

BOOK REVIEW

Developing resilience for social work practice

Edited by Louise Grant and Gail Kinman (2014)
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Louise Grant, Gail Kinman and colleagues make a strong and accessible academic contribution to the study of and response to stress and resilience in this 2014 edited book. It is a collaboration of British educators and practitioners from social work and occupational psychology in which the experience of stress is located and described, and strategies for developing, amplifying and sustaining resilient practice are outlined. *Developing Resilience for Social Work Practice* is developed chapter by chapter with a strong and readable practice focus which utilises case scenarios and provides exercises that enable the reader to reflect and open up their practice to each approach.

The ten chapter book begins by establishing the professional context in which experiences of stress occur, and presents succinct summaries of current research perspectives in regard to stress and resilience, within a framework of positive psychology that privileges strengths and skills for wellbeing as well as providing tools for combatting stress and stressors. The overview of resilience research is underpinned by a useful summary of the contributing competencies: evidence for the importance of emotional intelligence and literacy, reflective thinking, accurate empathy and social skills is relevant for all readers, be they social work practitioners and supervisors, educators, students or managers.

Conceptualising stress and resilience as the relationship between environmental demands and personal resources, the editors set the scene by acknowledging the reality that whilst many of the causes of stress lie within the organisational setting, social workers are individually and professionally expected to demonstrate personal resilience. Summarising the current research stance in regard to stress and resilience (to which the editors have contributed significantly), the focus on individual strategies for resilience is balanced by acknowledgment that the sources of stress often lie within the organisational settings and practice situations and that the impact on practitioners, whilst individually experienced, is a contextually-influenced balance of responsibility: this theme is acknowledged throughout the different chapters and is strongly stated at the book's conclusion.

Following the conceptual summaries of stress and resilience, the book's chapters address key focal points for the development and maintenance of stress resilience, focussing on stress resilience as opposed to stress management approaches. Beginning with consideration of the relational aspects of resilience (the nexus between home and work demands, and the supervision relationship), the chapters then consider organisational and time management strategies, and move through individually-located strategies such as cognitive behavioural approaches, mindfulness and self-knowledge and coping skills.

The chapter on the work-home interface gently challenges the 'work-life' dichotomy that is often presented, whilst acknowledging that as emotional labour, it is very easy for the job demands of social work to spill over into our personal lives. The importance of skills of, and opportunities for, critical reflection are considered in a chapter that addresses the importance of positive supervisory relationships, with some very practical suggestions for strategies that supervisees and supervisors can adopt. The practical intention of the book is maintained in the discussion on management of time and organisational behaviour, and the development of skills in the recognition of, and response to, anxiety. A useful summary of mindfulness methods for stress resilience enables this strategy to further consolidate its position in the mainstream of stress resilience approaches, whilst the chapter on peer coaching and mentoring introduces an under-utilised strategy that can supplement and enhance engagement with supervision. The final two chapters provide a well-considered balance between the psychology of stress and coping, and the contextual realities of social work. In considering coping skills and styles, the balance between internal demands and external expectations, levels of control and the difference between emotional and problem-focused coping, the book demonstrates an interactive and dynamic interpretation of stress and resilience that both honours current research and our professional practice realities. The conclusions embed the individual's exposure to stressors and their impact firmly within the organisational setting.

The book's relevance is for a wide audience: its accessibility and practice focus suggests that it can be used within social work education, and its exercises adapted for many teaching, professional development and supervisory purposes. Whilst a book arising out of a British collaboration, the references to the United Kingdom's Health and Safety Executive are easily transferable into international contexts. Of particular relevance to social work and welfare educators is the emphasis and resources that underscore the importance of emotional resilience and wellbeing in the otherwise cognitively dominated social work curriculum.

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