduce stress. Half of the participants overcame challenges in their past, which they felt enabled them to apply coping skills while in graduate school to effectively reduce stress. Several participants agreed that family support influenced their coping skills, while others mentioned their religion and support from friends, spouses, and professors. Some of the other factors mentioned were having positive role models, having a healthy perspective, good social skills, an active lifestyle, and self-care.

The participants were asked to offer suggestions to current students in regards to how to effectively reduce stress while in the graduate program. The top suggestions from the participants included learning to balance work and play, maintaining a social life, venting to supportive people, partaking in self-care, keeping things in perspective, and staying organized. Several people suggested to not work full-time, to exercise, and to be interested in the topic you are researching. Others noted the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with peers and family, keeping to a thesis timeline, and to procrastinate as little as possible. Following analysis of the interview transcripts four main themes emerged in relation to the stress and well-being of student social workers. These findings will be explored and discussed in relation to current research reports and studies in the literature review.

4.3 Factors influencing students stress

4.3.1 Course pressure

The interviews revealed that the main cause of stress for all the students was in regards to the stress caused by the academic demands of the course. This is similar to the findings of Collins et al (2010) and Wilks (2008) studies. In which the students also rated the academic demands as the most stressful aspect of the course.

In regards to my study the students referred specifically to the stress which resulted from trying to manage the demands of assignments while also being on placement. For example two of the students responded by saying:

“It’s the stress of been able to manage your assignments while you’re on placement. As you’re given a responsibility for a caseload, so you not only had to go to placement but you had to come back. It just felt like you didn’t have enough time, because by the time you had finished one assignment you had to start another one straight away” (Participant 5).

These two statements echo the feelings of the other participants in the sense that all the students classed the pressure of completing assignments while on placement as being the most stressful element of their studies. Similar to these results Koeske and Koeske (1989) noted how tensions between the demands of academic and placement work were regularly identified by students as being significant sources of stress.

Nearly all of the students said that the high demands of the course had affected their ability to apply for future social work jobs. The respondents said that they had found the prospect of looking for future employment stressful and that they had prioritised their placements and course assignments over that of their dissertation and of seeking future employment.

Low income and financial concerns was also a highly rated stress factor which was identified

in Patchner's (1983) study. Patchner believed that the findings highlight the need for better provision in regards to social work bursaries, thus reducing the financial pressure and burden.

The findings from my research are not only similar to the findings from UK studies of social work students such as that of Collins et al (2010), they also comparable to American studies such as Wilks (2008) and Dziegielewski et al. (2004). Whose studies also identified academic stress and financial concerns as two of the key stress factors for social work students.

4.3.2 Placement

Although issues in regards to the student's placements have been mentioned above in connection with the stress and pressure of assignments and in regards to financial worries.

I have decided to classify placements as a separate sub-theme because throughout the student's responses the pressures arising from the course and from placement were seen to as being two distinctly separate entities. When students spoke about the stress specifically in regards to their placement they talked about the physical stress, such as the travelling to and from placement.

The extent to which placements were considered as a key stress factor was significantly different to the findings of Collins et al (2010) study. As the student in Collins' study perceived it as being only slightly less stressful than that of academic assignments and financial worries. Whereas although some of the students in my study did describe aspects of the placement as being stressful, for the majority of the students, the placements acted as a method of support. Therefore issues relating to the students placements will be further explored throughout the chapter.

4.4 Support on the course

4.4.1 Ranges of support

The second theme which emerged from the findings was in regards to the range of support which was available for the students during their studies. Although some of the respondents briefly mentioned accessing the support of the student support officer and online support

materials. The respondents had only accessed these resources a few times and did not consider them to be one of the main sources of support. In comparison to this the students saw the in college days as one of the most important sources of support in regards to their emotional well-being. The following extracts from the interviews demonstrate how the students found the in college days as being vital in terms of offering mutual group support and as a chance to raise any issues with the university.

“Having the in college days are extremely important because you get to reconnect with people and see how their placements are going and you see that everyone else is under the same amount of stress, that some people have good days and bad days just like you, which boosts your confidence”. (Participant 1).

Despite the support which the students gained from the in college days, they reported that there had been less of them this year compared to that of their first year. The feelings from the participants in regards to this were mixed.

“There has been less in college days this year, which was good in one way because it meant that I could do five days a week and finish placement earlier. But it does mean that you miss that extra bit of support, so it has its plus points and negatives” (Participant 1).

“They allow you to keep in contact, because I found at times when we were on placement for months at a time that you had no contact with the university what so ever and you kind of forgot that you were a student to an extent. You felt very distant from the university and that’s a shame because if you remain engaged it helps you with your academic work and being able to manage stressful situations”(Participant 3).

The significance of the support of fellow students was highlighted in Collins et al (2010) study. In addition to this Collins and colleagues looked at ways in which the students believed

that the social work curriculum could be improved to alleviate students stress. The most popular option was in regards to more structured opportunities for group support. However the findings from my study would suggest that the students felt that they already had enough opportunities for utilising group support. Although the students said that they had less in college days in their last academic year, the pros and cons of this were weighed up by the students in terms of the extra time it enabled them to devote to their dissertation.

Although the students did speak about their placements in terms of causing stress, the majority of the participants spoke about it in relation to the support which arose from it. Such as the support they gained from their coordinator and other staff within the agency. This is demonstrated by some of the following quotes:

“I’ve been quite lucky with my two placements I’ve had a lot of support, they were two placements which I actually enjoyed and which I had an interest in. So I threw myself into the environment and got a lot out of it. But yes there has been times when it has been quite stressful” (Participant 3).

“In my second placement I had to dig but I have learnt so much as it was a statutory placement and I was lucky because I had a very supportive

(participant 1).

On the whole the students spoke about their placements in regards to the positive ways in which they helped them manage the stress and demands of the course. However one common theme about the emotional stress was in regards to the university not providing the students with enough practical support in order to prepare them for their placements. For example one student said:

“For my first placement I felt like I was going in blind and I was on the verge of cracking up. I got really emotional and upset and the combination of the coursework on top. I felt like they did no practical work with us before we went into placement, I think the university could have done more to help prepare us”

(Participant 2).

Another common theme from the students responses was in regards to how the support and experiences from placements had helped build up their resilience to stress. This is demonstrated by one student who said:

“Yes I consider myself to be resilient, but I’ve built up resilience through placement not university, whereas I think it should just be built up through both”

(Participant 5).

One of the students spoke about a stressful experience in their placement where a service user had committed suicide and the support they received.

“My placement coordinator treated me as if I was a member of staff so he gave me the same support that he would give a member of his staff. Which I thought was very commendable, but by virtue of the fact that I had that support I never needed the university support. That’s not to say that if I didn’t have that support I would of used any from the university. Because on an issue like that where I was sort of questioning my own practice, I certainly wasn’t going to be in a situation where I was asking the university can you help me, well no, you have to see this person, well when can I see this person, it’s very much in their time, and I couldn’t be bothered with it, I couldn’t be bothered with all the bother of the student support service, because really in my opinion there isn’t one” (Participant 5).

In my view the last extract in particular is especially concerning and echo’s not only the general feeling from all the interviewees but also the findings from the GSCC’s Fit for Purpose executive review (GSCC, 2008), in which the students valued the support and experience from their practice placements highly. Although the students from my study were fortunate to have to support from their placements, the findings show that they did not feel comfortable accessing support from the university due to issues around availability and accessibility.

