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## FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONGST SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE SOCIAL WORK FIELD

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FOSTERING RESILIENCE AMONGST WORKERS IN  
THE SOCIAL WORK FIELD

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Yesenia C. Rojas  
Rocio Patino  
May 2022

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## ABSTRACT

The high burnout levels and low retention rates of social workers prove to be significant problems for social service agencies across the country who are experiencing employee shortages and providing a less than adequate grade of customer service as a result. This quantitative study assesses the deficiency of resilience-based skills amongst MSW graduate students who are currently employed/interning within the social services agencies across Southern California State Counties in hopes that these deficiencies may be addressed in the future. This cross-sectional study utilized an exploratory research design and consisted of a self-administered questionnaire which was electronically provided to its participants. The data collected suggests that the age of the participants and the higher the length of time working within the social work field, resulted in higher levels of confidence and character as related to resiliency levels. The findings of this research on resilience contributes to social work practice by informing the implementation phase of the Generalist Intervention Model.

*Keywords:* Social work, social worker, resilience, resilience-based skills

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Problem Formulation

Conventionally, resilience has been defined as the dynamic process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress, trauma, and risk (Windle, 2011). This implies that an individual who is resilient or possesses resiliency has the ability to quickly recover from the challenges, adversities, and crises that are encountered throughout their lifespan. While resilient individuals continue to experience the effects of stress, fear, anxiety, and suffering, they have learned to utilize their strengths and support systems to successfully overcome challenges and work through problems. Consequently, the possession of resilience has been deemed an essential skill amongst workers in many high-stress professions, including social work. As stated by Grant, "It is widely acknowledged that social workers need to demonstrate resilience not only to cope effectively with the pressures they encounter but also to learn from setbacks and enhance their personal development" (2014, p.1).

Collins (2007) has noted that most works on resilience are centered around children rather than adults, and more specifically, social workers. This is problematic considering the large number of work-related stressors that social workers are exposed to on a day to day basis. The prominence of these stressors is best explained by social workers' involvement in the various areas of social service. These high-stress areas include but are not limited to Children

and Family Services, (CFS) also known as Child Protective Services (CPS), and the Department of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS), all of which can be physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding. Kinman & Grant (2012) mention how studies across various countries have found that the current retention problem of social workers can be attributed to the high levels of stress and burnout to which they are exposed to. In view of this, there is currently an emphasis being placed on the need for resilience amongst social workers in the field (Grant, 2014).

In a previous study of 1,001 specially trained social workers, 44.3% reported increased levels of emotional exhaustion/ burnout, in which stress was associated with burnout (Smith and Clark, 2011). However, low retention and increased burnout rates are not the only problems that stem from the lack of resilience-based skills amongst social workers. According to Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin (2001), the elevated resignation rate of social workers has an adverse effect on the quality, consistency, and stability of client services and is a serious issue for social work administration. More specifically, in addition to creating mental anguish amongst remaining staff members who now find themselves with increased caseloads, social work turnover also stalls client's faith in the system (Kim and Stoner, 2008).

## The Purpose of the Study

This research study assesses the deficiency of resilience amongst MSW graduate students who are currently employed or interning within the social services agencies in Southern California Counties. As previously noted, the lack of resilience amongst social workers is a problem due to the adverse effect that it has on the levels of employee burnout and retention across social service agencies. The prominence of these issues diminishes the quality of and disrupts continuity of services to clients giving way to negative client experiences which in turn minimizes client's willingness to participate in services. In an attempt to begin to address the problem of social worker turnover/burnout and the effect that it has on client services, this research specifically focuses on the shortcomings of social worker resilience. By identifying the specific areas of resilience in which social workers feel that they are inadequate, employers can then proceed to focus on creating a specialized training which will target social worker vulnerabilities and transform them into strengths.

The research method used in this specific research study is a quantitative design. The study employed a self-administered questionnaire utilizing the 5-point Likert scale in which the participants specified their level of agreement to specific statements made in regard to the seven facets of resilience: control, competence, coping, confidence, connection, character and contribution. The existing Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) was also incorporated into the studies survey. This research design was chosen considering that the goal of the study

was to collect data from a group of participants at a single specified point in time. The researchers also found that this research design proved to be most efficient due to the study's short time frame. Furthermore, the design selected assured that the researcher's own biases do not interfere with the innate findings of the study.

Significance of the Project for Social Work. The findings of this study hold major implications for social work at all levels of practice, micro, mezzo, and macro. At the micro-level of social work practice, the potential findings address the need for resilience-based skills amongst the various employees in the social work field, in hopes that existing and developing social workers will take the necessary steps to ensure that they are competent in all areas of resilience. At the mezzo level of practice, this study showcases how an emphasis on resilience-based skills can have a direct effect on the quality of the services and resources that social workers provide for clients.

