Intersecting Personal Identity and Professional Role: Impact on Social Worker Subjective Well-Being

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Within undergraduate social work education, personal life characteristics are viewed predominantly in relation to their implications for social worker professional role identity. But personal life factors should also be considered in relation to occupational health and well-being. To better understand this relationship in social work specifically, data from interviews with social workers who reported low to medium levels of overall work and profession satisfaction were analyzed. Respondents noted that personal life factors such as interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal functioning affected their overall subjective well-being, and they highlighted several intersecting factors between their personal lives and professional roles that contribute to overall well-being. The findings have implications for social work education in regard to issues of self-care and the development of inter- and intrapersonal skills to maintain positive occupational health.

Keywords: *subjective well-being, happiness, social work, self-care, personal life, professional role*

Developing a professional role identity is an overarching aim of undergraduate social work education, a place where many students are first introduced to the profession. One aspect of this professional role identity is the need for social work students to align personal life characteristics, such as their individual values and beliefs, with their professional role. Of course, this distinction is important to develop culturally competent, reflective social workers who understand their own position in relation to the position of individual service users (Jensen-Hart & Williams, 2010; Schon, 1983;

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Urth, 2011). In particular, and summarizing Barlow and Coleman's (2003) work on social work education, personal life factors such as congruence between personal life and social work professional values, being willing to change and accept criticism, and one's willingness for personal growth are all aspects of an individual's personal life that need to be considered when engaged in professional social work roles (see also Freeman & Hansen, 1995; Gibbs, 1994; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004). Tam and Coleman (2009) expand on this list and identify eight categories of an individual's personal life that are perceived among field instructors to be what makes a person a suitable social worker. Some of these include being emotionally mature, able to manage personal issues, and being open and receptive to feedback.

This approach to blending the personal with the professional in social work education appears one sided; it emphasizes aligning the personal with the professional. Instead, several aspects of a social worker's personal life can create the necessary conditions that allow social work practitioners to cope with the adverse and secondary traumatic experiences of direct social work practice (Graham & Shier, 2010a). As a result, further insight is warranted into the mutually affecting and intersecting personal and professional domains of social worker's lives. And as is argued here, the implications of such scholarship can be an improved understanding of the elusive concepts of self-care and well-being among social workers and in social work education. We asked the following research question: How are a social worker's personal and professional life factors intertwined in relation to the social worker's perceived well-being?

Perspectives on what works for social worker self-care are individually manifested and supported (or hindered) through the interaction between a social worker's personal life and professional role (Graham & Shier, 2010a; Shier & Graham, 2011a). From workplace social science, some research has found that daily detachment and minimal interference from the personal into the professional and the professional into the personal is important for the most favorable level of well-being and best performance among workers (Byron, 2005; Sanz-Vergel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Morenzo-Jiménez, 2011). Within social work education, this idea of separation, detaching oneself from the workplace (outside regular working hours) to maintain adequate levels of self-care, has only been included in regular curriculum content. However, no research exists that supports whether this claim is true for social work professionals. Instead, some research has demonstrated that social work professionals do not separate themselves from their day-to-day work at the end of the workday (Kalliath, Hughes, & Newcomb, 2012; Shier & Graham, 2011a). As a result, it becomes imperative to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between the personal and professional for contemporary social work education.

Literature Review

The theoretical construct framing this research is subjective well-being (SWB), which focuses on how individual people evaluate their lives and gives a sense of the individual's level of happiness (Diener, 1984; Diener, Duh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The concept is understood to be composed of multiple aspects, including individual experiences, mental processes and decisions, and overall life and job satisfaction (Diener, 1984; Larsen & Eid, 2008). Central to the SWB of individuals is that happiness is, in part, a function of interpersonal relationships (such as family dynamics, workplace interactions, and the quality of intimate relationships) and intrapersonal functioning (such as personality, cognitive functioning, and emotional regulation; Diener, 2009; Larsen & Eid, 2008). As a result, these personal life factors, and how they are manifested in a person's professional role, can be central to a better understanding of how to improve occupational health outcomes among social workers. Furthermore, the theoretical construct of SWB offers a more comprehensive orienting framework for social work educators grappling with curriculum content focusing on the personal and professional life duality. Following the framework of SWB, personal and professional role identities are seen, rightly so, as mutually reinforcing constructs.