Another emerging theme which arose was in terms of support that was provided by university tutors. However this resulted in many conflicting views and several of the participants only mentioned tutor support after prompts during the interview. Although one of the students was very complimentary about their tutor and noted how the tutor was very accommodating and generally had an open door policy. The other students felt that there were issues around tutor's lack of availability during the times when students were on placement, which therefore resulted in the students being unable to access tutors for support. This is demonstrated by the following comments:

“I had difficulty assessing support when on placement, there were numerous occasions where I asked to meet my tutor on Friday which was inherently our university day and they were giving me days for Monday to Thursday. When you're managing your cases and on placement you don't really want to miss a day for the sake of coming into university really. You have to manage both and it just seems like the availability of tutors is very much dependent on their time and not yours” (Participant 5).

“There is a need for you tutor to remain involved because sometimes I get the impression that some people feel quite distant from their tutor and feel a lack of emotional support from them” (Participant 3).

However not all the students' responses were negative:

“The support from the tutors can be very useful but there is only so much they can actually do, they can only support you so far. They do, do as much as they can do and our route leader has been very good” (Participant 1)

The above statement shows how the interviews produced mixed responses in regards to tutor support and focuses in on the point that, it is not so much the quality of the support which is the issue; it is the accessibility of the support.

In order to provide emotional support Collins (2010) believes it is important that tutors are not perceived by students just simply as administrators or assessors of their work. Instead tutors need to proactively work to make sure that they viewed by as being both supportive and empowering. Although it is in the interest of the social work faculty to be sympathetic and interested in enhancing students resilience. Reeser and colleagues (1992) believe that many social work academics are reluctant to modify the academic environment due to the tight restrictions they face in delivering the course content in the time available. Despite this Milner and Criss (2006) stress that there needs to be appropriate opportunities in the classroom, whereby students are able to express themselves and find validation for the stress and difficulties they experience. This commitment to encourage student expression is supported by the Council on Social Work Education's (2008) educational policy on student's active participation toward professional development (CSWE cited in Wilks, 2008).

4.4.2 Improvements to support

Similar to the studies of both Collins et al (2010) and Kinman and Grant (2010) my study sought to gain information in regards to how the students believed that the support on the course could be improved to help alleviate stress.

One of the main areas of concern raised by the students was in regards to the perceived lack of communication between the university and the students. Several of the students complained that they were not kept fully informed or given adequate opportunities to air their views. For example I was informed that there was a student representative for the course, however, although the student representative was invited to meetings. Several of the students said that these meetings were in placement time and therefore there wasn't that outlet for the student's voices to be aired by the student representative. The overall feeling from the students was that they felt that they needed more opportunities to give real feedback which results in change, one student summed this up by saying:

“They do listen at times but I’m not sure if anything actually changes because of it. Sometimes it feels like it’s, we respect your opinions but were not really going to change anything” (Participant 3).

Furthermore the students felt strongly in regards to the availability of tutors. All of the students believed that there should be more dedicated time for individual drop in’s and at times when students are not on placement.

Another area which the students felt could be improved to help alleviate their stress was in regards to the teaching that was provided on the course. The students felt strongly that the course should have more of a practical approach, especially in regards to the teaching that was provided to students before they went out on placement, as one student put it:

“There should be more of a practical approach so students aren’t going into the placements blind” (Participant 2).

The students commented on how they expected to have a better knowledge base before going out on placement and being more prepared for the stressful and challenging situations they may encounter. Some of the suggestions put forward by students to help them better prepare for practice included mock initial assessments, role plays and more case studies showing students how to apply theory to practice.

In addition to practical support the students felt strongly about the need for the course to offer more in terms of emotional support. The interviews showed that although all of the students viewed themselves as being resilient, they recognized the need for the continual promotion of resilience in a profession such as social work. Therefore they felt that they would benefit from the use of stress management and emotional resilience workshops, which would not only provide opportunity to enhance resilience but would also help promote students emotional well-being. In particular the students believed that there should be more opportunities to hear about the personal views and experiences of newly qualified and experienced social workers.

“You want to hear how the new legislation impacts on their practice, everything is

changing and you want to hear from someone in the field, how the changes are going to affect them, how is it going to affect us. You want to hear it the horse's mouth" (Participant 4).

"I think it's important for people to understand the sort of pressures they are going to be under and ways in which to cope with them. They need to know what the support is and how to access it and to be able to recognize the signs of stress and burnout because not everyone does" (Participant 1).

These views underpin the findings from Collins et al (2010) study; where their results showed that over half of the students supported the inclusion of stress management seminars within the social work curriculum. Furthermore the findings from Kinman and Grant's (2011) study show that emotional intelligence and resilience of trainee social workers can be enhanced through the use of stress management workshops and peer coaching techniques. In specific regards to stress management workshops, the study from Dziegielewski et al (2004) showed that stress management seminars can be of assistance in helping to moderate the stress experienced by student social workers. The results from their study suggest that the participants felt more secure in regards to identifying, monitoring and preparing for stress and that they had increased their knowledge of how to reduce stress and had become more secure and aware of different strategies for addressing it. Likewise according to the findings from Roembke's (1995) study, learning to identify and prevent burnout during social work training can have significant impact on the coping abilities of social workers post qualification.

4.5 Coping strategies

Thompson et al(1994) notes that coping strategies are vital in student ability to resist and manage stress. This is reinforced by Kinman and Grant (2010) whose findings indicate that coping strategies and social support are significant predictors of well-being and can help to minimize the negative impact of work-related stress on a person's health. This theme explores the range of coping strategies which was drawn on by students and the effects of each. Although some of the participants mentioned coping strategies that were used were in relation to the support from other people.

The most common cited coping strategy used by the students was in relation to fellow friends on the course. The students commented on how they were lucky to have a close group of friends on the course and therefore received a lot of emotional support from each other.

The importance of support from fellow university students is demonstrated through the comments below:

“Other people on the course have been a massive help, having people who understand where you’re up to with your work. they have empathy with you and the assignments you’re doing which has been really helpful. Also it’s helpful to be able to share resources”

(Participant 1)

“Your friends on the course understand what you are going through ,they know the pressures that you are under and there under the same pressures as it were”

(Participant 5)

The students also felt that the support gained from fellow students on the course had been a positive factor in relation to them building up resilience to stress.

“ The course tests you a lot but people on the course have helped me to build up resilience”

(Participant 2)

The support gained from friends on the course was seen as being different to that of other friends outside the university:

“Fellow students are supportive in a different way because they understand what you are going through and obviously their doing the same kind of work ,so they can help you with assignments. They offer you emotional support and give you a break, whereas I you think friends outside of the university understand the pressure you’re under ,but they provide you with an escape from the stress”

(Participant 4)

This was also mentioned by another participant who said:

“ Other friends can be supportive but I don’t think they understand the emotional investment you end up having with this course ”(Participant 1)

Overall when the students spoke about the support they received from friends outside the university they spoke about this support in very different terms. However from the students’ responses it is clear to see that although the support was viewed as being different it still emerged as being extremely important in regards to the student’s emotional well being.

“It is good just to be able to have to outlet and have a different conversation ,your friends are the outlet you need to get away from it a little bit ”(Participant 5)

“Even though I do talk about my course to them it’s not the main topic of the conversation, so it’s nice to have an escape from what’s quite an intense process ”.