Moreover, at the macro-level of social work practice, this study addresses the function that social service agencies serve in the development of resilience-building and maintenance amongst their employees. This ultimately makes the employers/agencies more accountable for the preparation and readiness of their social workers by ensuring that they provide adequate resiliency training services. It is important for both social workers and the social service agencies they work for to withhold their role in an understanding of how the lack of

resilience-based skills might negatively affect the quality of services rendered to clients.

The research serves to enhance and encapsulate the importance of social work practice at the micro level. More specifically, the findings of this research on resilience contributes to social work practice by informing the implementation phase of the Generalist Intervention Model. While there are various phases to the generalist intervention model, the researchers agreed that it is the implementation phase of the generalist intervention process which proves to be most challenging for both the social worker and the client considering the amount of time that is spent on plan follow-through, progress monitoring and the revision of client treatment plans. It is also during this phase that certain problems and setbacks arise, thus adding to the social worker's workload and need for resilience. With that being said the research question for this project was as follows: How is resilience fostered in social workers?

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

This chapter consists of an examination of the existing research on resilience and the role that it plays in the prominence of social worker burnout, retention, and inadequate client services. The first subsection of this chapter will focus on the studies that have been conducted in relation to the concept of resilience and the seven dimensions of resilience. The following subsections will include social worker burnout, low retention rates across social service agencies, and the barriers to providing adequate client services. The final subsection of this chapter will examine the theories guiding the conceptualization of the research, the resiliency theory and the 7 c's of resilience.

### Studies Focusing on Resilience

Prior studies that have been conducted in relation to individual resilience have centered their focus around children and adolescents. As a result of this, very few studies have looked at resilience in adults, and social workers in particular. The scientific study of resilience in children first began around the 1960's and 1970's with the sole purpose of understanding the phenomenon of "resiliency" and discovering how a transformation in social policies and procedures might instill resilience amongst children who found themselves at a greater risk for experiencing adversity (Lopez and Snyder, 2011). The adversities

explored by the researchers were those in relation to the children's biological heritage, prenatal hazards, mental illness, and existing environmental factors such as poverty, family addiction and their proximity to violence. The major observations of this study found that many children displayed positive adaptation and developed quite well despite their susceptibility to experiencing hardships and difficulties during their early years of development.

Nonetheless, various studies have determined that early childhood is a crucial window for the development of resilience in individuals. According to Masten and Gewirtz (2006), the use of interventions to prevent and reduce risk, increase resources, foster competence and build a strong foundation for future development is most effective when it is introduced during the early stages of a child's life. This implies that while there are some facets of resilience which are naturally acquired over the developmental stages, that there are others which must be taught through the implementation of interference. This is particularly true for the establishment and mastering of fundamental skills such as self-control and self-regulation, both of which are equally important for future success. Masten and Gewirtz found that these skills could be fostered in children through positive relationships and a healthy attachment to others. Ginsberg (2006), who specializes in building resilience in children created the model of the 7 c's of resilience to better understand these different areas of resilience. These 7c's of resilience consist of concepts such as competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control, all of which

come with their own set of principles and guidelines. Ginsberg created a list of specific techniques which can be used to develop resilience skills in children in every one of these areas. For example: in terms of control, Ginsberg found that by empowering children to make their own decisions regarding the things which directly affect their lives that the children began to exhibit a greater sense of control. In a similar manner, he also discovered that by teaching children how to distinguish the differences between what is right and wrong that these children were more likely to not only adopt, but strongly adhere to their own values and beliefs, thus, helping them build character (Ginsberg, 2006).

### Social Worker Burnout

Social worker “burnout” is a term widely used to describe worker stress in an attempt to understand why and how it occurs in the field, while subsequently attempting to retrograde it in order to maintain social workers’ effectiveness in the field. Numerous studies have been conducted with the purpose of understanding burnout through the exploration of interactive measures of overall job stressors, employer autonomy and social support (Kim and Stoner, 2008). In the research study directed by authors Kim and Stoner, a large group of social workers partook in the completion of a survey implemented with the purpose of understanding the occurrence of burn out. After careful consolidation, researchers determined that the survey’s findings suggested that favorable job conditions are essential in the prevention of burnout and stress, as well as the



existence of supportive measures meant to retain workers who are experiencing initial burnout fatigue.

In 2011, researchers Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu conducted a study on burnout which focused on the direct care workers who serve populations consisting of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The findings of this study are relevant to this literature review due to the nature of the services provided by the care workers which greatly resemble those provided by workers in the social services field. It is plausible to state that both care workers and social workers experience similar strains and stressors in their lines of work. In this study, the researchers determined that work-related stressors such as heavy workloads and limited participation in decision-making were also associated with worker burnout.

#### Retention Across Social Services Agencies

The retention rates/turnover of social workers in social service organizations can be attributed to both personal and organizational factors. Organizational factors such as adequate pay were emphasized in past research, which determined that although social workers have a “calling” to serve others, that it does not depose the desire for an income that is satisfactory to the cost of living for the worker. Wermeling (2013) found that the prominence of higher wages played a role in the high retention of workers. What can be deducted from this author’s finding is that while social workers possess an innate desire to help

others, personal factors also play a significant part in their satisfaction and therefore turnover.

