The development of resilience in social work students and professionals

Maria de las Olas Palma-García
University of Malaga, Malaga, Spain

Isabel Hombrados-Mendieta
University of Malaga, Malaga, Spain

Abstract

- **Summary**: This study analyzes whether resilience, defined as a process rather than as a static response over time, is associated with social work. The main aim was to determine whether social work increases resilience in students and professionals during training and when practicing the profession. The sample consisted of 613 university students and professionals from Malaga (Spain).

- **Findings**: The longitudinal study of social work students indicated statistically significant within-subjects differences during their university course in the components of resilience (personal competence, acceptance of self and life, and social support). Regarding professionals, the results show a positive association between years of experience and their acceptance of self and life and coping with workplace adversity.

- **Applications**: Implications include the need to focus on the development of positive experiences during training and the practice of social work, such as the capacity to be resilient.

Keywords
Social work, longitudinal analysis, resilience, social workers, social work students

Corresponding author:
María de las Olas Palma-García, Department of Social Psychology, Social Anthropology, Social Work and Social Services, Faculty of Social and Work Studies, Avenida del profesor Francisco Trujillo Villanueva, n° 1, Ampliación Campus de Teatinos, University of Malaga, Malaga, Spain.
Email: mpalma@uma.es
Introduction

Since its beginnings, social work has benefited from the practical and theoretical contributions provided by the social sciences, while also creating and defining its own conceptual issues (De la Red, 1993). In recent years, these issues have led social work researchers to focus on their own university students and practicing social workers in order to analyze the development of capacities during training and professional practice (e.g. Acker, 1999; Redmond, Guerin, & Devitt, 2008; Um & Harrison, 1998; Zamanillo, 2000). Among such capacities, recent interest has focused on resilience as a novel element that can be applied within social work. Resilience, in the context of social work has usually been analyzed as a variable that should be encouraged in users (e.g. Gilligan, 2004; Guo & Tsui, 2010; Nash & Fraser, 1998; Norman, 2000; Saint-Jacques, Turcotte, & Pouliot, 2009; Villalba, 2006). However, few studies have investigated resilience in social work students and practicing social workers (e.g. Graham & Shier, 2010; Kinman & Grant, 2011). The present study addresses this issue by determining whether social workers and social work students develop resilience during their daily practice and training.

Since 1980, social work training in Spain has involved a 3-year university degree, in which students acquire the professional skills that enable them to intervene in situations distressing to individuals, families, groups, organizations and communities. Social workers are involved in managing conflict and the use of mediation (Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment, 2004). Due to the nature of their work, there is a strong risk for social workers to experience their working activity as a potential source of distress (i.e. burnout, discouragement and dissatisfaction). A wealth of research has focused on this aspect (Contreras, 2008; Coyle, Edwards, Hannigan, Fothergill, & Burnard, 2005). However, this professional setting could also be viewed as an opportunity to overcome challenges, increase the capacity of adaptation and experience positive emotions (Menezes de Lucena, Fernández, Hernández, Ramos, & Contador, 2006).

A recent study of Spanish social workers described them as experiencing a high level of job satisfaction, although they work in a setting in which problems and difficulties are encountered during daily practice (Brezmes, 2008). Their findings show that social workers learn from their own experience and difficulties and, based on this knowledge, respond to new challenges and situations. These skills and attitudes are synergic with resilience, the latter being a personal capacity that can change the outcome of professional practice (Luthans & Youssef, 2004; Salanova, 2009).

Resilience has been defined as ‘a universal capacity which allows a person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity’ (Grotberg, 1995, p. 2). It also refers to the ‘dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity’ (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000, p. 543). It is a twofold process. On the one hand, resilience describes the ability of the individual, family or community to cope with the adversities they encounter, whether they are personal, social, or workplace-associated. On the other
hand, it also refers to knowing how to overcome such adversities by learning from them and becoming stronger. This twofold aspect of resilience, which is not limited to the ability to resist but also involves the capacity to reconstruct, has been studied using a variety of approaches in recent years.