(Participants 3)

Another subtheme which emerged in relation to coping strategies that the students drew on was in relation to the support gained from family and partners. The student saw them as being supportive for a variety of reasons including emotional, financial and academic support.

“ My family is very supportive, my mum and my brother both proof read my work for me. My mum is in a similar field and therefore I can talk to her about certain things and get advice ”.

I have found one of my cousin very supportive because she has done similar practical based course and understands the stress you go through with the placements and the coursework. They have helped me with the assignments, encouraging me to carry on ”(Participant 2)

“My family and boy friend have been really helpful, mum has helped to financially supported me ”(Participant 4).

Students saw the support from family, partners and friends outside the university and being very different to that of the support from fellow students on the course. Similarly to the

findings from Collins et al(20110) study, the students perceived the support from fellow students as being more important in terms of emotional support and understanding .Despite that fact that the students in my study focused on three main types of coping mechanisms ,Moran and Hughes(2006)point out that humour is now increasing been seen and accepted as a strategy for coping with stress within social work.

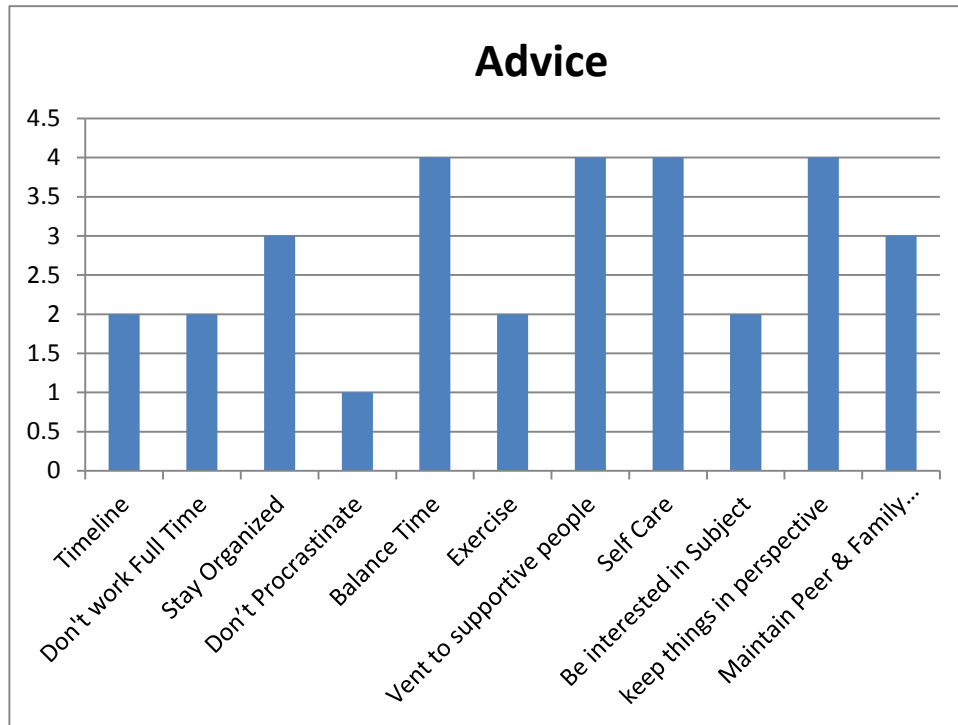


Figure 4. Advice

When participants were asked if they were able to go back in time how would they address stressors differently in graduate school four of them stated that they would adhere to a timeline and maintain a to do list. Three different participants mentioned that they would not change anything and another three stated that they would eat healthier and exercise. A couple of the participants interviewed indicated that they would practice self-care more often and another set of participants stated that they would have sought support from their peers more frequently. Others that were interviewed reported that they would have been better prepared, socialized less, utilized resources, sought support from their thesis advisor, and had more self confidence in general.

When questioned about the effect of the recent high cost of living - economy, I have noted polarized responses from the participants in that there was a high negative impact or

minimal to no impact at all. It was also noted that the year of each participant's graduation had significant relevance to their response. Those who graduated in 2013 and 2014 reported great stress related to the poor economy given the nature of the job market and increase in tuition. One participant in particular summarized this frustration by stating, "It had a big influence because tuition went up(rate of dollar exchange rate went up lead to increase in tuition fee) . Also, I was stressed about the job market because no one was hiring and I knew I couldn't quit my job to concentrate on my studies. Those that graduated 2011 and earlier did not express that the economy had any negative impact on their stress level.

Summary and Prevailing Themes

Advice to new MSW student:

- Self Care
- Exercise/Eating Healthy
- Professional Therapy
- Social, Peer, and Family support
- Professor and Field Instructor support
- Spirituality
- Maintaining Perspective
- Keeping to a timeline/To-do list/Stay organized
- Start thesis/project as soon as possible
- Maintain a healthy social life

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Stress has long been seen as an integral part of social work practice and the notion that social work is an inherently stressful profession is not new. Stress and burnout are perpetual problems for social works and they are regularly required to deal with emotionally challenging and complex situations and a wide range of diverse service users (Moran & Hughes, 2006 &NASW,2008).Therefore training in stress management and burnout prevention is crucial in order to protect the emotional well-being of social work professionals (Dziegielewski et al.2004).

This project was designed to gain a broader understanding of the sources of stress of recent MSW graduates while in graduate school with the objective of ascertaining suggestions and advice for effective stress reduction for current and future MSW students. This study also had the objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the amount of additional stress that was experienced by students due to the recent state of the economy being high cost of living. Given the amount of pressure and role-strain experienced by MSW students, the researcher felt that it was pertinent to investigate these issues for the benefit of current and future students. Although the findings of this qualitative study may not have added statistically significant data, the results of this study offers a more in depth understanding of the experiences and stressors of recent MSW graduates.

The researcher analyzed the sources of stress that were identified by the participants including, but not limited to, working full-time, course load, internship, and the challenge of balancing all three responsibilities. The stress theory applies to the students' perception of situational stress experienced in graduate school in that the stressful event,

“....becomes a psychological stressor when the individual reacts to the stressful event or condition based on cognitions that the event will adversely affect his or her personal well-being. This perception of the event as psychologically stressful is the vital component necessary to define the event as a psychosocial stressor in the human stress response. Over time, the strain of responding to stressful situations, whether mentally

or physically, can be cumulatively detrimental”. (Matthieu & Ivanoff, 2006, p. 340)

My findings contribute to the Social Work Department and future students in regards to identifying the types of stressors they may encounter and coping methods to address these stressors. Based on the responses provided by the research participants, the top stressors while completing the MSW program were reported as follows: balancing coursework, internship, thesis/project, and work responsibilities, personal problems (i.e. divorce, living far from home)/lack of social support, financial problems, lack of preparation for work and internship, and health problems.

Most participants reported that their greatest stressor was derived from challenges in balancing coursework, internship, thesis/project, and work responsibilities. When asked what were some of the greatest stressors during graduate school, one participant stated, “work load, with school, internship, thesis. They each needed time and energy which was running low.”

Secondly, multiple participants reported that personal problems and lack of social support was their greatest stressor. Some indicated that they experienced serious health problems, went through divorce, illness or death in the family, and lacked social support. One participant in particular had major back surgery, which hindered her ability to sit long periods in class, and made it difficult to fulfill her eight-hour internship responsibilities. Furthermore, others indicated that they faced some form of financial problems due to increase in tuition, housing costs, and not being able to work due to course load and internship. While others stated that they did not feel as if they were prepared enough through their coursework for their internships and jobs.