Moreover, researchers Kim and Stoner (2008) noted that one personal factor that positively impacts the retention and turnover of social workers is an emphasis on social support and role stress interaction. These researchers found that the existence of a supportive work environment during times where workers perceive a high level of stress allowed workers to remain attached to the organization and its goals. These findings were further supported by researchers Gray-Stanley and Muramatsu (2011) who also found that social workers who reported to have higher levels of role stress concurred with the effect that a supportive work environment assists in maintaining “attachment” to the organization.

Additionally, Elçi, Şener, Aksoy and Alpkın (2012) discovered that the retention rates of social workers and the impact at organizational levels based on prior research was a determinant of current time. The effects of high turnover rates for social workers and the effect on the organization was explored and discussed. It was determined that the impact organizations encounter when workers leave lead to re-adjustments, hiring/replacement of personnel and costs associated with new hires. This study explored the ethical leadership and effectiveness of work-related stress that determined the employees’ intention to leave.

## Barriers to Client Services

Social worker burnout and turnover in turn creates barriers for the quality of the services rendered to clients. In past research, a correlation has been established between social workers' support and its effectiveness during high stressful situations (Gray-Stanley and Maramatsu 2011). It was discovered that a deficiency in social workers support can be a factor which contributes to an imbalance in client services. More specifically, an absence in social support systems has a direct impact on both social worker turnover and the service provided to the client population served.

Furthermore, a study administered on a group of foster care youth described the turnover rates of social workers that provide services to them. This research described the impact on services provided and the difference between a shift in workers and the quality of services provided from a youth's perspective. (Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, Trinkle, 2010). The findings of this study for services youth received implicated the effects minors felt such as lack of stability, loss of trust and even a second chance with a new worker. Within these findings, the services that new workers are now faced with as they pick up cases from previous workers creates a new slate for minors but with new inexperienced workers, comes the strategic decisions agencies must also partake in.

Previous studies conducted for the purpose of establishing a direct relationship among clinician turnover and the services provided to adolescent clients receiving substance use treatment found that treatment outcomes were

not determinants of negative outcomes. Researchers Garner, Funk and Hunter (2013) found no association between treatment outcome for the adolescent and clinician turnover. It was determined that client perspective research regarding client services provided by high turnover/burnout from social workers is very limited. Further research can explore an in-depth perspective of the effects in shifts in social workers providing services in multiple service agencies.

To the researchers' knowledge there is not sufficient literature which places an emphasis on the resources being provided by agencies/organizations for its employees and where there exists a mandatory or even optional training that promotes resilience-building skills. There is a need for further development of the specific resources that can be offered to social workers within their organization such as mental health services, coping/resiliency skills and constant retraining of social workers to better serve clients.

Theories Guiding Conceptualization. The two theories being used to conceptualize this research are the resilience theory and the 7c's of resilience. The resiliency theory was founded by Garmezy (2015), a clinical psychologist whose studies primarily focused on mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. However, after some time, his research shifted to the study of individual qualities which included stress resistance, competence, and resilience. In the research, Garmezy studied the resilience and competence of children whose mothers were diagnosed with schizophrenia and other mental illnesses. The results of Garmezy's study found that the existence of resilience or

competence was linked to a lower number of risks and higher protective factors for these children. Adversely, children with little to no resilience or competence experienced a higher number of risks and lower number of protective factors (Shean, 2015).

The resiliency theory has since then been expanded and applied to studies conducted by other researchers. Often this theory is applied in an adolescent/youth context as a means of developing a strengths-based approach to understanding the development of this particular age group. According to Zimmerman (2013), this theory also assists in shaping an effective intervention design. In this study of resilience, the application of resiliency theory will divert from these younger age groups and instead be applied to social workers. While this theory is often used in the context of applying it to the client services social workers provide, the application of this theory to strengthen a social worker's ability to cope effectively with adverse situations can be beneficial to decrease the workers ability to remain resilient. Additionally, the researchers of this study will utilize the same framework with the use of the compensatory model to assist in the conceptualization of the promotion of resilience building skills of social workers. The compensatory model works to explain that a resilience factor works in the opposite direction of a risk factor (Fleming and Ledogar, 2008).

Moreover, the researchers conceptualized this research project around Ginsberg's (2006) 7 C's of resiliency which served as the framework for this study. These 7 C's of resilience consist of seven facets to resilience which are

competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control. The researchers will utilize this author's framework and apply it to social workers who are currently employed and/or interning within Southern California Counties in an effort to determine what specific areas social workers feel that there is a need for resiliency to be developed. The researchers hypothesize that since this foundation has been effective in instilling resilience in individuals during the early stages of life, that it may prove to be just as efficient when applied to individuals during the later stages of life.