For example, relationships of all kinds can cause interpersonal issues and conflict (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). However, supportive outcomes can occur through such interpersonal dynamics as social connections based on altruism; preferential treatment bestowed on intimates; the strength, frequency and familiarity of contact; and positive peer pressure (Carson & Kuipers, 1998; Patterson, 2003). Navigating such successful relationships requires certain skills and the mastery of constructive intrapersonal dynamics, such as processing emotions, self-awareness, consciousness, discipline, empathy, rapport, intuition, and self-management (Goleman, 1998; Morrison, 2007). Certainly, these are areas for general personal (and professional) skill development that could be more explicitly emphasized within contemporary social work education. Applying these strategies in personal and professional contexts in turn can reduce the harmful effects of stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, thereby elevating perceived well-being and functioning (Collins, 2008; Kinman & Grant, 2011).

In fact, in contemporary social work scholarship investigating direct practice experiences of social workers, the link between the personal and professional has been found to be more complicated than simply aligning the personal with the professional or by separating the two life domains. For instance, there is some evidence that many social workers find it virtually impossible to completely sever themselves from their family and domestic affairs when they go to work and then completely leave work behind at the end of the day when it is time to return home (Graham & Shier, 2010a). As Graham and Shier

(2010b) point out, the effects of this boundary between social workers' personal and professional lives on their overall well-being are individually defined. In fact, some empirical evidence suggests that the interference of the personal in work commitments can be a source of conflict as much as a source of support (Horwitz, 1998). Essentially, relationships with family, friends, and co-workers have positive and negative contributions to individual professional roles (Graham & Shier, 2011a). Likewise, life circumstances, personal histories, and coping strategies largely determine reactions to overwhelming and traumatic work events (Negash & Sahin, 2011).

Social work education emphasizes social workers' personal characteristics and vulnerabilities that may jeopardize the efficacy of therapeutic relationships, treatments, and outcomes (Negash & Sahin, 2011). This is a reasonable focus of education in some regard. For instance, some past traumas and vulnerabilities could be aggravated by burdensome levels of workplace responsibility, chronic workplace stress, and exposure to physical danger (Horwitz, 1998). However, much less is known about opportunities for internal resilience; indeed, social workers' personal lives and past experiences might result in improved methods of practice, a more empathetic manner, and a greater awareness of service user difficulties. But how does one tap into that potential?

This article provides insight into the relationship between a practitioner's personal life and professional role, and how this relationship influences a practitioner's perceived well-being. Our findings can be a basis for improving workplace functioning and better client-worker relationships. And they can help to better understand those circumstances in which social workers separate their personal and professional lives, and when this intersection (or overlap) is necessary to appreciate on a deeper level. The findings highlight several areas that can be better focused on in mainstream social work curricula to aid in the development of a personal role identity in relation to an undergraduate social work student's professional sense of self.

Method

This qualitative research analyzes one-to-one interviews ($n=19$) conducted in 2010 based on an initial quantitative study reporting on the satisfaction and well-being of social workers practicing in Canada's Northwest Territories and northwestern Ontario (Graham et al., 2013). Elements of work and professional satisfaction were elicited from participants in that study. Respondents represented a variety of social work fields and ranged broadly in age and educational attainment ($N=138$). That multiple regression study sought to predict models of work and professional satisfaction based on particular dispositions toward the occupation of social work, mental health symptoms, job characteristics, and multiple demographic variables. A recruitment section was included in the informed consent process in which

participants were invited to provide their contact information for possible participation in a follow-up interview.

