Stress, Emotional Labour and Resilience in Social Work: Everybody's Business!

JIM GREER (BSC HONS PSYCHOLOGY, MA SOCIAL WORK)
PRINCIPLE LECTURER IN SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY OF CUMBRIA

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How I Became Interested in Resilience
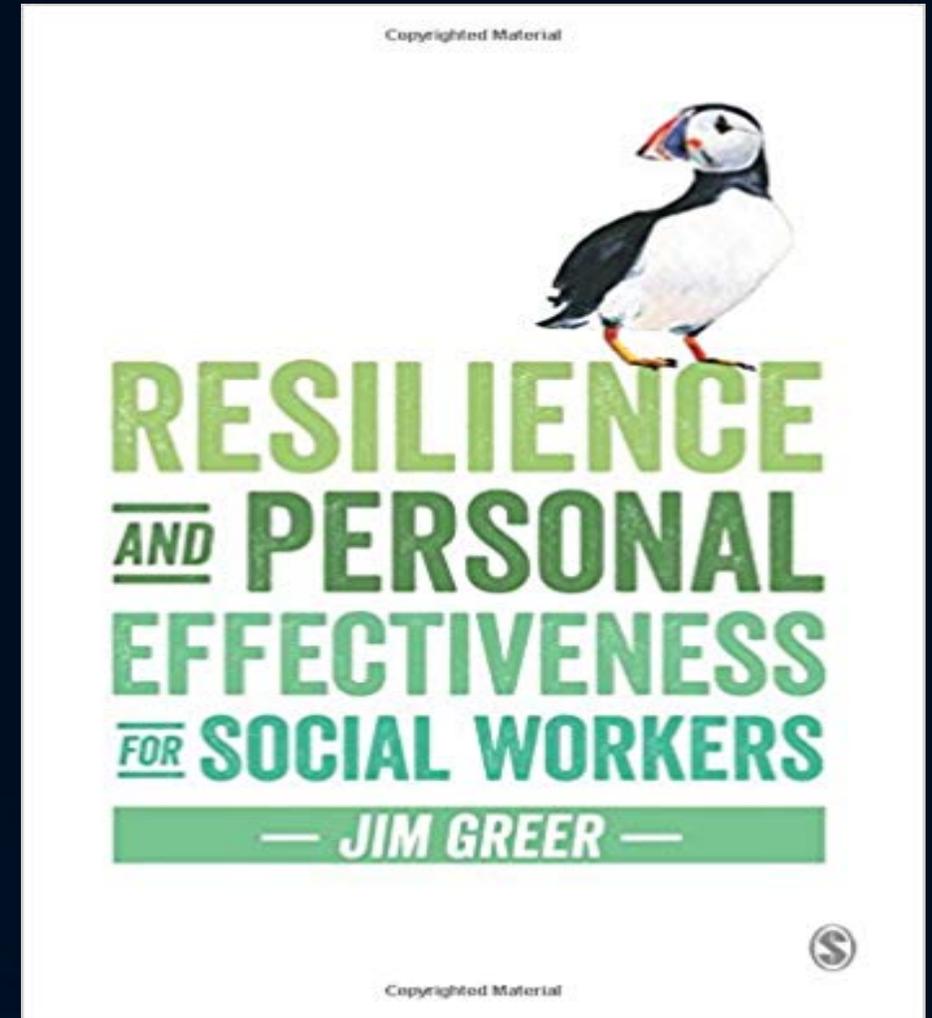
Resilience

- Emotional labour

- Vicarious trauma

- Compassion fatigue and burnout

- Other sources of stress for social workers

- Definitions of resilience and its components

- Promoting resilience

- Whose business is it?

Emotional Regulation: non-judgementalism

- 'It is necessary for the social worker to eliminate factors in his own personality which are barriers to understanding the emotionally disturbed nature of the patient and his problem…………..The nonjudgemental attitude is not one of tolerance or intolerance of the feelings or actions of patients. Rather it is a detached attitude which transmits to the patient the idea that the social worker is only seeking to understand why he acts and feels the way he does.'

Department of the Army (1950)

Other Reasons for Emotional Regulation

- Need to put aside one's own issues and concerns from one's personal life.

- Need to regulate one's public behaviour outside work to comply with standards of employer and the Regulator, especially online.