The advice provided to current and future students from recent graduates in regards to how to cope with stressors related to the MSW program were as follows: balance of work and play, maintain social life, vent to supportive people, self-care, maintaining perspective, maintain peer and family relationships, and stay organized. When asked what advice they would offer to future students, one participant suggested, “Sharing your experiences and stresses with other who can appreciate them and help you through them is key. This also opens up the possibility of others offering you effective suggestions for coping.”

The themes of stressors that are supported by the findings in the literature were work schedules, field placement, course load, and personal factors.

5.1 Implications for Social Work

These researcher found that the literature reviewed combined with their research could influence all levels of Social Work practice, including micro, meso, and macro. For example, on the micro level, students will learn to identify stressors and apply their coping skills to future stressors to effectively reduce stress levels once in the field and prevent or reduce incidences of burnout. Through this experience, student will become more self-aware, which will in turn provide them with the skills to identify causes of stress in the community and the clients they serve, enabling them to hone their advocacy skills. Furthermore, the implications for the meso level could be that MSW faculty, field instructors, and thesis advisors will be better prepared to provide effective support to students that face challenges related stressors experienced while in the program. Finally, the macro level is also impacted by this research in that current policies can be revised or analyzed to decipher if changes can be made to current educational plans.

Given the findings of this research and the amount of stress experienced by MSW students while in graduate school, the researcher find it important that further studies should explore how Social Work Education programs can change or alter their existing programs. Through these modifications, future MSW students can experience a more effective and less stressful graduate program. Additionally, the researcher found that students experienced a significant reduction in stress levels when they had the support of their field instructor/liason, and MSW faculty while completing the program. It is therefore the recommendation of the researcher that faculty and staff obtain on-going education to provide a more supportive learning environment that students will untimely benefit from.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Although there were significant findings that were derived from the research of this study, there were also certain limitations. One of the limitations of this study was the number of participants interviewed, which were 14 in total from Ignou Saint Mary Social work graduate students. For future research related to this subject it would be beneficial to

interview a larger amount of participants from a larger geographic area to acquire more statistically significant findings.

Additionally, female students composed the majority of the participants interviewed in this study, although this is representative of the sample population. Given the small sample of participants, we were further limited given that two of the participants' responses failed to answer the interview questions thoroughly, which made it challenging to maximize the quality of the findings. Had there been a larger pool of participants, responses that failed to fully answer the interview questions would not have had as much of a significant impact.

This study was especially interested in analyzing the impact the recent state of the economy had on the participants interviewed. However, the researcher found that most of the participants had graduated prior to the recession after the data was collected. The researcher assumed that students that graduated within the last five years would have had some form of impact on their stress levels due to the economy; however the findings show that the only participants that felt the impact were those that graduated in 2013 and 2014, while those that graduated before 2011 noted no impact. Along with having a larger pool of participants, future research would benefit from ensuring that at least half of the participants graduated in 2013 and after, while the other half of participants graduated before 2013 in order to conduct a comparative analysis.

Finally, this research failed to look at how stress impacted student's health and other biological factors. Further research can investigate or question MSW graduates about the impact the stress they experienced had on their health.

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APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research

You are invited to participate in a research study that will be conducted by Fedayit Abebe, social work graduate students at IGNOU Saintmary University. This study will explore sources of stress experienced while in graduate school and coping methods used to effectively reduce stress.

Procedures:

After reviewing this form and agreeing to participate you will be given the opportunity to set up a time convenient for you. The interview should take approximately one hour. It will be audio taped. The tape will be transcribed and then destroyed.

As a participant in the interview you can decide at any point to not answer any specific question or to stop the interview.

Benefits:

By being part of this study you may gain insight into effective coping strategies. In addition this research may help others to further understand the connection between stress experienced in graduate school and helpful coping methods. This information may be useful in providing more effective coping skills for graduate students.

Confidentiality:

All information is confidential and every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality. Your responses on the audiotape will be confidential. Information you provide on the consent form will be stored separately from the audiotapes in a secure location. All audiotapes will be transcribed by the researcher. The researcher's thesis advisor will have access to the transcriptions for the duration of the project. The final research report will not include any identifying information. All of the data will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

Rights to withdraw:

If you decide to participate in this interview, you can withdraw at any point. During the interview you can elect not to answer any specific question.

Consent to Participate as a Research Subject

I have read the descriptive information on the Research Participation cover letter. I understand that my participation is completely voluntary. My signature indicates that I have received a copy of the Research Participation cover letter, and I agree to participate in the study.

I _____ agree to be audio taped.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have any questions you may contact me at _____ or email me at _____

Or, if you need further information, you may contact my thesis advisor:

Ms. Bizuayenu Ayele
Ignou Saint Mary University
Addis Ababa

Cell phone no. +251 911 862072

Thank You for your cooperation and participation.

APPENDIX B

Counseling Referrals List

Black Lion Hospital

Social work and counseling section

Tikur anbessa next to Oil Libya gas station

Tel.no.0115- 511211

Pawlos Hospital

Enkulal fabrica the road to General Winget School

Tel.No: 0112-768303

Private

Michael Mental Health Center

Psychiatry service

On the way to Gola Michael church

Adjacent to Oil Libya gas station

Radio Station

Endalk and maheder

Counselling and Refferal service

Contact Person: Tigist walta

Cell Phone No.+251-47-77-96

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

TYPE I QUESTIONS

1. What were some of your greatest stressors during graduate school? List the top stressors you experienced in graduate school.
2. What kind of coping skills and methods did you use during those times? Describe your coping practices to reduce stress during your academic career.
3. List the top five resources you utilized to effectively reduce stress while in graduate school.
4. In what ways were your coping styles/practices/experiences helpful to you during you graduate studies?
5. Describe any significant stressful experiences, non-academic, you had in graduate school.
6. How did your academic and non-academic stress impact your experience in graduate school?
7. What factors in life have influenced your coping skills and ability to effectively reduce academic stress?
8. If you could offer any advice to current graduate students on how to effectively cope with the stress of the completing the program, what would say?
9. If you could go back and change the way you addressed stressors while in graduate school what would you change?
10. How much influence did the recent economic situation have on your stress levels while in graduate school?

TYPE I QUESTIONS

- Demographic information

1. Age
2. Gender
3. Education
4. Religious affiliation
5. Year of MSW graduation
6. Employment status

**Indira Gandhi National Open University
School of Social Work**

**A Study on Stress, its impact and emotional well being of social
work students: Stress Management Guidelines to Future Students**

By: Fedayit Abebe kahsai

**A Research proposal Submitted to Indira Gandhi National Open
University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for The
Degree of Master in Social Work.**

Advisor: Bizuayehu Ayele

December 2014

**PROFORMA FOR SUBMISSION OF MSW PROJECT PROPOSAL FOR APPROVAL
FROM ACADEMIC COUNSELLOR AT STUDY CENTRE**

Enrolment No: ID1217165

Date of Submission: December 10,2014

Name of the study centre: Saint mary University ,Addis Ababa

Name of the guide: Bizuayehu Ayele

Title of the project: A Study on Stress, its impact and emotional well being of social work students: Stress Management Guidelines to Future Students

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Date December 2014

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Chapter One

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to provide a discussion on stress, how it can prevent students from being successful in fulfillment of their educational goals and suggest coping mechanisms a guidelines from recent graduates of social work students to future students. The literature is supportive of the fact that stress places demands on an individual, and in response to the stress, the body attempts to adapt to the stressful experience to maintain a sense of normalcy (Selye, 1974). Another common theme in the literature is that university students are faced with a unique set of stressors that may be overwhelming, thus altering the ability to cope with a situation. Strategies to reduce stress have been associated with academic success in university students (Dziegielewski et al., 2004).