Interview participants were selected by purposive sampling from the 91 respondents who completed the study's social worker satisfaction scale (Graham et al., 2013), had scored mid to low on overall workplace and profession satisfaction, and who provided us with contact information for a follow-up interview. Respondent scores on the overall measure of social worker satisfaction were ranked, and the 25 respondents who scored the lowest and the 25 respondents who scored midrange on this scale were contacted to participate in a follow-up interview. We focused specifically on social workers who were less satisfied because they would have insight into current factors related to their work and profession that contributed negatively to their present levels of SWB. Although it is also likely that people who scored high on the measures of work and profession relating to well-being would have insights about the things that contribute to their high levels of well-being, previous research on social worker SWB has shown that those insights tend to be more general (see, e.g., Graham & Shier, 2010a, 2010b; Shier & Graham, 2011b), therefore affecting the development of more in-depth or inclusive constructs, such as the personal-professional dynamic that contributes to social worker perceived well-being. Furthermore, we were interested in the experiences of those individuals who had low levels of satisfaction. These experiences are manifested in a particular context of study, and to establish a transferability of findings, the context of study (based on present political, economic, and social factors) can be compared with other contexts to establish whether the findings are applicable in those contexts. Emphasis on those individuals who were predominantly satisfied would have limited our study's transferability, as they might be commenting on previous contexts in which they practiced.

A standardized telephone script was used to initiate contact, and a total of 19 respondents agreed to participate in the research. All participants held a diploma or university degree in social work; the majority were employed by government-mandated social welfare programs; levels of experience varied widely, the most frequent age categories were 36 to 45 and 46 to 55; and all worked in the Northwest Territories and northwestern Ontario. The University of Calgary Ethics Review Board granted ethics certification for the study.

Data were collected following standard qualitative approaches to interviewing (Fetterman, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Interviews lasted about 1 hour and were conducted by a research team member over the telephone. Following a semistructured open-ended interview guide, respondents were asked questions that sought to identify aspects of work, the profession, and their personal lives that had an effect on their SWB. Respondents were asked the following:

- What aspects of the profession of social work have the greatest impact on your overall well-being?

- What factors in your personal life contribute to your happiness?
- What aspects of your work environment contribute to your perceived well-being?
- Can you describe what things your employer could do to improve your well-being?

All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data were analyzed using qualitative methods of analytic induction and constant comparison strategies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Specifically, data were analyzed for emergent themes (Williams, 2008) and patterns (Fetterman, 2008). By first reading through all the interviews and isolating recurring themes, one researcher coded the data after reading the transcripts three times, then the two researchers came together to discuss the coding process until all contradictions, similarities, and differences were explained in the coding, thus increasing the dependability and consistency trustworthiness criteria. A saturation of findings was achieved with the 19 social work respondents. The collaboration of the team on this stage of the research ensured that the credibility criteria of the study were maintained.

Findings

Aligned with the theory of SWB, respondents identified two aspects of their personal lives affect their perceived well-being: interpersonal dynamics and intrapersonal functioning. Respondents also provided new insight into the intersection of these personal characteristics and their professional roles. The data provide examples of ways personal life factors can contribute to professional and workplace well-being.

Interpersonal Dynamics

The concept of interpersonal dynamics refers to the nature and types of relationships and interactions that individuals have with each other. The nature of those relationships refers to the structure of the relationship and interaction between two (or more people). The nature of interpersonal dynamics might also include the perceived quality of the relationship. Types of interpersonal dynamics refer to the different people we have relationships or interactions with and include the different roles people have based on our position in that relationship, such as employer, colleague, service user, spouse, friend, or child.

Many participants discussed how their intimate relationships benefitted their SWB. As one respondent stated,

I would say what works well is ensuring that you have a good connection and contact with a support system whether it be family or other profes-

sionals, you need that in order to be balanced. You need to have a sounding board; somebody that you feel you can safely share issues with. (020)

Several respondents expressed how important it was to stay connected, especially through periods of adversity. One respondent said,

Sometimes stories [from clients] are so sad and horrendous you can't help but carry them. Certainly if it's a tragedy, a suicide or a lost family member or something that connects closely with your own life. Those are a bit harder and that's when I make sure I reach out to my support system within the community, including the church. (005)

As these respondents have articulated, personal life relationships are key aspects of maintaining well-being in the workplace. Individual social workers' personal life relationships are fundamental in addressing a negative psychosocial well-being attributed to their professional roles.