Initially, studies on resilience focused on the individual traits of people, especially children, who had adapted positively despite living in adverse conditions (Werner & Smith, 1982). Subsequently, while maintaining the focus on identifying the specific factors involved in resilience, researchers began to investigate the processes associated with positive adaptation (Grotberg, 1995; Rutter, 1993). By observing these processes, a theoretical framework for resilience has been constructed, which includes elements common to social work. Under this framework, social work students and social workers are considered potentially resilient, as this is an ordinary and universal ability that can be developed by anyone (Baruch & Stutman, 2006); it is not an absolute or permanent ability or trait but rather, as suggested by Grotberg (1995), is a dynamic process which develops over time and may vary over time or circumstances. According to Grotberg, resilience develops via the sources of support a person acquires during their life experience. These sources can be grouped together as resilient factors (Table 1) and are referred to as *I Can* (personal competence, understood as interpersonal factors that help people to solve problems), *I Am* (acceptance of self and life, referring to the inner strength developed over the years that helps people to cope with adversity) and *I Have* (perceived and received social support).

This pioneering threefold model regards resilience as a dynamic process and suggests resilience is the product of the interaction of resilient factors. This view is related to the aim of our research, to investigate whether social work contributes to the development of resilience, understood as a dynamic and interactive process, among social work students and practicing social workers. From this theoretical perspective, we hypothesize that social work students will become increasingly more resilient over the course of their university training. Regarding the work setting, we hypothesize that resilience among social workers is positively associated with the ability to cope with adversity during their daily practice and that it will increase with experience.

**Method**

**Analytical framework**

This study followed a combined cross-sectional and longitudinal design. The cross-sectional approach was applied to practicing social workers to analyze the association between professional experience and resilience. The longitudinal approach allowed us to analyze changes occurring among social work students over each academic year. A quantitative method was chosen in order to use a large sample and thus obtain confirmatory results. However, we are aware that the application of qualitative methodology would have added richness to the data.
Participants

The study included 613 participants, students and professionals from Malaga (Spain). Of these, 175 were social work students and 304 social workers, while the rest of the sample consisted of students other than social work students (N = 72) and other professionals (N = 62). The social work students were assessed twice: in November 2008 (1st measurement; N = 175) and in November 2009 (2nd measurement; N = 111), with 64% participant retention in the longitudinal analysis (see Table 2).

The sample of social work students comprised all the students enrolled in the three-year course at the faculty of Social Work of Malaga University during 2008–2009 and 2009–2010. The remaining students were randomly chosen from those attending university courses (psychology, teaching, industrial engineering, business administration and management) and pre-university courses.

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Table 1. Resilience factors (Grotberg, 2003, pp. 13–17).

| I Can (Personal competence) | Generate new ideas or new ways to do things  
|                           | Stay with a task until it is finished  
|                           | See the humor in life and use it to reduce tensions  
|                           | Express thoughts and feelings in communication with others  
|                           | Solve problems in various settings academic, job-related, personal and social  
|                           | Manage my behavior, feelings, impulses, acting-out  
|                           | Reach out for help when I need it  
| I Am (Acceptance of self and life) | A person most people like  
|                           | Generally calm and good-natured  
|                           | An achiever who plans for the future  
|                           | A person who respects myself and others  
|                           | Empathic and caring of others  
|                           | Responsible for my own behavior and accepting of the consequences  
|                           | A confident, optimistic, hopeful person, with faith  
| I Have (Social support) | One or more persons within my family I can trust and who love me without reservation  
|                           | One or more persons outside my family I can trust without reservation  
|                           | Limits to my behavior  
|                           | People who encourage me to be independent  
|                           | Good role models  
|                           | Access to health, education, and the social and security services I need  
|                           | A stable family and community  

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The participating social workers were chosen from the members of the Association of Graduates in Social Work of Malaga (N = 1570) using probability sampling from a finite universe, with a 95% confidence level and 5% sampling error. The resulting sample was proportional regarding gender, age and work experience and representative of social workers in Malaga. Their mean age was 39 years (SD = 9.15); 86% were women and 14% were men. They mainly worked in social services, followed by social organizations, public health, and other areas (see Table 3).

Spanish social workers mainly work in the public sector and are involved in designing and implementing social welfare policies and eliminating the causes hindering their implementation. Their presence in the private sector is far less significant.

The social workers only participated in the first measurement of this study.