Stress is a common element in the lives of every individual, regardless of race or cultural background (Garrett, 2001). Over the past few decades, there has been significant investigation on the issues of stress and management of stress (Dziegielewski, Turnage&RoestMarti, 2004). In addition, university students have been shown to possess a unique set of stressors which can affect their daily experiences (Garrett, 2001). The focus of this article is on stress and how it can affect academic success and emotional well being of social work students.

According to Selye (1974 p. 27), stress is a “nonspecific response of the body to any demands made upon it”. In other words, as demands are made on an individual or as situations arise, the body attempts to adjust or adapt to the situation in order to reestablish normalcy (Selye 1974). Selye(1974) further states that there is a series of physiological reactions that occurs in response to environmental demands or any noxious stimulus. Some familiar reactions to demands made on the body include increased heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure and blood glucose level. These compensatory reactions occur to ensure the muscles and vital organs have an ample supply of oxygen, energy and nutrients to handle the challenging situation (Nathan, 2002). In addition, Nathan (2002) also states that prolonged and severe stress may be psychologically damaging in that it may hinder a person’s ability to engage in

effective behavior. Another view of the effect of stress on the body was presented by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), in that they state stress is more than a response to environmental demands, but is also related to personal perception. If an individual perceives a situation as stressful, then it is indeed stressful. Also, if an individual is susceptible or vulnerable to the negative effects produced by stressors, the situation may pose a threat or may be harmful to the individual (Lazarus & Folkman 1984). Furthermore, an individual's well-being may be at risk whenever their resources to manage the stressful situation is limited or depleted (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). All in all, when multiple demands are made on an individual, they usually experience intense feelings of stress related to role-ambiguity, role-strain and role-overload (Dziegielewska et al., 2004).

Stress is affecting the lives of many as research studies have been made in USA and UK on student social workers as well as on employees and service giving organizations such as hospital etc.

Most students withdrew from university life especially social work and medical students in most schools in Africa and Ethiopia.

In Ethiopia student's annual enrollment shows increase in number from year to year in both government and private universities. Being this an average of 1/3 of the students quit exam and withdraw especially social work and medical students. (Fortune magazine dated 13.10.2014)

So I believe this issue should be seriously studied critical analysis needed to be done on stress and focus on the emotional well-being of students. Stress management tips needs to be communicated and make every student to be successful in their educational goals.

The belief that there is a relationship between stress and disease has been discussed for several decades. Holmes and Rahe (1967) were among the first researchers who identified a relationship between stressful life experiences and the onset of disease. In addition to an overall definition of stress, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) found that hassles and uplifts seem to be a better predictor of a person's well-being. Daily hassles have been defined by Kanner, Coyne, Schafer & Lazarus (1981) as irritating or annoying factors that occur on a daily basis, and place demands on an individual. On the other hand, uplifts have been described as positive experiences that buffer the negative effects of hassles (Kanner et al., 1981).

According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the severity and intensity of daily hassles and uplifts are key determinants of illness and well-being

University students have a unique cluster of stressful experiences or stressors (Garrett, 2001). According to Ross, Neibling and Heckert (1999), there are several explanations for increased stress levels in university students. First, students have to make significant adjustments to college life. Second, because of the pressure of studies, there is strain placed on interpersonal relationships. Third, housing arrangements and changes in lifestyle contribute to stress experienced by university students. In addition, students in university experience stress related to academic requirements, support systems, and ineffective coping skills.

Frazier and Schauben (1994) used the Psychological Distress Inventory to obtain information regarding stress experienced by a group of female college students. The researchers found that female university students experienced stress related to financial problems, test pressure, failing a test, rejection from someone, dissolution of relationships, depression and feelings of low self-esteem. On the contrary, Ross et al. (1999), conducted a study on university students of both genders and found a different set of stressors that were common among all university students; those experiences associated with stress included a change in eating and sleeping habits, new responsibilities, heavier work loads and breaks. Similarly, Phinney and Haas (2003) reported a unique set of stressful experiences among ethnic minority, first generation college freshmen. More specifically, sources of stress included difficult financial challenges, domestic responsibilities, responsibilities related to holding a job while in school, and a heavy academic load. Also, the ethnic minority university freshmen experienced stressors such as conflicts in time management, pressure associated with their academic workload and problems within their family (Phinney & Haas, 2003). In addition to identification of stressors experienced by first generation ethnic minority freshmen, Phinney and Haas (2003) found that students who expressed strong social support congruent with their educational goals, experienced more feelings of self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-determination. Consequently, these students believed they were more successful in their academic endeavors in that they were better able to cope with their stressful experiences.

Besides the usual stressors associated with university life, students enrolled in a curriculum of a caring profession seem to face additional stressors related to their clinical practicum (Dziegielewska et al., 2004). Also, burnout among caring professionals, such as those in

medicine, nursing and social work, is an issue of concern. In fact, Dziegielewski et al. (2004) state that the risk of burnout is high among this population of professionals.

Health care professionals are subjected to chronic stressors due to the nature of their work and environmental factors. In other words, health care professionals are constantly bombarded with a number of environmental and psychological stressors. Kanner et al. (1981) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) determined that the number of identified stressors is not the only element that may jeopardize a person's wellbeing. The researchers found that if there is an increase in the severity and intensity of the stressors, or hassles and uplifts, a person's well-being is significantly affected. In other words, there is often physiological or psychological disequilibrium when the stressors are severe and intense.

In lieu of the negative effects of stressors among persons in the caring professions, there is a need for early intervention during the university curriculum or early in the professional career. In an investigation by Dziegielewski et al. (2004) subjects were enrolled in a course of study leading to a degree in social work. The researchers (Dziegielewski et al., 2004) noted that prior to the study, all of the students had a strong belief that stress can negatively affect professional performance and achievement of educational goals.

In summary, stress has the ability to prevent students from being successful in their respective educational goals. If a continual flow of professionals to the workforce is a goal, student success is essential.

Strategies to empower college students to manage stress may prove to be beneficial. According to Dziegielewski et al. (2004) programs that identify stressors and provide information on stress reduction and burnout prevention can help students learn to better cope with stressful experiences. Subsequently, better coping skills are associated with decreased anxiety levels and decreased risk for academic failure. The literature suggests that stress is a common theme among college students, and when stressful experiences are greater than the coping resources, multiple problems often arise (Garret, 2001). Hence, programs which assist in the identification of stressors, and focus on prevention of burnout, and counseling regarding coping strategies should enhance student success (Garret, 2001).

I believe this Project will benefit current and future social work students by providing analysis of the experience from recent social work graduates who have experienced similar stressors

related to their academic program. It will normalize the academic stress and allow future social work students to utilize the advice from former students as a coping skill.