Arlie Hochschild (1983/2003)
Concept of Emotional Labour
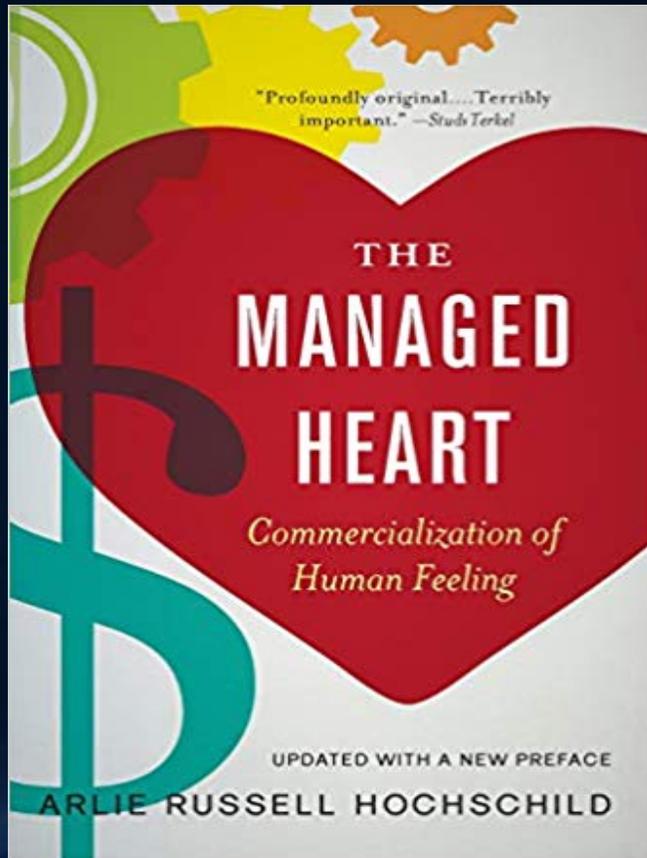
Vicarious Trauma

- 'Result of observing, hearing, or reading about, commonly, violent, trauma that has been experienced by others'. van Heughton (2011)

- Shares symptoms in common with burn-out such as mood changes, irritability and changes in how the person views the world

- Rather than becoming desensitized to the feelings of others, empathy is retained, and in fact the individual may be very sensitive to trauma in others

Others Sources of Stress for Social Workers: Austerity

- Online survey by the BASW (2012):

  88% of those surveyed fearing that cutbacks might put service users lives at risk

  77% feeling that their caseloads were unmanageable

  78% respondents expressed concerns about unfilled vacancies

- Sickness and use of agency staff

- Policy alienation- strain and disillusionment of having to implement policies at odds with one's professional values (Tummers 2013)

Other Sources of Stress for Social Workers: Managerialism and Business Discourse

- elements of management culture and techniques from the private sector are imported into public services in order to achieve greater efficiency and greater satisfaction from service users, who are sometimes rebranded as customers (Harris 2007)

- outsourcing and contracting

- a consumerist approach

- emphasis on performance management measures

- gate-keeping and rationing

- development of standardised assessment tools

- defined criteria for eligibility to receive services

Managerialism : The Political Dimension

- Ferguson (2008) claimed that the rise of managerialism was being driven by a desire to undermine the professionalism of social workers and diminish their ability to advocate for their needs

- Munro (2011) Review of Child Protection claimed that social workers had become too concerned with meeting targets and following rules and regulations and that this was interfering with their ability to exercise their professional judgement

Hot Desking

- 9/10 believe it affects morale (Unison/Community care 2011)

- Needs to be applied sensitively to maintain benefits of team working (Munro 2019)

Compassion Fatigue (Figley 1994)

- 'a state of exhaustion and dysfunction biologically, physiologically, and emotionally, as a result of prolonged exposure to compassion stress.'

- In early stages of compassion fatigue individuals will still be able to experience and express empathy

- potentially a stage in the development of burnout if the individual does not have an opportunity to rest and replenish their coping resources

Burnout

- Endpoint of accumulated stress and resulting exhaustion

- Individual has nothing left to give

- It is the most dangerous stage of work related fatigue because a worker who has lost their commitment to work and their ability to empathise may make poor decisions or be negligent

- Link between burnout and accidents and reduction in quality of care within health care (Demir, Ulusoy and Ulusoy 1997)

What Then is Resilience and How Can it be Achieved?

Three Definitions of Resilience:
1 Attitudes, cognitive style and response to challenges

"Resilience comprises a set of flexible cognitive, behavioural and emotional responses to acute or chronic adversities which can be unusual or commonplace......... While many factors affect the development of resilience, the most important is the attitude you adopt to deal with adversity. Therefore attitude (meaning) is at the heart of resilience."