**Table 2.** Sample distribution according to categories and time of measurement.

| Categories                          | 2008 | 2009 |
|-------------------------------------|------|------|
|                                     | N    | N    |
| Students                            |      |      |
| Pre-university students             | 44   |      |
| Other university students (other than social work) | 28   |      |
| SWS: 1st–2nd year                  | 57   | 44   |
| SWS: 2nd–3rd year                  | 53   | 36   |
| SWS: 3rd–graduate                  | 65   | 31   |
| Professional workers                |      |      |
| Other professional workers          | 62   |      |
| SW: 1–10 years’ work experience    | 116  |      |
| SW: 11–20 years’ work experience   | 155  |      |
| SW: Over 20 years’ work experience | 26   |      |
| Retired SW                          | 7    |      |
| Total                               | 613  | 111  |

*Note. SWS = social work students; SW = social worker.*

Resilient factors were established according to the model proposed by Grotberg and were assessed using an instrument consisting of three subscales: *I Can, I Am* and *I Have*. The first two subscales were measured with the Spanish version of the Resilience Scale (RS) (Heilemann, Lee, & Kury, 2003; Wagnild & Young, 1993). The first subscale – personal competence (17 items) – refers to *I Can*, and includes self-confidence, independence, determination, endurance, empowerment, ingenuity and perseverance (e.g. ‘I can overcome difficulties because I’ve experienced them before’). The second subscale – acceptance of self and life (8 items) – refers
to I Am and includes adaptability, balance, flexibility and a stable life view (e.g. ‘I am able to accept things without getting upset’). The third subscale – social support (5 items) – refers to I Have and assesses the external support received and perceived by the individual (e.g. ‘When faced with a problem, I find someone who can help me’). This instrument was specifically constructed for use in a previous study (Dash, Dayal, & Laksminarayana, 2006). Finally, a fourth subscale – coping with adversity at work (5 items) – was created for the present study to analyze the association between resilience and experiencing difficulty and adversity at work. It was only applied to the practicing social workers. This subscale asks social workers about their perceived difficulties at work: ‘I think social work is a job where one faces constant difficulties’; ‘I am constantly faced with new professional challenges’; ‘I often feel little recognition for my work’; ‘In my work I had to take tough decisions’; and ‘I find it impossible to perform social work as I understand it and want to do it’.

This global instrument consists of 35 items and measures the level of agreement or disagreement with the dimensions on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.86, 0.72, 0.85 and 0.75, respectively, for the subscales of personal competence, acceptance of self and life, social support and coping with adversity at work.

| Table 3. Sample distribution of social workers according to gender, age, work experience and work setting. |
|-----------------------------------------|--------|-----|
| Categories                              | N   | %   |
| Gender                                 |      |     |
| Male                                   | 42   | 14  |
| Female                                 | 262  | 86  |
| Age/Work experience                     |      |     |
| 24 to 34 years old/1–10 years           | 116  | 38  |
| 35 to 44 years old/11–20 years          | 155  | 51  |
| 45 to 64 years old/Over 20 years        | 26   | 9   |
| Over 65/Retired                         | 7    | 2   |
| Work setting                            |      |     |
| Public administration: Social services  | 159  | 52  |
| Public administration: Health           | 35   | 12  |
| Public administration: Law              | 12   | 4   |
| Public administration: Others           | 20   | 7   |
| High School, University and other colleges | 4  | 1   |
| NGOs and other non-profit organizations | 44  | 14  |
| Private companies                       | 24   | 8   |
| Others                                 | 6    | 2   |
| Total                                  | 304  | 100 |

Palma-García and Hombrados-Mendieta 385
Procedure

The instrument was applied twice over a period of 12 months – once in November 2008 and once in November 2009 – to identify resilient capacities in the participants over time and to analyze the evolution of social work students during their academic course.

In November 2008 (T1) data were collected from all participants, students (pre-university, social work students and other university students) and professional workers (social workers and other professionals).

The pre-university students and those enrolled in other degrees were randomly identified and assessed in their respective places of study in collaboration with their teachers. Social work students filled in the instrument in the Faculty of Social and Work Studies at the University of Malaga, and were informed that they were participating in a longitudinal study. They were assigned an identification code for the second measurement.

Data from the professional workers were collected via collaborators. The instrument was administered to social workers in collaboration with the Association of Graduates in Social Work of Malaga (College for Registered Social Workers of Malaga) and the managers of public administration and social organizations where they worked. The control group of other professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, commercial agents) was randomly identified and the instrument was randomly administered in different work settings. The participants provided written consent for their replies to be submitted to statistical analysis.

In November 2009, the instrument was again administered (T2) to social work students after a full academic year had passed. In total, 64% of the students who had participated in the first measurement participated in the second one. In total, 36% of the initial sample did not complete the study; of these, 10% left their course and the remaining 26% could not be accurately identified or their questionnaires were incomplete.