1.1 Statement of the problem

There is a lack of direction and suggestions passed down from recent Social Work graduates to current Social Work graduate students in regards to managing stress in graduate school. There is sufficient amount of data regarding the causes of stress on Social Work graduate student, however, there were no studies conducted the impact of stressors related to the poor economy. Given the various stressors experienced by Social Work graduate students such as balancing work schedules, field placements, class load, and personal factors, it would be beneficial to also analyze what impact, if any, the economy has had on stress levels among graduate level Social Work students and what interventions can be developed to address this issue.

The only way we will know what people require to become productive and less stressed is to explore topics as my research question.

The topic will explore many correlating factors to causes of stress and effects of stress. Once these factors are known it will become simple to counter this pandemic.

The prevalence and impact of stress within social work is well recognized and it is a discourse that is regularly linked with the social work profession, to the extent that social work is often perceived to result in higher levels of stress and burnout than many other occupational groups (Coffey et al. 2004). Not only can work-related stress have a serious impact on the mental and physical well being of social workers but it may also result in the level of care being compromised by impaired performance at work and unnecessary sickness and absence (Kinman & Grant, 2010). Furthermore, the high levels of stress and burnout experienced by social workers has also been found to be a contributing factor to on going retention problems within the profession.

1.2 Objectives of the study

:

- To explore the sources of stress experienced during the graduate social work program from the perspective of recent social work graduates and their opinion of effective stress relieving interventions.
- To examine socialwork student's emotional well-being and resilience of stress, to provide a discussion on stress and how it can prevent students from being successful in fulfillment of their educational goals.
- To help future social work graduate students with their stress by providing coping techniques suggested by the recent graduates.

1.3 Significance of the study

The research topic is chosen, as stress is becoming major reason for university student's failure worldwide. In addition no tips on are found in any universities in Addis Ababa which could be a guide for the future students on stress management. I believe if there is graduate school stress management guidelines from recent social work graduates to future students' social workers students will have something to review and guideline to follow as a result student success will be met.

1.4 Scope of the study

The universe of the study will consist of MSW 14 graduate students, aged between 25 to 48 will participate in this study.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

In March 2000 Dziegielewski, Turnage and Roest-Marti (2004) conducted a study at the University of Florida examining stress of social work undergraduate students. The purpose of the study was to measure the effectiveness of a seminar on handling stress and preventing burnout for social work students (Dziegielewski et al. 2004). The seminar was presented by an experienced clinical social worker and was divided into two main parts. The first part of the seminar was subdivided into four parts which included; (1) understanding and identifying personality styles and patterns of behaviour, (2) learning about the topic of stress, (3) helping students to look for signs of stress in themselves and (4) providing concrete measures for addressing stress. The second part of the programme examined the range of methods that students used to help them cope with stress, these included going away on holiday, exercise, family and friend support and humour (Dziegielewski et al. 2004).

The results of the study showed that substantial changes occurred with the students after they had taken part in the seminar. The student's in the study reported that they had not only increased their knowledge of how to reduce stress, but had become more confident and aware of different strategies for coping with it (Dziegielewski et al. 2004). The results of this study support findings from similar studies such as Godbey and Courage (1994), Roembke (1995) and Heaman (1995) suggesting that seminars and training of stress management and burnout prevention can be effective in increasing students understanding of stress and in teaching students strategies to deal with it and thus helping students to cope with stressful situations (Dziegielewski et al. 2004).

Although the results suggested that the students felt more secure in regards to recognizing,

monitoring and coping with stress after they had taken part in the seminar. It is important to note that the sample size was limited to 48 undergraduate students; therefore a larger sample would be needed in order to be able to increase the generalizability of the study. Furthermore although the students reported significant changes in their coping abilities, the study failed to examine which parts of the seminar in particular were the most effective, instead it only examined whether or not the seminar was effective as a whole.

Although there are several limitations of the study the findings are important and further research into the impact of stress management seminars on social work students would be useful to measure whether or not the reductions in stress levels were maintained. In addition to seeing exactly which types of stress education are needed and how best to present this information to students?

Additionally even though the results from Dziegielewski and colleagues study suggest that stress management seminars can be useful in helping to prevent stress and burnout of social work students, the study fails to explore the extent to which stress is a problem for social work students. I believe this is an aspect which needs to be further explored, as in order to be able to successfully look at ways in which to reduce the stress experienced by social work students it is necessary to understand to what extent it is perceived as a problem and what the specific stress factors are. A more comprehensive study trying to address these aspects was completed by Wilks (2008). The main aim of Wilks' study was to analyse the relationship between academic stress and resilience among social work students and whether or not social support acted as a protective factor within this relationship (Wilks & Spivey, 2009). In order to explore this relationship Wilks conducted a quantitative study using surveys to examine the experiences of 314 Bachelor and Master level students in the United States.

Data was collected in regards to academic stress, family support, friend support and resilience (Wilks, 2008). Wilks Found that the main stress factors for social work students included finances, relationships, life-stage transitions, time management and academic stress (Brown et al. 2005; Milner and Criss, 2006). In addition to this Wilks noted how there was a wide number of pressures that affected academic stress such as course requirements, time management issues, financial worries, personal goals, social activities and lack of support networks. Specific to the former pressure is an implied assumption that the existence of social support may moderate to some degree the level of academic stress. In fact social support is often considered to be a protective factor against the negative effects of stress (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008).

The students in the study reported a moderate amount of academic stress, a moderate amount of overall social support, including family and friend support and a higher degree of perceived resilience. Despite classing themselves as being moderately stressed, social work students also characterised themselves as having a strong level of resilience. Which would therefore suggest that the support of friends can be deemed as a protective factor in the sense that it moderated to some extent the negative impact of academic stress on students perceived ability to overcome adversity (Wilks & Spivey, 2009).

Wilks has attempted to offer an insight into the resilience of social work students given the stress of academic demands, as well as attempting to identify to what degree social support can be deemed to be a protective factor (Wilks, 2008). Wilks hopes that;

The recognition of protective resources such as friend support may assist social work educators, administrators, and related practitioners in designing interventions that decrease academic stress while at the same time enhance student resilience”

(Wilks & Spivey, 2009:286).

In addition to improving the academic and health outcomes for students Wilks believes that increased levels of resilience during training can have significant impacts on social workers later on in their professional career when they are faced with future adversity.

Wilks study was similar to Dziegielewski and colleagues in terms that they both recognised the impact of protective measures in moderating the level of stress in student social workers. However both studies revealed limited diversity in terms of gender, age and ethnicity between the participants, therefore meaning that no significant demographic differences were noted. In order to be able to explore whether there would be any differences between different demographics of students future studies need to make sure that the characteristics of their sample were more diverse (Wilks, 2008).

Although Wilks study attempts to explore what some of the main stress factors for social work students are, the study fails to examine to what extent these affect students and ways in which they can be reduced. One study which attempts to do this is one conducted by Collins, Coffey and Morris (2010). This study appears to be to the first study in Britain to focus exclusively on stress, support and well-being of social work students. The main aims of the research were to examine the attitudes students had towards themselves and the level of psychological well-being of the students. The nature and extent of the demands experienced by students and to what extent of support the students felt they had from colleagues, university staff, family and friends. In conclusion the researchers also asked students what changes they would like to see introduced to help alleviate their stress (Collins et al, 2010). In order to address these questions Collins and colleagues constructed an eighty-two-item questionnaire. The first section of the questionnaire sought to gain general information about the characteristics of the

respondents such as age, gender, employment status and ethnic origin. This was gained in order to look for comparisons between the different demographics. The purpose of the rest of the questionnaire was to gain more specific information in regards to the students and their perceived level of stress. The final section of the questionnaire asked students to consider possibilities for changes around stress management, training, counselling and support opportunities (Collins et al, 2010).