Work-related relationships were also identified by respondents as affecting their overall well-being. For instance, several respondents struggled with cultivating the degree of patience necessary to constructively support other practitioners in their stages of learning and in successfully navigating occurrences of interpersonal conflict. In other cases, clients could also be a source of interpersonal difficulty. One respondent stated,

I found that probably the hardest thing to swallow and probably what caused me the most stress was when parents or people made a decision in their life that had very negative impacts on them and others. Hearing decisions that people make can be hard. (016)

The development and quality of intimate relationships in the workplace, within the profession, and beyond in an individual's personal life had direct implications for these respondents' perceived well-being. Some respondents did not differentiate between these different types of personal relationships. They did not state that certain interpersonal relationships are needed for maintaining well-being at work and others for their personal lives. Instead, the relationships themselves are developed based on the needs of the individual social workers. For these respondents, a simple work-personal life disconnect is not sufficient in maintaining practitioner well-being. These relationships (even in the workplace) were all regarded as personal and used to support social workers' well-being as they undertake their professional roles.

Intrapersonal Functioning

The concept of intrapersonal functioning refers to the cognitive processes individuals undertake internally to process information and make decisions. Because social workers are often required to operate in emotionally charged

traumatic situations that have uncertain outcomes, it is all the more important for them to be particularly mindful of their emotional state and that of their clients (Morrison, 2007; Spratt & Callan, 2004). Respondents identified several intrapersonal characteristics that were thought to be particularly useful in achieving this level of mindfulness. For instance, many reported feeling an increased level of SWB from being employed in a profession that is concordant with their worldviews and past experiences. They spoke of having been motivated to choose a career in social work for altruistic reasons and because striving for social justice resonated with them. One respondent commented,

I like social work because it aligns with my core values and beliefs. I feel good after a day of work because I'm instilling those values and beliefs. It runs into my personal life at home and I try to keep it going. (009)

Fit of character was also an important factor. Cultivating SWB by focusing on the journey, truly knowing oneself, building maturity and confidence, accepting one's expectations, and appreciating one's strengths and weaknesses were common themes. For instance, one respondent stated,

It's a balance between honoring one's inherent characteristics and, at the same time, challenging one's natural preferences. Pushing the boundaries of one's comfort zone. For example, I'm an introverted person. It is important for me to be true to that inherent trait. But at the same time, [it is also important] for me to challenge myself while recognizing it, so as not to become completely limited by it. (013)

Maintaining balance and practicing self-care were also crucial for respondents' SWB. Several respondents elaborated on the consequences of having neglected their needs. One respondent said,

Burnout is certainly a huge factor in social work. I think it has to do with how you take care of yourself. Not taking too much home with you is very important. Keep it light and keeping a sense of humor about what you are doing. It certainly can be too much when you're dealing with difficult issues that are so sensitive. (009)

Furthermore, several respondents commented on the difficulties of resolving conflict when the source and effects of the problem are obscured. In these instances, applying principles of faith and core values seemed to offer the most comforting respite. One respondent stated,

I really believe in the medicine wheel, the four aspects of the human being: your spirit, your mind, your heart and your body. They all work in harmony and, if you're in tune with them, you know when one of them is out of balance and can actually fine tune it. (022)

For others, having power over life circumstances, being in control of their emotions, and maintaining appropriate boundaries provided adequate defens-

es. And for others still, having the opportunity to tap into their feelings was enough.

Intersection of Social Work Practice and Individual Personal Lives

The previous categories demonstrate ways the personal lives of respondents affect individual SWB and involves the development and maintenance of intimate relationships and their own intrapersonal functioning. As outlined by respondents, these factors in turn can contribute to overall perceived well-being in the social workers' professional roles.