Results

Capacity for resilience among students

The initial capacity for resilience among students was calculated using MANOVA, where the independent variable was the course taken (pre-university students, 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of the social work degree, and other university students) and the dependent variables were the three components of resilience analyzed (competence, acceptance, and social support). No significant differences were observed in any group of students, Pillai Trace = 0.047, F(3, 240) = 0.96, p = 0.48, η² = 0.47 (see Table 4). Regarding personal competence, there were no significant differences between students following the different courses, F(1, 242) = 0.83, p = 0.50, neither were there significant differences in relation to acceptance of self and life,
Finally, the differences in perceived social support were not significant $F(1, 242) = 1.23, p = 0.29$.

### Resilience capacity in social work students

The longitudinal analysis of the social work students was performed using a repeated measures analysis of variance, using the 1-year span as the between-subject factor and the repeated measure as the within-subject factor. The longitudinal analysis was repeated for each dependent variable (competence, acceptance and social support). The independent within-subjects variable was always the time of measurement (T1 and T2) and the independent between-subjects variable was the participant’s course (1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-year student or graduate in social work).

As shown in Table 5, the individual level of personal competence increased in each social work student as indicated by the statistically significant differences between the mean of the 2008–2009 course and that of the 2009–2010 course ($Pillai Trace = 0.099, F(1, 103) = 11.30, p = 0.001, \eta^2 = 0.09$). As shown in Figure 1, competence increased in all the students. No interaction effect was found between competence and the year the student was enrolled in ($Pillai Trace = 0.007, F(2, 103) = 0.38, p = 0.68, \eta^2 = 0.07$).
Similarly, there was an increase in the individual level of acceptance of self and life between T1 and T2. Table 5 shows that there were statistically significant differences in this variable between the means of the 2008–2009 course and the 2009–2010 course as shown by the within-subjects test ($\text{Pillai Trace} = 0.100$, $F(1, 106) = 11.74$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.10$), but there were no interaction effects between acceptance and the student’s course ($\text{Pillai Trace} = 0.14$, $F(2, 106) = 0.77$, $p = 0.46$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$). Figure 2 shows that acceptance increased in all social work students.

Finally, as shown in Table 5, there were also statistically significant differences in social support between the means of the T1 and T2 ($\text{Pillai Trace} = 0.043$, $F(1, 108) = 4.87$, $p = 0.029$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$). The within-subjects analysis showed an increase, but not the between-subjects analysis, since there were no statistically significant differences according to the participants’ course, nor were there any interaction

Table 5. Competence, acceptance and social support among social work students at both assessments (means and standard deviations).

| Situation          | M   | SD  | N  |
|--------------------|-----|-----|----|
| Competence 1 (2008–2009) |     |     |    |
| 1st-year student   | 5.21| 0.65| 41 |
| 2nd-year student   | 5.13| 0.69| 35 |
| 3rd-year student   | 5.40| 0.65| 30 |
| Total              | 5.24| 0.67| 106|
| Competence 2 (2009–2010) |     |     |    |
| 2nd-year student   | 5.35| 0.39| 41 |
| 3rd-year student   | 5.39| 0.64| 35 |
| Graduate           | 5.65| 0.55| 30 |
| Total              | 5.45| 0.54| 106|
| Acceptance 1 (2008–2009) |     |     |    |
| 1st-year student   | 5.13| 0.74| 42 |
| 2nd-year student   | 4.82| 0.70| 36 |
| 3rd-year student   | 5.21| 0.65| 31 |
| Total              | 5.05| 0.71| 109|
| Acceptance 2 (2009–2010) |     |     |    |
| 2nd-year student   | 5.27| 0.52| 42 |
| 3rd-year student   | 5.19| 0.70| 36 |
| Graduate           | 5.47| 0.61| 31 |
| Total              | 5.30| 0.61| 109|
| Social Support 1 (2008–2009) |     |     |    |
| 1st-year student   | 5.97| 0.71| 44 |
| 2nd-year student   | 5.73| 0.99| 36 |
| 3rd-year student   | 6.14| 0.84| 31 |
| Total              | 5.94| 0.85| 111|
| Social Support 2 (2009–2010) |     |     |    |
| 2nd-year student   | 6.07| 0.61| 44 |
| 3rd-year student   | 6.03| 0.79| 36 |
| Graduate           | 6.29| 0.68| 31 |
| Total              | 6.12| 0.69| 111|
Figure 1. Differences in competence between the first and second measurement.