### Summary

The purpose of this study was to further explore the multifaceted concept of resiliency by utilizing the 7 C's of Resilience and the resiliency model. As previous studies discussed, past research conducted regarding social worker burnout and high turnover rates exists in volumes. Many of these studies have found that there exists relational evidence that these negative factors have an innate correlation to the absence or lack of resilience-based skills in social workers. This study served to measure the degree of resilience in social workers with an intent to further advance their personal level of competence in the field. By taking this approach of targeting social workers currently in the field, the researchers hope that this will encourage agencies/organizations to promote resiliency skills in effort to reduce social worker burnout/turnover rates.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### METHODS

#### Introduction

This study examined the 7 C's of Resilience as they pertain to the individual skills sets of social workers who have at least six months experience either working or interning at any social service agency in Southern California Counties. The following chapter will include the methodology that was employed for this study. The sections covered are the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments to be used, procedure, protection of human subjects and data analysis.

#### Study Design

This study utilized quantitative research to identify the characteristics of social workers that contribute to self-resilience. This approach was chosen due to the limited literature found where resiliency is measured and explored among social workers. As previously mentioned, the existing research on resilience has been primarily acquired through studies focusing on children and adolescents. The findings of this study served to explore these vulnerabilities using a strengths-based approach. This is similar to or in conjunction with services social workers currently provide to clients in the social work field. The study also utilized a quantitative approach with the use of Ginsberg's (2006) 7 C's of Resilience.

This approach was determined to be the most effective due to the nature of the measure and self-report of resilience levels.

A cross-sectional research method was employed for this study. The reason for this is being that the collection of these surveys and the distribution method took place at a given point in time. The researchers found this approach to be most effective due to the accessibility to obtain participants who have experience working or interning in a social service agency.

As with many research methods chosen, it is important to consider the limitations of this method. Due to the nature of the study which consisted of providing participants with a self-administered questionnaire the interactive feature was limited, when compared to other methods such as a mixed methods or qualitative approach. By utilizing the selected method, the need for further research was prompted in terms of the exploration of the validity of measuring tools used to measure the resiliency of MSW students currently interning or working for social service agencies across Southern California Counties.

### Sampling

The proposed research was obtained using a non-probability sampling method obtained from master's in social work students. The sampling method was directed with a purposive sample of a total of 50 participants. The planned criteria for these participants was that they must have been employed within or interned at a social service agency for a minimum of 6 months.



## Data Collection and Instruments

The quantitative data was collected with a self-administered questionnaire which was offered solely to MSW graduate students who are currently employed or interning within a social service agency in Southern California Counties and have been so for at least six months. The survey was sent to MSW students at the beginning of both Spring 2021 and Fall 2021 semesters. This survey was administered using a link created with Qualtrics. The primary data was collected through a survey link which consisted of the participant's demographic information such as age, gender, ethnicity, program year and the time length of employment or internship experience in the social work field. In addition to the questions on demographics, the researchers created a list of twenty-one statements which are derived from the existing 7 C's of resilience. The creation of these questions were limited to three questions per building block (of each C).

Moreover, the existing Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) was also incorporated into the research questionnaires, considering that it is a scale which has already been established and utilized in previous studies on resilience. The psychometric properties of the BRS scores have been examined in multiple studies and have proven to be both reliable and valid means of assessing resilience as the ability to bounce back. (Rodriguez-Rey, Tapia, and Hernansaiz-Garrido, 2016). The BRS consists of a total of six statements whose answer options consist of the 5-point likert scale.

All of the statements used in the studies' questionnaire were meant to be non-intrusive, with the purpose of encouraging the participants to provide more genuine responses. Additionally, the collection of this data provided an internal consistency reliability due to the measurement of resilience among a population of social workers. The independent variable for the study was the participant's amount of experience working/interning within the social work field. The dependent variable in the study was the participants' level of resilience which was measured by their level of agreement to the statements found in the study survey.

### Procedures

To solicit participants for this study, the researcher notified the population of interest via email in order to adhere to the social distance policies that were currently in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In regard to the collection of the data needed for this study, this was accomplished through the utilization of a web-based software tool called Qualtrics. This software tool allows the researcher to create surveys and generate reports without having any prior experience in programming. By utilizing Qualtrics in this study the researcher was able to create and distribute their survey to their desired population. Furthermore, the researchers were able to view the survey results in the form of a report which was downloaded and preserved for the duration of the research study.