Respondents also identified ways their personal lives directly affect their professional roles and vice versa. This category, although aligned with the previous two, is distinct because it demonstrates the relationship between the personal and the professional. Interpersonal dynamics and intrapersonal functioning are primarily personal-level factors. Individuals develop cognitive and behavioral processes throughout their lives, and in many respects, before they come to the profession of social work through postsecondary education. Although a primary focus of social work education seeks to align individuals to the social work profession, this has consequences for adequately understanding what contributes to the well-being of social workers and how individuals create mechanisms that help them deal with adverse professional situations. Instead, a process of interaction between the personal and the professional creates social worker identities and the cognitive and behavioral processes social workers rely on to maintain overall perceived well-being. This section focuses on this intersection.

With regard to the intersection between personal lives and professional roles, previous research has shown that social workers are guided by strength of character and hardiness. Social workers often rely on the relevance of their personal experiences, spirituality, and cultural heritage to inform their practice, coping strategies, sense of identity, and connections with clients (Holland & Neimeyer, 2005). Respondents identified a similar overlap between their personal and professional roles when defining aspects of their perceived well-being. For instance, one respondent stated,

I think we learn through all of our personal experiences. As a parent, my children are now grown up and I just had a grandchild so I'm entering a new stage. But all of those life experiences contribute to building empathy. Whatever those experiences are, whether joyful or challenging, they definitely contribute to how we see the world and how we interact with others. (O10)

A number of respondents explained how they shared aspects of their personal lives, such as similar interests and common life circumstances and difficulties with clients, to build rapport (a fundamental aspect of positive relationship development in social work practice, and as demonstrated previously, a

key relationship in supporting SWB among social workers). One respondent said,

I have a one and a half year old son. It gives me a little bit more credibility that I have my own when I'm talking about kids and counselling on parenting. They see me out with him in the community. (009)

Some respondents also talked about how profound trials and life events involving parents, partners, and children affected them and spilled over into their professional responsibilities.

Although the previous excerpts demonstrate ways personal life factors can affect professional well-being, respondents also described the opposite—the professional factors that can support or jeopardize personal well-being. The majority of respondents in this study described how they benefit from the direct transferability of the professional skills they acquire to their personal lives. They also explained that the work they do makes them feel valued and empowered, and this greatly improves their perceived well-being. However, the importance of having an opportunity to relieve the built-up anxiety and tension from dangerous and stressful situations in their professional roles should not be underestimated. Social workers face the prospects of burnout, compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and countertransference (Figley, 2002; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Thus, suitable ways of detaching oneself from work events is essential to prevent bringing the weight home and not feeling renewed. The themes brought forward by respondents support conclusions reached in many previous studies pointing to the greater interference of professional time and strain-based demands in individual personal lives as opposed to that of the burdens of family-to-work conflict (Schieman, Milkie, & Glavin, 2009; Voydanoff, 2004). The implications are considerable. For instance, promoting family-supportive work environments with family-friendly benefits could restore resources to the family and decrease work-to-home interferences (Allen, 2001). In fact, several respondents conveyed the enormous difference supportive family relationships and positive work experiences have on their SWB. One respondent noted,

I meet people here that I like and care about and I carry that into my home life, sometimes in pretty concrete ways. And then work colleagues become friends and that kind of stuff. My work place also supports worker families. The support allows me a lot of flexibility and I can flex my time if I need to meet family needs. (012)

Properly diffusing stress and anxiety caused by traumatic work events was vital to avoid bringing it home. Not having the opportunity to resolve some of those negative feelings affected social workers' SWB and their relationship with their families, sometimes a great deal more than they realized. One respondent stated,

It really does impact me, it's very frustrating and I'm angry at the system itself. Everyone is so busy at the office that you can't even really talk about stuff to get it off your chest, so you take it home to your kids, and it's hard. It's really draining on a person. I try not to bring stuff home with me. ... I don't want to be but I'm so frustrated or still worked up because of work. (021)

For some respondents, their professional roles were too much for their partners to bear as well. One respondent said,

If I have a bad day at work it comes home with me, especially if I'm on call. For example, when I was with my partner, he hated it when the phone rang in the middle of the night and I had to go out, but that was my job. It affected my whole life. I'm a single parent now because it was too much for him. (021)

For others, the solution was to compromise and devote personal time to adequately put work away, catch up on casework, or accomplish whatever else could foster a sense of mastery over their situation.

