



## Emotional Intelligence among Social Work Students

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### ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper delves into the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) among social work students, recognizing its pivotal role in preparing future practitioners for the complexities of the profession. Drawing on existing literature and theoretical frameworks, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of EI in the context of social work education.

The paper begins by defining emotional intelligence and delineating its key components, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills. It then explores the importance of EI in social work practice, highlighting its impact on client engagement, effective communication, and overall job performance.

Furthermore, the paper examines the challenges faced by social work students in developing and applying emotional intelligence skills during their education and field placements. It considers the role of social work education in fostering the development of EI and explores various interventions and strategies aimed at enhancing EI among students.

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### Introduction

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a crucial skill set in the field of social work, facilitating effective client engagement, conflict resolution, and empathetic communication. However, research on the specific EI competencies and challenges faced by social work students. Developing high levels of emotional intelligence is imperative for navigating these challenges successfully. Social work education programs should emphasize the cultivation of EI competencies tailored to the local context.

Additionally, the demanding nature of social work practice in urban settings may contribute to stress and burnout among students, necessitating robust emotional regulation skills. Research in Bangalore should focus on identifying the specific EI competencies most relevant to social work students, such as empathy, active listening, and self-awareness. Additionally, studies can explore the effectiveness of EI training interventions tailored to the unique needs of social work students.

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### Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a set of abilities that pertain to emotions and emotional information. [Salovey & Mayer \(1990\)](#), p. 189 defined EI as “the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.” They later revised and extended their definition, proposing that EI consists of “the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” ([Mayer & Salovey 1997](#), p. 5). A more recent review defined EI as “the ability to carry out accurate reasoning about emotions and the ability to use emotions and emotional knowledge to enhance thought” ([Mayer et al. 2008](#), p. 507). These definitions all construe EI as a set of abilities concerned with emotions and emotional information. [1]

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been defined as ‘Being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations; to control impulse and delay gratification; to regulate one’s moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think; to empathize and to hope’ (Goleman, 1996) [2]

The study examines how important social work education and training are to helping students develop their professional competence. It places a strong emphasis on the all-encompassing development of the knowledge, attitudes, and abilities required to successfully carry out the profession’s primary duties, which are reducing suffering and improving wellbeing. Students are given the theoretical knowledge, moral standards, and practical skills necessary for effective practice through an extensive curriculum. The paper emphasizes how crucial it is to combine theoretical understanding with practical application in order to promote critical thinking, empathy, and cultural competency. It draws attention to how social work education is dynamic and constantly changing to meet new challenges and fit into various settings. The ultimate objective is to enable students to navigate intricate social issues, support underrepresented groups, and encourage constructive change within communities. [3]

The article titled "What's All this Talk About Emotion? Developing Emotional Intelligence in Social Work Students," Louise Grant, Gail Kinman, and Kelly Alexander gives insights into the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) within the sphere of social work education and practice. The authors underscore the pivotal role of effectively managing emotional reactions, particularly in intricate care environments, for social workers. However, they note that social work students commonly encounter emotional challenges and stress during their placements. The article states that emotional intelligence could serve as a crucial tool in assisting students in navigating their emotional responses throughout their placements and professional careers. Despite this recognition, the authors highlight a dearth of systematic research on whether emotional intelligence and its associated competencies can be cultivated during social work training. Furthermore, the implications of such development on student well-being remain largely unexplored. Grant, Kinman, and Alexander advocate for further inquiry into the correlation between emotional intelligence advancement, social work education, and student well-being. They suggest that implementing interventions aimed at bolstering emotional intelligence skills among social work students could yield positive outcomes by enhancing their capacity to manage the emotional demands inherent in the profession. Ultimately, such enhancements may contribute to improved client outcomes.