Michael Neenan and Windy Dryden (2009)

Three Definitions of Resilience
2: Homeostasis and having reserve capacity

Resilience is firstly about "recovery, or how well people bounce back and recover from challenge. People who are resilient display a greater capacity to quickly regain equilibrium physiologically, psychologically and in social relations following stressful events. Second, and equally important is sustainability, or the capacity to continue forward in the face of adversity."

Kate Murray, Alex Zautra and John Stuart Hall (2010)

Three Definitions of Resilience
3. Multi-dimensional and dynamic

"Resilience is multi-dimensional in nature. Consequently, people who are faced with adversity can exhibit competence in some domains but not others."

"In addition to being multi-dimensional, resilience is dynamic rather than static. Resilience trajectories may be uneven, with some people demonstrating resilience at one age but not another, or in one circumstance but not another."

Southwick, Litz, Charney and Friedman (2011)

Supporting the Different Components of Resilience

COMPONENT

- Attitudes and cognitive styles

- Homeostasis

- Gaining insight into the multi-dimensional and dynamic elements of our resilience

HOW TO SUPPORT IT

- identifying and challenging self-defeating thinking styles, building self-efficacy, self- confidence and self-esteem

- support through supervision, support from colleagues, maintaining work/life balance

- mindfulness, building self-awareness and reflection, building personal intelligence

Attitudes and Cognitive Styles: Cognitive Errors

- David Burns (2008) identified categories of cognitive errors which some people typically make

- People can be taught to recognise these errors and challenge them

- Examples:

  Over-generalisation of failings

  Filtering out the positive

  All or nothing thinking

  Accepting responsibility for things that are not our fault

Making negative assumptions about what other people are thinking

Catastrophising

Mistaking negative feelings for evidence of failings

'Should statements' which leave us feeling inadequate

Attitudes and Cognitive Styles: Self- Esteem and Self Efficacy

- Benight and Cieslak (2011) - self efficacy is positively correlated with job performance and job satisfaction

- Self –efficacy is related to internal locus of control and self esteem
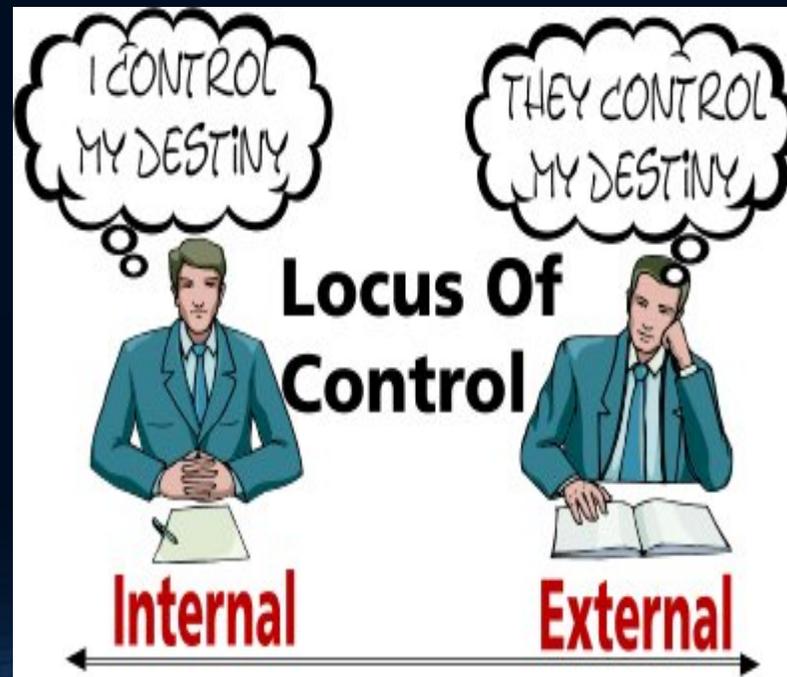
Approaching Challenges Positively

- Ryan Holiday (2014) quoted the Roman Emperor and stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelias who said "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way"

- Thus, if approached correctly, obstacles in our way can be seen as challenges and opportunities to redefine who we are.
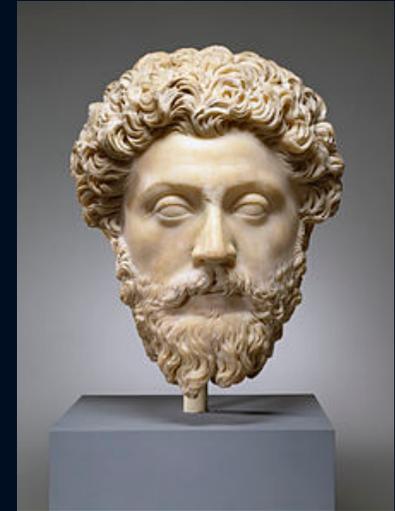
Supporting Homeostasis