Most of the respondents reported applying their professional knowledge and skills in their personal life and that they learned from clients who overcame struggles. One respondent noted,

Being a social worker, for the most part, is a benefit to my well-being because it helps me to understand who I am. Having to listen to people and sort through with them the behavioural pieces in their lives helps me to understand the cognitive behaviour piece in my life a lot better. (014)

Respondents' personal lives also benefitted from their professional careers by contributing to their SWB via feelings of fulfilment, a sense of purpose, being valued and respected, increased self-esteem, and empowerment. One respondent said,

When I decided to become a social worker, I was motivated to help people. But I had no idea how much I would receive. Even in the training no one told me that entering this profession and caring, being authentic, empathetic, compassionate and genuine with other human beings would give me so much in return. (011)

For these respondents, it was common to include elements of their personal lives in their professional roles, and their professional roles equally contributed to their personal lives and well-being. For some respondents, the division between the two was about finding balance, but for many the personal and professional were mutually reinforcing. This finding runs counter to widespread beliefs about the differentiation between occupational roles and personal lives (Byron, 2005; Sanz-Vergel et al., 2011).

Implications and Conclusion

Maintaining harmonious connections with others and reconciling differences take a tremendous amount of awareness and interpersonal skill. The data confirm previous findings that relationships with family, friends, and co-workers can sometimes cause conflict (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). However, studies have also found that seeking supportive relationships is the primary coping mechanism for workers in a number of professions similar to social work, and that collaboration and support in work-related problems is associated with lower rates of exhaustion and greater well-being (Carson & Kuipers, 1998). Moreover, community ties with family, friends, and co-workers act as a defense against distress caused by work events (Patterson, 2003) and provide valuable resources such as companionship and emotional and financial aid (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Our findings support these previous discussions on the role of interpersonal dynamics and support the model of SWB discussed previously.

These interpersonal findings have implications for social work education and in undergraduate social work education in particular where students are exposed to key discussions about understanding and developing a professional role identity. For instance, greater emphasis could be placed on ways of developing these interpersonal dynamics rather than discussing the need to differentiate between an individual's personal life and professional role. Furthermore, these respondents identify aspects of interpersonal functioning that can help equip social workers with the tools to deal with the negative workplace outcomes associated with the profession (such as burnout, secondary traumatic stress, and disengagement). In addressing these challenges, social work education and training among students of social work should focus more on developing the skills required to maintain and foster these positive interpersonal dynamics.

Furthermore, as the respondents in this study corroborated, practitioners with higher levels of personal satisfaction learn to implement practices of self-care and set effective limits and boundaries (Carmack, 1997). They monitor their emotional needs and make deliberate choices to manage their levels of engagement and detachment, thus mitigating the compounding effect of demands and losses. This process involves awareness and control, building resilience, and learning constructive coping skills (Collins, 2008; Goleman, 1998; Kinman & Grant, 2011; Morrison, 2007). It also necessitates a strong concept and sense of self within the social work identity and developing confidence in one's abilities (Miehls & Moffatt, 2000). Based on the literature and its application to the findings from this study, once again we see aspects of the theoretical framework of SWB supported by the perspectives of respondents. This suggests that well-being among social workers is also manifested in these cognitive processes. This finding is distinct from the present focus of undergraduate social work education, which primarily seeks to align the intrapersonal functioning of the person to some objectified professional role. However,

this finding suggests the need to incorporate training of more structured practices of mindfulness in generalist social work education to better equip students of social work with the necessary cognitive skills to cope with the negative occupational health-related outcomes associated with the profession (see also Shier & Graham, 2011a).

