Health Management and Policy Section

Resilience of Social Workers in India: Are They Surviving or Thriving?

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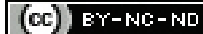
Dear Editor,

As dedicated social workers deeply invest in the wellbeing of individuals and communities in India, authors write to shed light on a critical issue faced in our profession: resilience, or the lack thereof. While resilience is widely acknowledged as a crucial attribute for navigating the challenges inherent in social work-particularly in a country as diverse and complex as India-it is evident that many social workers in our midst are struggling to uphold this principle in their daily lives. The demands placed on social workers in India are immense, ranging from addressing poverty, inequality, and discrimination to providing support for mental health issues, domestic violence, and child welfare. Yet, amidst these challenges, the concept of self-care and resilience often takes a backseat, resulting in high levels of burnout, stress, and attrition within the profession [1]. When it comes to anxiety, a study from Ireland reported that 30.6% of social workers scored in the mild range, 26.5% in the moderate range, and 10.7% in the severe category [2]. Another Indian study on stress and anxiety levels in social work students reported that first-year students who had just been admitted experienced higher levels of stress and anxiety, with moderate levels in second-year students, whereas the highest levels were observed in third-year students [3]. Most social workers work for Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) at local, national, or global levels. Workplace policies usually tend to be vague and arbitrary. Low pay scales and frequent employer whims are two major issues regarding employment. Tasks and activities, as opposed to set, preset daily hours, dictate working hours. The job description is frequently vague, and social workers may be expected to carry out duties that fall entirely outside the scope of their training [4].

Despite the challenging circumstances under which they operate, social workers take great satisfaction in the positive impact they have on the lives of the individuals and communities they serve [5]. It is imperative to acknowledge and address resilience in social work head-on. We cannot continue to expect social workers to effectively support others if they are not adequately supported themselves. Resilience is not just a desired quality for social workers; it is a necessary tool for avoiding burnout and preserving general wellbeing [3]. Resilience-building must become a priority within our profession, and this begins with a concerted effort to cultivate a culture of self-care, support, and empowerment.

To achieve this, one must start by promoting awareness and education about the importance of resilience and self-care among social workers, educators, and policymakers. Training programs and workshops on stress management, coping strategies, and self-care practices should be integrated into social work curricula and professional development initiatives. Additionally, we must advocate for policies and practices that prioritise the wellbeing of social workers, including reasonable workloads, adequate resources, and access to mental health support services. Creating supportive work environments where social workers feel valued, respected, and supported in their roles as essential for fostering resilience and preventing burnout.

Furthermore, one must encourage open dialogue and peer support networks within the social work community, where social workers can share experiences, seek guidance, and offer support to one another. Building a sense of camaraderie and solidarity among social workers can go a long way in bolstering resilience and promoting collective wellbeing.

In conclusion, resilience-building must not be viewed as a luxury but as a necessity for social workers in India. It is time for us to prioritise the wellbeing of those who dedicate their lives to serving others. By investing in resilience-building initiatives and creating a supportive environment for social workers, we can ensure that they are better equipped to fulfill their vital role in creating positive change in our society.

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AUTHOR DECLARATION:
• Financial or Other Competing Interests: None
• Was informed consent obtained from the subjects involved in the study?   NA
• For any images presented appropriate consent has been obtained from the subjects.   NA