The participation in this study was entirely on a voluntary basis. The individuals who wished to participate were able to do so if they met the minimal requirements for the study which included possessing at least 6 months experience working in one or more sectors of social service. It was imperative that the participants meet this requirement to ensure that their responses were both valid and relevant to the focus of the study. Once the Qualtrics link was distributed to all potential participants, the individuals who chose to partake in this study were granted approximately one month to complete the self-administered survey. The researchers decided to limit the time that the Qualtrics link was available to guarantee that the respondents completed their surveys in a timely manner. This also allowed the researchers to gather their results by a specific date so that they could proceed in the completion of their study and the analysis of their data.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The identity of the human subjects surveyed remained entirely anonymous for the purpose of protecting the participants. Since the research data was collected entirely through Qualtrics, no identifying information was gathered in regard to the studies participants. All data will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. Additionally, the potential participants in this research study were required to read and sign an informed consent form prior to their participation in the study. This informed consent form included a brief statement created by the researchers which provided all potential participants with full

disclosure about what their participation in the research study implied. This ultimately certified that the participants were fully aware of the purpose of the study and the data collected. Without their consent on this form, the potential participants were not allowed to partake in the completion of the study survey. Furthermore, in response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers conducted their research utilizing online surveys in an attempt to mitigate the participants risk of exposure to the virus.

#### Data Analysis/Summary

All the quantitative data gathered from the study survey was input into and statistically analyzed by the statistical software SPSS. Given that the participant's answers to the survey questions will be based on the 5-point Likert Scale, the researchers found that the best measurement scale for the survey data was ordinal. At the moment, the researchers are unsure as to how they will be statistically analyzing the data for their research, so this segment of the proposal will be updated at a later time.

Moreover, the participant's amount of experience either being employed or an intern at a social service agency served as the independent variable in this study. In regard to the dependent variables for the proposed study, the researchers found that these would consist of the seven different components pertaining to resilience: competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping and control. In addition, in terms of the descriptive analysis

for the study, the researchers utilized the demographic variables gathered at the beginning of the participant surveys.

### Summary

This study examined the 7 c's of resilience as they pertain to the individual skills sets of MSW graduate students who possess at least six months experience either working or interning at any social service agency in Southern California Counties. The researchers gathered the quantitative data with a self-administered survey which was provided to qualifying participants for the study. Additionally, to protect the human subjects who took part in this research, all individuals who wished to be a part of this study were required to sign an informed consent form before proceeding.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter will discuss the findings of the study. A total of 42 Master's in Social Work students from California State University, San Bernardino participated in the study during the Fall 2021 school year. First, the researchers will provide a review of the descriptive statistics of the study. Secondly, the researchers will analyze the reviewed data. The last section will include discussion of the results of the study.

### Demographics

The study included a total of 42 participants. Table 1 indicates the characteristics of the participants in the study. From the total participants, 85.7% identified as female, 11.9% as male and 2.4% preferred not to answer. As for participants' ages we received a total of 41 valid responses and 1 was missing. The minimum age of participants was 22 and a maximum of 53 years of age with the average age 31.2 and the standard deviation of 7.616. The ethnicity of participants was identified as primarily Hispanic American/Latinx (66.7%) while 11.9% identified as white/Caucasian, 9.5% African American, 7.1% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2.4% as Mixed Race/Biracial/Triracial and 2.4% whom identified as Middle Eastern.

Furthermore, when participants were asked about the year they were in for the Master's program there were 54.8% who were in their second year while 31.0%

were in their 1<sup>st</sup> year and 14.3% were in the third year of their program.

Additionally, the participants were also asked about the experience they have working within a social work agency or internship. 33.3% reported they had worked 6 months to 1 year, 31.0% 2-3 years, 23.8% 4-5 years and 11.9% for 6+ years.

Table 1. Demographics

| Variable                      | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                 |               |                |
| Male                          | 5             | 11.9           |
| Female                        | 36            | 97.6           |
| Prefer not to answer          | 1             | 2.4            |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>              |               |                |
| White/Caucasian               | 4             | 9.5            |
| African American              | 5             | 11.9           |
| Hispanic American/Latinx      | 28            | 66.7           |
| Asian/Pacific Islander        | 3             | 7.1            |
| Mixed Race/Biracial/Triracial | 1             | 2.4            |
| Middle Eastern                | 1             | 2.4            |
| <b>Age</b>                    |               |                |
| Mean                          | 31.20         |                |
| Median                        | 29.00         |                |
| Std. Deviation                | 7.616         |                |
| Minimum                       | 22            |                |
| Maximum                       | 53            |                |

### Brief Resilience Scale

The BRS scale consisted of six questions that aimed to assess the participants levels of resiliency such as the ability to bounce back/stress recovery (Rodriguez-Rey, Tapia, and Hernansaiz-Garrido, 2016). Questions 1, 3 and 5 were positively worded and questions 2, 4 and 6 were negatively worded which were reverse coded. The scale used was as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = Disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. Table 2. Demonstrates the total scores results were as follows: The participants scored a mean of 21.10 on the resiliency scale while the average was 22.0. A standard deviation of 4.15 with a minimum of 11.0 and maximum of 28.0. The cutoff score for the highest possible score was 30.0 and the lowest at 0.00.