The results of the study showed that students experience high demands from their course, which was similar to the findings of social work students in America (Dziegielewski et al. 2004 & Wilks, 2008). The main demands which the students cited included demands to be successful on the course, to attend the course regularly and to complete academic essays, practice learning requirements and course structure were rated just below these (Collins et al, 2010). Similar to these results Koeske and Koeske (1898) noted how tensions between the demands of academic and placement work were regularly identified by students as being significant sources of stress.

While Green (2003) has suggested that the stress experienced by social work students caused by regular attendance on the course could be reduced through flexible options around time and place of study. It is difficult to suggest ways of reducing the demands on social work students to be successful, as not only do students need to be successful on the course in order to qualify. Difficulties in the economic climate and recent Government cuts have resulted in a reduction in the amount of social work jobs available and increased competition, which may subsequently lead to more pressure on social work students to be successful in order to find employment (Collins et al. 2010).

The results from Collins and colleagues study show that almost three-quarters of the sample had part-time jobs, but the amount of hours worked varied greatly. A statistically major finding in the study was that students who worked a higher number of part time hours experienced more emotional exhaustion than those who either worked less or not at all. These findings were similar to the results in Koeske and Koeske's study (1989), where they similarly found that the students in their study who undertook more hours of part-time work experienced more stress (Collins et al. 2010).

The stress resulting from having to undertake part-time work in addition to managing academic requirements is often related to the financial needs of students to support themselves. Patchner's (1983) study revealed that low income was the highest-rated stress factor for social work students. These findings highlight the need for better provision of more adequate bursaries for social work students. This would mean that students would not be forced into undertaking excessive hours of part-time work in order to support themselves (Callender and Jackson, 2005 & Collins et al. 2010).

Although this study was different to that of Dziegielewski (2004) and Wilks (2008) in the sense that it analysed differences between the results of participants with different demographics, the study found no significant differences between most of the groups, such as those of males and females and those with different home circumstances. However statistically considerable differences were found in the reported stress levels of those who had previous experience of voluntary social work and those who did not. The results indicated that those who had either less or no experience of voluntary social work reported higher levels of stress. These results highlight the importance of social work students having previous related experience within the social work field. However the study was undertaken at a very

early stage within the student's academic career and the differences between the two demographics may be considerably less if the study was completed towards the end of their academic career when all the students had gained more experience through placements.

In regards to the range of methods of support, the study highlighted the significance of support offered by fellow students, the university tutor and Practice Educators (Collins et al. 2010). The importance of the tutor's role is a method of support which is often recognised within research and this further reinforces the value of regular tutorials in helping to alleviate students stress. In comparison to the ranges of support previously mentioned, the influence of partners, relatives and friends produced mixed responses and on average students were more likely to rate support structures connected to their course or university as being more beneficial than external support structures.

Overall the evidence of this study would suggest that the students were at a low risk of burnout which is perhaps expected seeing as the students were at an early stage in their course. Although the students were at low risk of burnout, one in three respondents was a few times a week or every day feeling worn out at the end of the day, with one in ten respondents feeling worn out at the end of each day (Collins et al. 2010).

In regards to the questions about student's attitudes to self and psychological well-being, the results were overall encouraging as students saw themselves as persons of worth. However it is also worth noting that over a quarter of the respondents were not satisfied with themselves with one in ten stating that they did not like themselves and regarded themselves as a failure (Collins et al. 2010). Previous studies looking at motivating factors to undertake a social work course have found that a significant number of social workers have experienced; unhappy parental marriages, alcohol and drug problems in their families, child abuse and neglect and

violence (Sellers and Hunter, 2005). Therefore bearing this research in mind it is perhaps not surprising that some of the students in Collins' study had poor self-esteem. Whatever the source of the findings, they highlight the need for adequate support structures which can help empower students to develop more confidence and better self-esteem (Collins et al. 2010).

Unlike many other similar studies, Collins' study looked at ways in which the social work students believed that the course could be improved. The most popular option selected by students was that of more structured opportunities for general group support and bearing in mind the poor self-esteem that was reported by the sample. Increased group support may provide an opportunity for students to be able to discuss their concerns with other students and to gain advice from them thus helping to improve their confidence and self-esteem. However it also needs to be remembered that although this option was the most popular choice, around a fifth of students said that they were unlikely to make use of such groups. Therefore maybe attendance at these groups could be optional (Collins et al. 2010).

The study also asked participants how beneficial they felt stress management seminars would be, half of the sample said they thought that they would be helpful and that they would use them however, one-quarter said they were not interested in the idea and the other quarter were unsure. Despite this studies such as that by Dziegielewski and colleagues (2004) have shown that stress management seminars can be very beneficial in alleviating the stress experienced by student social workers and help provide them with tools to use future on in their career. Furthermore a recent study of social work students' perceptions of competence in practice learning, revealed a need to improve teaching and learning experiences in resilience and coping with the stresses of social work (Parker, 2006). With these points in mind and in view of the high levels of stress reported by the study, the inclusion on stress management

seminars may be worth consideration by universities. Stress management programmes could help students at an individual level by developing their knowledge and understanding of stress, sensitivity to the psychological, physiological signs and teach them ways to address stress through appropriate coping strategies (Collins et al. 2010).

Overall the findings from the study emphasise the importance of appropriate support for social work students especially those with low self-esteem and poor emotional stability. Collins and colleagues (2010) hope that the findings may be taken on board by universities in terms of maintaining and creating spaces in programme timetables for regular individual and group tutorial support. They believe that the implications of this study are wide ranging and varied and that the study encourages a focus on intervention at different levels. In conclusion they note that;

“Students should be adequately resourced and empowered to cope more effectively with the stress generated by their learning experiences. This would appear to be a sound investment, not just during the time spent on programmes, but also to provide a firm foundation for dealing with stress in future careers in social work”.

(Collins et al. 2010:980).

This argument is further reinforced by Kinman and Grant (2010 & 2011) who believe that trainees who are more emotionally intelligent, more socially competent and empathetic will be more resilient to stress both in their training and after qualification. In order to be able to establish whether or not this was true Kinman and Grant examined the emotional intelligence, reflective ability, empathy and social competence of trainee social workers. Whilst they anticipated a negative relationship between resilience and psychological distress, they

predicted that resilience would mediate the relationship between emotional intelligence and psychological distress. In another words trainee social workers who are more emotionally intelligent will be more resilient to stress factors and will have a better emotional well-being (Kinman & Grant, 2011). Furthermore the high levels of stress and burnout associated with social work have been found to contribute to the current recruitment and retention problems in the UK. However it has been suggested that resilience is a protective factor that enhances the ability to manage stress and promote well-being in the social care context (Kinman & Grant, 2010 & Collins et al. 2010).

Kinman and Grant's study is similar to that of the one by Collins and colleagues in the sense that they looked at how the findings be taken on board to help inform the social work curriculum. The main aims of their study were to examine the key motivations to enter social work and the sources of social support and the coping strategies that students draw on to help them manage the demands of the study and placement experiences (Kinman & Grant, 2010).