Figure 2. Differences in acceptance between first and second measurement.
Effects ($Pillai\ Trace = 0.010$, $F(2, 108) = 0.55$, $p = 0.57$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$). Once again, Figure 3 shows increases in social support in all the participants.

Overall, the results show that the social work students significantly increased their resilience from one academic year to the next during their university course. All students who passed from one course to the next or graduated increased their personal competence, acceptance of self and life and perceived social support between the T1 and T2. There were no statistically significant between-subjects differences, but it is noteworthy that the graduates increased their scores in all the components of resilience.

**Capacity for resilience of professional social workers, other professionals and social work students**

The capacity for resilience in professional workers was calculated using MANOVA. The professional category (social workers or other professionals) was the independent variable and the components of resilience (competence, acceptance and social support) were the dependent variables. The results show that there were significant differences ($Pillai\ Trace = 0.023$, $F(3, 355) = 2.82$, $p = 0.003$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$) in the component of personal competence $F(1, 358) = 7.38$, $p = 0.005$, and acceptance of self and life, $F(1, 362) = 5.56$, $p = 0.001$ with practicing social workers obtaining the highest scores. However, there were no significant differences in social support $F(1, 364) = 0.63$, $p = 0.042$ (see Table 6).

On the other hand, differences in resilience between practicing social workers and social work students was analysed by performing a MANOVA in which the
independent variable was their status as social workers or students, and the dependent variables were the components of resilience (competence, acceptance and social support). The results show significant differences ($Pillai Trace = 0.013$, $F(3, 471) = 2.99$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.13$). As shown in Table 6, there were significant differences between social workers and students in the component of personal competence $F(1, 473) = 2.82$, $p = 0.05$ and acceptance of self and life $F(1, 473) = 4.22$, $p = 0.04$. The social workers showed greater competence and acceptance of self and life than social work students. However, these differences were not significant for social support $F(1, 473) = 0.3$, $p = 0.95$, as both groups obtained similar scores.

### Association between resilience and work experience in social workers

Pearson’s correlation was used to determine the association between resilience in social workers and years of work experience (see Table 7). The results show that seniority is positively associated with resilience in social workers. The more years of work experience, the greater their capacity for resilience, especially in acceptance of self and life, and the ability to cope with adversity and problems at work.

### Discussion

The present study used a cross-sectional and longitudinal design to investigate the development of resilience in social work students and social workers. The main novelty of this study is that it focuses on resilience in students and practicing social workers, rather than on social work settings and the users.
The results of this study show that, in general, all students start with similar levels of resilience. No significant differences were found between pre-university students, social work students, and students following other university courses in their level of resilience. This may be related to increased diversity among students and easier access to university education among the general population. The results also highlight the importance of the changes occurring during the university years. Redmond et al. (2008), report that social work students change their attitudes and opinions regarding the profession throughout their university degree. Our study describes specific changes taking place in the capacity for resilience among these students during their university years. According to Saavedra and Villalta (2008), who studied resilient characteristics in an adult population, the acquisition of resilience is not associated with age but rather with training received over time. According to our results, social work students not only acquire professional knowledge but also gain in resilience. The within-subject analysis showed how participants significantly increased their level of resilience as the year passed by their becoming more competent (I Can), being more accepting of themselves and life (I Am), and perceiving greater social support (I Have). In the between-subjects analysis, no significant differences between the different course years were found. Such results may be explained by the heterogeneity of the students enrolled in the degree who would start with varying levels of resilience. However, all mean values suggest an increase in resilience by the end of the degree (graduates) in all the three components of resilience.

|                          | Years of experience |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Competence               | Pearson’s correlation | 0.094  |
|                          | Significance (two-tailed) | 0.104  |
|                          | N                    | 300    |
| Acceptance               | Pearson’s correlation | 0.128* |
|                          | Significance (two-tailed) | 0.026  |
|                          | N                    | 304    |
| Social support           | Pearson’s correlation | 0.024  |
|                          | Significance (two-tailed) | 0.682  |
|                          | N                    | 304    |
| Coping with adversity    | Pearson’s correlation | 0.144* |
|                          | Significance (two-tailed) | 0.015  |
|                          | N                    | 284    |

*Correlation is significant at 0.05 (two-tailed).
Several studies have suggested that the training of future social workers should include strategies to develop personal factors that may contribute to high levels of subjective well-being – such as positive emotions, social skills and resilience – because of the facilitating and catalytic effect they exert on creating deeper commitment to professional practice (e.g. Collins, 2007; Graham & Shier, 2010; Howe, 1997; Kinman & Grant, 2011). The data obtained in this study support these views, and provide a basis for further research aimed at a more detailed analysis of the factors involved during training that may influence the resilient capacity of students and the mechanisms by which such capacity increases.