Table 2. Brief Resilience Scale

| Valid | Frequency (N) | Percentage (%) |
|-------|---------------|----------------|
| 11.00 | 1             | 2.4            |
| 12.00 | 2             | 4.8            |
| 13.00 | 2             | 4.8            |
| 15.00 | 1             | 2.4            |
| 17.00 | 2             | 4.8            |
| 18.00 | 1             | 2.4            |
| 20.00 | 4             | 9.5            |
| 21.00 | 3             | 7.1            |
| 22.00 | 6             | 14.3           |



|                |        |        |
|----------------|--------|--------|
| 23.00          | 7      | 16.7   |
| 24.00          | 7      | 16.7   |
| 25.00          | 4      | 9.5    |
| 26.00          | 1      | 2.4    |
| 28.00          | 1      | 2.4    |
| Total          | 42     | 100.00 |
|                | Number |        |
| Mean           | 21.10  |        |
| Median         | 22.00  |        |
| Std. Deviation | 4.15   |        |
| Minimum        | 11.00  |        |
| Maximum        | 28.00  |        |

### Major Findings/Hypothesis Testing

Using SPSS, appropriate bivariate analysis was completed to determine if there were relationships between key variables. Correlation analysis was completed on the amount of experience a participant had, age, and their responses to key questions. Most tests were not significant. The significant findings included the following (as shown on Table 3.)

There is a moderate positive relationship between the amount of experience a student has in the field and their agreement with the statement “I am just as good of a social worker as my coworkers” ( $r(42)=.306, p=.049$ ). Participants with more experience are more likely to report they believe themselves to be as good of a social worker as their colleagues. There is a moderate negative relationship between the amount of experience a student has in the field and their agreement

with the statement “I often look to my supervisor for clarification on our agency’s procedures” ( $r(42) = -.345, p = .025$ ). The more experience the participant reported having, the less likely they were to agree that they often use their supervisor for clarification of agency procedures.

Table 3. Correlations

|   |                     | How much experience do you have working/interning in the social work field? | Age - Please specify: - Text | What year are you in your MSW program? - Selected Choice | Brief Resilience Scale |
|---|---------------------|---|------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| How much experience do you have working/interning in the social work field? | Pearson Correlation | 1   | .379*                        | 0.216  | 0.192                  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     |   | 0.015                        | 0.169  | 0.224                  |
|   | N                   | 42  | 41                           | 42   | 42                     |
| Age - Please specify: - Text  | Pearson Correlation | .379*   | 1                            | -0.205   | 0.300                  |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.015   |                              | 0.199  | 0.056                  |
|   | N                   | 41  | 41                           | 41   | 41                     |
| What year are you in your MSW program?                                      | Pearson Correlation | 0.216   | -0.205                       | 1  | -0.056                 |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.169   | 0.199                        |  | 0.722                  |
|   | N                   | 42  | 41                           | 42   | 42                     |
| Brief Resilience Scale  | Pearson Correlation | 0.192   | 0.300                        | -0.056   | 1                      |
|   | Sig. (2-tailed)     | 0.224   | 0.056                        | 0.722  |                        |
|   | N                   | 42  | 41                           | 42   | 42                     |

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

#### Introduction

This chapter will present an overview of the data collected from the surveys of MSW students who are currently enrolled in graduate school studies at a California University and its implications to the social work profession. This section will further explain the study's findings and how they relate to the existing literature on resilience. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and how the findings can be used to improve social work policies and practices as they apply to social worker's capacity for resilience.

#### Discussion

The literature emphasizes how the seven facets of resilience can be developed throughout the lifespan, regardless of the individual's demographics. Although it has been determined that childhood is a crucial window for the development of resilience in individuals, there exists plentiful evidence which suggests that individuals can continue to foster resilience through their life experiences, including their workplace encounters. Researchers Kim and Stoner (2008) noted how personal factors such as having a supportive work environment positively impact the retention rates of social workers by allowing them to experience a sense of "attachment" to their organization and its goals.

This would indicate that social workers are able to develop the facet of connection when there is an emphasis placed on social support in the workplace. The literature also highlights how the facet of character can be developed through individual knowledge. For example, Ginseng discovered that by teaching children how to distinguish the difference between right and wrong independently could help them to adopt and adhere to strong beliefs and values, helping them to build character. The development of character can also be accomplished with newly emerging social workers through the teaching of the NASW code of ethics, which serve to guide social worker's values and principles and provide the standards to guide their decision-making and their everyday professional conduct.

Furthermore, in this study the research question sought to address how resilience can be developed in social workers by looking at seven different factors which are direct determinants of individual resilience. The results of this study show how the participants recognize these identified factors within the literature to be slightly influential. The most influential factors were those pertaining to the participants level of confidence as it is related to their individual capacity for resilience. The findings indicate that the participants' age is indicative that they possess a greater sense of confidence when compared to their younger counterparts. Another finding that emerged from this study is that the greater the length of experience, the higher that the participants responded to the statements of character. The results of this study would suggest that a social worker's length

of experience in the field and age do have a direct impact on their ability to quickly recover from difficulties, especially those difficulties that arise during their work.