Furthermore, respondent insight is directly applicable in social work education settings teaching social workers about self-care and developing a sense of self; it is particularly important in undergraduate social work education where many students have not yet been exposed to the interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts that might lead to negative occupational health outcomes. Instead of just teaching students of social work how to develop a wholly professional sense of self, the social work curriculum might also focus on training social workers to understand these intrapersonal characteristics and qualities that can be detrimental and bypass negative workplace outcomes such as burnout and turnover.

Finally, and more practically, the findings have implications for undergraduate students of social work about to embark on their social work careers. The respondents in our study illustrate ways social work practitioners undertake self-care. For instance, fully diffusing a negative workplace situation, maintaining positive workplace relationships, and adequately reflecting on individual experiences can improve social worker SWB. Personal relationships with colleagues and family members are central to supporting social workers in their efforts for self-care. Likewise, the personal aspects of an individual's life are actively incorporated in direct practice. For instance, personal experiences can be used to help support the development of rapport with service users. Incorporating a knowledge base in social work education that recognizes the fundamental role a social worker's personal life plays (including experiences, thought processes, and values and beliefs) in his or her professional role is not only supportive of the reality of the way many social workers view their roles within the profession, but it also acts to support the SWB of social workers.

Occupational well-being is a serious problem in the social work profession, and with no campaigns or efforts from our national and local professional associations to counter the negative well-being aspects of social work, more needs to be done in educational institutions to equip social workers with the tools they need to survive. This research provides some evidence of one way educators of social workers can begin to construct a program of self-care by focusing on the dynamic relationship between personal lives and professional roles, a focus that moves away from just trying to align individuals with social work and instead seeks to align social work education with the reality of this personal-professional dynamic.

As an orienting paradigm to equip social work educators in this endeavor, this research provides evidence that social worker well-being is similarly aligned with the theoretical model proposed by the concept of SWB. In part, social worker well-being is a result of interpersonal dynamics and intrapersonal

functioning. Interestingly, the relationship between these personal life factors and the social worker role adds to our understanding of ways to improve methods of teaching social worker self-care. A key aspect of these respondents' well-being—and acting as a form of self-care—was the use of intimate relationships (at work and at home) to alleviate some of the stress and secondary trauma associated with their professional roles. Individual psychosocial functioning also played a role in social worker well-being. Social work teaching therefore could support the development of this personal sense of self among social work students rather than just focusing on the development of the professional sense of self. This is an important aspect of social worker development that might help address the prevalence of negative workplace outcomes (burnout, stress, and attrition) that occur disproportionately in the social work profession. Although this research helps support a new focus in curriculum content within social work, its implications are limited in that it does not provide insight into ways this can be achieved. A likely place to start is in the practical training elements of the degree programs, whether through course work in practical training seminars or through direct fieldwork. Educators teaching experiential learning courses (such as seminars for practicum or agency placements) could apply some of these insights to help students better understand the nature of self-care and the role of their personal lives in this regard. The findings provide students with a general operating framework to understand self-care, which is something they would be able to reflect on and discuss in the confinement of their practicum seminars while reflecting on their current placements. This provides an opportunity to better equip students of social work with the skills to deal with the possible negative occupational outcomes prevalent in the profession. Values and ethics courses could also be emphasized in social work where the personal and professional distinction resonates in undergraduate social work education.

Fundamentally, greater emphasis in social work courses needs to be placed on adequately preparing social workers for professional practice and developing the necessary tools and skills to combat the negative experiences of practice and the subsequent psychosocial effects on individual well-being. Although some research has shown that social work instructors are primarily interested in aiding students in the development of values, knowledge, and skills, it is also important to increase development of the personal self (Mosek & Ben-Oz, 2011). Our respondents provide evidence that the development of the personal self was a key factor in maintaining their well-being amid varied workplace challenges and negative workplace outcomes. This research provides a beginning point to consider a less restrictive professional-personal duality in generalist social work education. The fundamental need is for social work education to be more aligned with the realities of direct social work practice. Social work education could continue to evolve in a manner that best reflects an increasingly sophisticated sense of social worker well-being.

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