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### **Challenges faced by social work students in developing emotional intelligence**

Students tend to struggle on placements due to a multiplicity of reasons. Which include a breakdown in communication between the practice educator and the student, family problems, unrealistic expectations by the placement agency, coursework, assignments, financial difficulties or health problems such as depression caused by stressors at home, in the placement or university. Moreover, high levels of work-related stress, depression, and burnout have been found among social work students and qualified professionals (Freshwater and Sticklely, 2004; Jack and Donnellan 2010; Kinman and Grant 2011). Research conducted by Tobin and Carson (1994) found that training to be a social worker or nurse can be more stressful than qualified practice. Studies have found that some students are unprepared for realities of social work practice, which can affect their emotional well-being (Clements et al. 2013). Jack and Donnellan (2010) suggested that strong emotional reactions to practice learning have an impact on self-confidence and competence.

Other commentators have argued that the stress experienced by trainee social Journal of Social Work Education and Practice (07/2018) 3(3) 01-10 ISSN: 2456-2068 Charles Mugisha Challenges of Developing an Emotional Resilience Curriculum in social work education in England 3 workers and nursing students is likely to be exacerbated by their reluctance to disclose their feelings due to fear of being judged as incompetent or lacking in resilience (Wilks and Spivey 2010). Research conducted by Kinman and Grant (2011) found that social work students who develop effective reflective practice skills were more resilient and reported very high levels of emotional wellbeing and perseverance. [\[4\]](#)

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### **Interventions to Enhance Emotional Intelligence**

Interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence (EI) among social work students play a crucial role in preparing them for the complex and emotionally demanding nature of the profession. These interventions focus on developing key components of EI, including self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, to improve students' ability to manage their emotions effectively and navigate challenging interpersonal interactions with clients and colleagues.

Peer support and group therapy interventions offer additional avenues for enhancing emotional intelligence among social work students. Peer support groups provide a safe and supportive environment for students to share their experiences, express their emotions, and receive feedback and validation from their peers. Group therapy sessions, facilitated by trained professionals, allow students to explore and process their emotions more deeply, develop insight into their interpersonal patterns, and practice new coping strategies in a supportive group setting.

The article "Managing Stress through Stress Management Intervention for Increasing Emotional Intelligence and Academic Achievement" by Sarwat Sultan, Rizwana Amin, and Maria Anwar Khan explores the effectiveness of a stress management intervention in enhancing emotional intelligence (EI) and academic achievement among students.

The study focuses on addressing the pervasive issue of stress among students and its impact on academic performance and emotional well-being. Recognizing the interconnectedness of stress management, emotional intelligence, and academic success, the authors propose a holistic intervention approach.

The intervention program incorporates various stress management techniques, such as relaxation exercises, mindfulness practices, and cognitive-behavioral strategies. These techniques are designed to help students identify and manage stressors effectively, regulate their emotions, and improve their overall psychological resilience. [\[5\]](#)

Overall, interventions to enhance emotional intelligence among social work students are diverse and multifaceted, encompassing psychoeducation, mindfulness training, experiential learning, peer support, and group therapy.

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### **Conclusion**

This conceptual paper sheds light on the significance of emotional intelligence (EI) among social work students, emphasizing its pivotal role in preparing them for the complexities of the profession. EI, encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, is integral to effective client engagement, communication, and overall job performance in social work practice.

The paper highlights the challenges faced by social work students in developing and applying EI skills, particularly in navigating diverse socio-cultural contexts and demanding urban settings like Bangalore. These challenges include communication breakdowns, unrealistic expectations, and high levels of work-related stress and burnout. However, it also underscores the potential for social work education and training to foster the development of EI competencies tailored to local contexts and student needs.

It is imperative for social work education programs to prioritize the integration of EI training interventions into their curricula, equipping students with the necessary skills to thrive in the profession. By addressing the unique challenges faced by social work students and providing targeted support for EI development, educators can contribute to the holistic growth and well-being of future practitioners.

By prioritizing EI in social work education and practice, we can better prepare students to meet the diverse needs of clients and communities, enhancing positive outcomes and meaningful change.

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## References

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6. [Emotional Intelligence in organisation](#)