Moreover, although the participants of this study were able to identify the significance of these two factors in their personal experiences, the rate at which this is applicable to this specific population on a larger scale is not known. This research focused specifically on MSW graduate students currently employed or interning within a social service agency in Southern California Counties for a time frame of at least six months, which does not allow for a full representation of MSW graduate students pursuing higher education in other academic institutions and/or interning or employed within other counties. Further research into how these factors influence these student's individual capacity for resilience on a larger and more diverse scale can add more depth to the understanding of this population's experiences.

### Limitations

The researchers identified various limitations to the study and its overall findings. From the total number of 70 MSW student surveys collected through the web-based software tool, Qualtrics, the researchers found that only a total of 42 surveys had been completed from beginning to end. As a result of this, the researchers agreed that the 28 incomplete survey responses should be eliminated from the data collection for they could not be utilized during the data analysis. Furthermore, due to the small sample size, the researchers

encountered a type II error as evidenced by the completed data analysis which did not yield any significant findings. It was determined that if the sample size had been larger, the power would have increased, leading to a greater likelihood that the findings would have been significant.

Additionally, due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the study utilized a data collection method that was primarily virtual. This method presented various limitations for the study and its overall findings. The use of the web-based software tool, Qualtrics was the sole method of survey distribution. This caused the researchers to have limited control over who had access to the survey, who shared the survey link and who ultimately responded to the survey. This in turn, created a discrepancy in the authenticity of the participant's surveys for the data collected anonymously. Due to the nature of the survey's distribution, it is also possible that non-MSW students could have accessed and responded to the survey providing false information.

Despite the various limitations of the study, the researchers would agree that there were some strengths. For example, the data was collected quite easily in a way which was convenient for both the researchers and the participants. The participants of the study were conveniently able to access the survey from their mobile phones and/or computers, while the researchers were able to collect and analyze the data from the comfort of their homes. Lastly, there was a range of diverse demographics amongst the participants, including but not limited to, their age, ethnicity, and length of experience in the social work field.

### Implications for Social Work Practice and Policy

This study can serve to inform MSW graduate students who are preparing to enter the field of social work as well as the employers and agencies who are hiring these individuals. While the study survey was administered solely to those MSW graduate students who are currently employed or interning within a social service agency in Southern California, the researchers would agree that its findings could be applied to social service agencies in other counties as well. The findings could inform the social service agencies who are employing and offering internships to these students and allowing them to provide supportive services which could foster the professional development of these individuals. This population of social work students are experiencing many barriers regarding their individual resilience, especially in the areas of competence, connection, contribution, coping and control, which could, in turn, adversely affect the quality of their work and the services that they are rendering to their clients.

In light of the study's implications, social work students are able to use the findings of this study to increase their self-awareness as it applies to their individual capabilities and overall capacity for resilience. The results of the study provide this population of students with opportunities for growth and areas of improvement to further advocate and expand the supportive services that are offered to them. Furthermore, it is by these means that social service agencies can link those of this population to the resources which they require to fully

flourish in their prospective field. Continued research can also serve to provide a better understanding and awareness of the other factors that contribute to social worker resilience on a broader scale.

### Conclusion

The intended purpose of this study was to identify how resilience is fostered within social workers, with a specific focus on whether a social worker's length of experience in the social work field could have a direct effect on their capacity for resilience. The results of the study found that demographic information did not have a major influence on the participants' awareness regarding their individual capacity for resilience. Furthermore, while insignificant, the findings of the study did suggest that the participants with greater age and an increased length of experience in the field provided more confident responses to some of the questions asked. It was determined that the greater the participants' age and length of experience in the field, the higher that they responded to the questions pertaining to confidence and character. Researchers suggest further studies be conducted within this population to increase the existing research on social worker resilience and how it can be fostered.



APPENDIX A  
RESEARCH SURVEY

Gender:  
Male  
Female  
Transgender Female  
Transgender Male  
Gender Variant/ Non-conforming  
Not listed  
Prefer not to answer

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity:  
White/Caucasian  
African American  
Hispanic American/ Latinx  
Asian/Pacific Islander  
Native American  
Mixed Race/Biracial/Triracial  
Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

What year are you in in your MSW program?

1st yr.  
2nd yr.  
3rd yr.  
Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently employed/interning within a social service agency in San Bernardino or Riverside County?

Yes  
No

How much experience do you have working/interning in the social work field?

Less than 6 months  
6 months - 1 year  
2- 3 years  
4-5 years  
6+ years

“For the next set of questions, please consider your current work or internship setting. “

Competence

1. “I possess the skills and abilities to handle the difficult situations that arise at work.”

Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

2. "I often look to my supervisor for clarification on our agency's procedures."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree
3. "I am capable of fulfilling the requirements that are specific to my position."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

Confidence

1. "I am just as good of a social worker as my coworkers."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree
2. "I often second guess myself when it comes to my ability to successfully help my clients."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree
3. "I generally look to my superior for reassurance on the best plan of action."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral

Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

#### Connection

1. "I am able to easily build rapport with my clients and coworkers alike."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree
  
2. "I often have trouble building connections with my clients and coworkers."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree
  
3. "I possess meaningful relationships with individuals at my current place of employment."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree

#### Character

1. "I have a clear understanding of what is right and wrong in regard to my relationships with my clients."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree  
Strongly Disagree
  
2. "I sometimes struggle with distinguishing between what is ethical and what is unethical regarding my interactions with clients."  
Strongly Agree  
Agree  
Neutral  
Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3. "I believe that the six core values of social work set forth ideals to which all social workers should aspire.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

#### Contribution

1. "I help contribute to the overall success of my organization and its goals."

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. "I feel like I have no say in the organizational decisions of my workplace."

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3. "I feel that I play an important role in the self-actualization of my clients."

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

#### Coping

1. "I am able to overcome the obstacles that I experience at work on a daily basis."

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. "I often have trouble dealing with the problems and difficulties that arise during my work."

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. "I seek help/resources when it is necessary."

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

#### Control

1. "I occasionally have trouble handling the situations that arise at work."

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

2. "My clients often take control over our sessions."

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

3. "I am able to regulate my emotions when situations arise that are out of my control."

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

## Brief Resilience Scale

1." I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times."

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. "I have a hard time making it through stressful events."

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

3." It does not take me long to recover after a stressful event".

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

4." It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens".

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

5." I usually come through difficult times with little trouble".

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

6." I tend to take a long time to get through set-back in my life".

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

We thank you for your participation in the study. If any questions may arise, feel free to contact Dr. McAllister at [mccallis@csusb.edu](mailto:mccallis@csusb.edu)

Survey developed by Yesenia Rojas & Rocio Patino



APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

You are invited to participate in a study that is designed to examine levels of resiliency among BSW and MSW students who are currently employed or interning within social service agencies in the counties of San Bernardino and Riverside. The study is being conducted by Yesenia Rojas and Rocio Patino, both graduate students in social work, under the supervision of Dr. Carolyn McAllister, director and associate professor of the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between the years of experience and level of resilience of MSW graduate students who are currently employed or interning within the social service agencies in San Bernardino or Riverside County.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked to answer a list of survey questions in relation to the seven areas of resilience which include: competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, control and five questions from the BRS (Brief Resilience Scale). Participants will also be asked to answer six demographic questions.

**PARTICIPATION:** Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may skip or refuse to answer any questions which cause discomfort. If after beginning your participation in the survey you decide that you no longer wish to participate, you may discontinue your participation at any given time.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The participants of the study will remain anonymous. All data gathered for the study will be stored on a protected password file with no identifying information and the results will only be viewable by conducting researchers and Research Supervisor.

**DURATION:** This survey will take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

**RISKS:** Although none are anticipated, if any discomfort may occur while providing answers to the questions you are able to skip the question or end your participation in the study altogether.

**BENEFITS:** There are no direct benefits to participants. However, the findings from this study will contribute to knowledge in this area of research.

**CONTACT:** If any questions may arise, feel free to contact Dr. McAllister at [cmccallis@csusb.edu](mailto:cmccallis@csusb.edu).

**RESULTS:** Results of this study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks/lib.csusb.edu>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2023

APPENDIX C  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 3-17-2022

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-161

Title: Fostering Resilience Amongst Workers in the Social Work Field

Creation Date: 12-1-2020

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Carolyn McAllister

Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for School of Social Work

Sponsor:

### Study History

| Submission Type | Initial | Review Type | Exempt | Decision | Exempt |
|-----------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------|--------|
|-----------------|---------|-------------|--------|----------|--------|

### Key Study Contacts

|               |                    |             |                           |                |                           |
|---------------|--------------------|-------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Member</b> | Yesenia Cabral     | <b>Role</b> | Co-Principal Investigator | <b>Contact</b> | cabry303@coyote.csusb.edu |
| <b>Member</b> | Rocio Patino       | <b>Role</b> | Co-Principal Investigator | <b>Contact</b> | patir300@coyote.csusb.edu |
| <b>Member</b> | Carolyn McAllister | <b>Role</b> | Principal Investigator    | <b>Contact</b> | cmcallis@csusb.edu        |
| <b>Member</b> | Carolyn McAllister | <b>Role</b> | Primary Contact           | <b>Contact</b> | cmcallis@csusb.edu        |

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

Given that this is a partnered research project, the researchers agreed to divide the research responsibilities amongst one another for each chapter. For this project, the research partner, Yesenia C. Rojas was responsible for creating the Qualtrics survey link and completing the discussion and partial data analysis section once the timeframe for completing the survey expired. The research partner, Rocio Patino was responsible for creating and distributing recruitment materials amongst the population of interest as well as partial data analysis.