- Admitting vulnerability

- Maintaining friendship network and interests outside work

- Maintaining supportive relationships and networks with colleagues

- Using supervision effectively

Gaining insight into the multi-dimensional and dynamic elements of our resilience

- Mindfulness

- Reflectiveness:

- Mayer and Faber (2010) say that a heightened awareness and understanding of our own personality gives us an ability to utilise that awareness to problem solve and live more congruently

- Getting in touch with what and who inspires us:

- Block and Turula (1963) stated that internalising the strengths of people we admire can improve our resilience. These can be fictional character or famous people who have inspired us or important people we know or have known

Gaining insight into the multi-dimensional and dynamic elements of our resilience

- Inner expansion (Dalai Lama and Cutler 2003)

- Finding ways outside of work to achieve the things that are of fundamental importance to us but temporarily unavailable through work

Resilience: Whose Responsibility is it?

- Personal or Organisational?
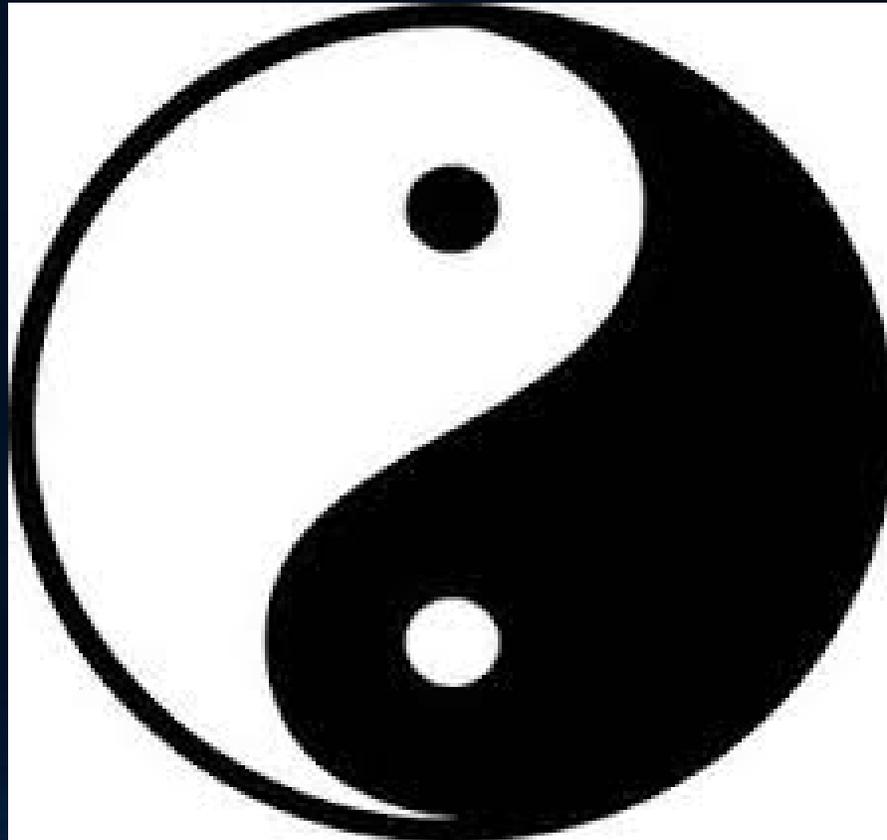
Three Functions of Supervision
(Kadushin and Harkness 2002)

- Administrative/ Managerial

- Educative/ Formative

- Supportive /Restorative.

Supervision

- Department for Education Knowledge and Skills Statement for children and families practitioners supervisors statement has a section on 'Emotionally intelligent practice Supervision' which makes reference (page 6) to the need to 'be attuned to effects of high emotion and stress'.

- Statement for supervisors of adult social workers was prepared by the Department of Health (2017) and was the subject of a consultation process which ended in January 2018. This statement uses the same words as in the quote above (p11).In addition it states that supervision should be 'responsive and restorative'. And that 'Practice Supervisors should recognise how different practice relationships evoke different emotional responses within practitioners, which can impact on the effectiveness of practice.'

- Note emphasis on effects on quality of practice rather than worker wellbeing

Resilience: Its Everybody's Business

- Educators

- Supervisors

- Colleagues

- Employers

- Social workers

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Thank You and Questions?