Although the study used both quantitative and qualitative measures to obtain data, the majority of the data was collected through a cross-sectional survey of 240 Undergraduate and Master level social work students. The project examined the potential sources of motivation to undertake the social work degree and to what extent the students' motivation impacts on their learning and well-being (Kinman & Grant, 2010). The sources of motivation were classed into two different categories which included intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation included self-determination, task involvement, interest and passion. Whereas extrinsic motivation is associated with financial rewards, recognition and other tangible incentives (Kinman & Grant 2010).

The results showed that intrinsic sources of motivation such as caring for people and wanting to make a change were stated more frequently than extrinsic factors such as salary and career

opportunities. The students who were more intrinsically motivated appeared to be more resilient and less stressed (Kinman & Grant, 2011).

In addition to looking at the students motivation to undertake the course Kinman and Grant also looked at the range of coping strategies which students used to help them manage the demands of the course. Coping strategies and social support are seen as key predictors of well-being and can help to reduce the negative impact of work-related stressors on psychological and physical health (Kinman & Grant 2010). The study measured a wide range of external and internal coping strategies such as adaptive, dysfunctional, problem-focussed and emotion-focussed coping. The coping strategies that were mentioned by the students included; peers, lecturers, practice assessors and family and friends. The most commonly cited ways of coping with stress were problem focussed, such as planning, positive reframing and active coping. Kinman and Grant noted how positive reframing, acceptance and substance use were the key predictors of resilience and psychological distress. Whereas the most important predictors of distress were self-blame and excessive substance use, the findings show correlations between the coping styles adopted by trainee social workers and their resilience and psychological well-being (Kinman & Grant, 2011).

In addition positive relationships were found between resilience and emotional intelligence, social competence and reflective ability. The findings indicate that trainee social workers whose emotional and social competencies are more highly developed are more resilient to stress. This may be due to the fact that trainee social workers who are able to reflect on their thoughts; feelings and beliefs will be more likely to be able to consider the position of other people and will be more likely to be able to use their reflective abilities to communicate effectively with others (Kinman & Grant, 2010). As well as helping to build effective relationships with service users, social competence is also a key component in gaining and

maintaining social networks with colleagues, friends and family. Kinman and Grant (2011) note how social support is often seen as one of the most effective barriers against stress. The findings highlight the importance of reflection as a protective factor and as well as a way of enhancing professional practice and growth. With these findings in mind Kinman and Grant believe that;

“A more explicit focus on the management of emotions, the development of effective social and coping skills and the effective uptake of social support is required in social work training in order to enhance wellbeing and protect trainees against future professional burnout” (Kinman & Grant, 2010:14).

Kinman and Grant hope their findings will help inform this increased focus and that they can be used to not only develop the curriculum but to help enhance support structures and help social work students develop key personal skills that will help them to increase their resilience, well-being and employability (Kinman & Grant, 2010).

As a result of Kinman and Grant’s research project there has been an increase in articles surrounding the issue and a series of articles has also been commissioned by Community Care. The research has also directly informed the development of the curriculum at the University of Bedfordshire and has led to well-being days for social work students. These well-being days are intended to highlight the significance of resilience and open up students to a wide range of techniques which hope to increase their emotional intelligence, reflective abilities, social competencies and stress coping strategies. The workshops have been carefully designed to build resilience and are facilitated by specialists in their respective fields (Kinman & Grant, 2010).

Although there has been an increase in literature surrounding the stress experienced by student social workers and the coping mechanisms that they draw on, the majority of these studies are of a quantitative nature and there appears to be a lack of qualitative research. Therefore I have decided to take a qualitative approach to my research in the hope that I will be able to gain a more detailed and in-depth look at the thoughts and feelings of social work students in regards to stress. In addition I hope a qualitative approach will allow for more free flowing information to be gained and to help further identify the problems experienced by trainee social workers. My research will not only seek to find out the degree to which social work students feel stressed, it will also build on the work of Collins (2010) and Kinman and Grant (2011) by exploring how prepared trainee social workers feel to enter the profession and ways in which they feel they could have been further supported on the course and tips for future students from recent MSW graduates.

Chapter Three

3. Methodology

3.1 Sampling Method

The structure of this study will be administered using both a qualitative and exploratory design. A qualitative design is chosen in order to explore and analyze individual experiences of the participants rather than gathering statistical data from a greater pool of participants.

3.2 Data Collection: Tools and Procedures

The main tool of data collection shall be interview schedule and questionnaire which shall be used to collect data from recent MSW graduate. The interview schedules shall contain mostly open ended questions.

Non-participant observation shall be yet another method of data collection. Many issues on which the data is difficult to be collected reliably by way of interview, non-participant observation or direct observation method shall be resorted to.

The research participants will be given to sign an informed consent form prior to being interviewed and will be verbally informed about the purpose of this study.

3.3 Data Processing

The research participants will be asked to sign off an informed consent form prior to being interviewed and will receive their own copy of the consent form after signing after verbally being informed of the purpose of this study. Those that consented to participate will be interviewed individually, in a private setting, and will be asked structured open-ended questions as well as their individual demographic information. The researcher will write down responses verbatim and later to be transcribed each participant's responses. Responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. The audio recordings of the interviews will be transcribed at which time the recordings will be later destroyed. The participants will be

interviewed at different locations in the community. The completed interview schedules shall be processed on computer.

3.4 Chapterization

The **first** chapter shall be an introduction to the subject-matter of the present study. In this chapter, an attempt shall be made to describe the concept of the issue on Stress, its impact on academic performance of university social work students and recommendation for future students in the same line.

Second chapter shall deal with the Theoretical framework and research design of the present study. A review of literature and findings on the predominant origins of stress shall also be included in this chapter.

The **third** chapter shall explain the study design, sampling procedures, data collection procedures, instruments; data analysis approaches and organizing principles.

The **fourth** chapter analyzes the responses, this analysis focuses on the stress levels students experience while completing their MSW graduate studies and the advice they provide to current and future students and as well as include responses of the current social work students

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In the **fifth** chapter, will elucidate the major findings of the present study and recommendation.

The appendixes shall include the Time and budget estimate along with interview schedules and extended bibliography.

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Time Estimate

No	Research Activity	Time Estimated in weeks
1	Identification of problem and objectives	2 weeks
2	Review of Literature	3 weeks
3	Selection of Research Design and Tools	5 weeks
4	Selection of sample	1 weeks
5	Preparation and refining of data collection tools	6 weeks
6	Data collection	2 weeks
7	Editing of data	3 weeks
8	Processing and analysis of data	3 weeks
9	Writing and finalizing the report	8 weeks
	Total activity estimate	27 weeks

Budget Estimate

No	Item/Research Activities	Unit of measurement	Personnel Required	Duration	Cost(Birr)	
					Unit cost	Total Cost
1	Researcher	person				
	Transport cost	person	1	45 days	40.00	1800.00
	Lunch Allowance	person	1	45 days	50.00	2250.00
	Sub Total					4,050.00
2	Secretary services	Lumpsum				700.00
3	Photocopy services	Lumpsum				340.00
4	Binding	Lumpsum				60.00
	Subtotal					5150.00
5	Contingencies expense (10% of all expenses)					515.00
	Grand Total (Birr)					9,715.00