Regarding social workers, our results confirm the gradual effect of work experience on the development of resilience, especially on acceptance of self and life. The findings describe social workers as people who become increasingly able to accept things as they are, and who feel more satisfied with the meaning of their lives as they gain work experience over the years. These capacities are related to *I am* (acceptance), where inner strengths are put at the service of the social work profession. However, we did not find a similar positive association between work experience and the factors associated with *I can* (personal competence) and *I have* (social support), the latter being the less well-developed factor in social workers. According to our data, social workers do not perceive an increase in social support as the number of years they have worked increases; no differences were found between social workers and other professionals or students of social work regarding perceived external support. Social support among students and social workers seems to be inadequate, but this variable has been mainly investigated as a secondary variable. Most studies have used this variable to investigate its effect as a predictor of burnout and permanence at work (Jones, Fletcher, & Ibbetson, 1991; Kim & Stoner, 2008), rather than assessing or explaining social support among social workers compared to other care-giving professionals. Therefore, the results obtained in this study highlight the need to design research on social support among social workers and compare it to other care-giving professionals, as well as the need to promote social support among students and social workers.

In order to cultivate resilience several elements have to converge: the presence and intensity of resilient factors, exposure to adversity and the interaction between them (Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1979, Werner & Smith, 1982). Therefore, for social work to be a source for developing resilience, the resilient factors have not only to be identified, but also the process of interaction between them and the adversities experienced in day-to-day practice have to be recognized. In this regard, this study provides some suggestions that help to explain this process, since the results of the correlations show that social workers acquire a greater capacity to cope with adversity at work as they gain in seniority.

Social workers are fully aware of the difficulties of their task, which is strongly related to sociopolitical policies and the changes and challenges these impose on social work: globalization, economic inequities, and palliative care, among others. (e.g. Jordan, 2008; Midgley, 2001; Payne, 2009). There are also difficulties related to the profession itself, such as its lack of recognition and the excessive
bureaucratic load involved in providing resources (e.g. Brezmes, 2008; Collins, 2007; Fargion, 2006; Peña, 2009). Social workers are constantly exposed to difficulties, risks and adversities and this enables them to develop resilient responses, making them more self-confident and capable of coping with difficulties. Consistent with Menezes de Lucena et al. (2006), our results confirm that adversity can be perceived not only as source of distress, but it can also be used to become stronger and resilient, as observed among the social workers.

**Limitations of study**

Some limitations of this study have to be taken into account before the results can be generalized. The data were collected using self-report surveys; the researcher assumes that the participants’ responses accurately reflect their feelings (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992). Furthermore, regarding the subjects (36%) to whom we could not apply a second measure; it would be of interest to study whether the students who left their course had a lower level of resilience than those who continued.

In addition, these results may not adequately reflect how these variables interact outside the setting of Spain, and thus it would be of interest to replicate these studies in other countries. Another potential limitation is whether our sample is representative of other students and professional workers; although it does not have a direct bearing on this study, future work should use a larger sample. Therefore, all the results should be taken with caution. Although the participants showed a significant increase in resilience, these results should be validated in future studies by comparing the changes in social work students and professionals to those in other professional areas in order to eliminate the possibility of a maturation effect. It would be of interest in future studies to compare resilience among different professionals to investigate whether resilience is associated with all professions or is more strongly associated with professionals working in care-giving contexts and adverse situations. Social workers can increase resilience by developing all the components of which it consists, as well as addressing associated issues such as perceived support, which remains very low in this group.

Thus, further research is needed to confirm, refine, and extend these findings.

**Conclusions**

This study contributes to the current discussion on the need to value the skills and positive experiences developed during social work (Collins, 2007, 2008; Shier & Graham, 2011), as it was found that education and professional practice enable students and social workers to experience and develop their own capacity to be resilient.
Ethics
Ethical approval for this study was given by The Faculty of Social and Work Studies of the University of Malaga approved the study prior to data collection. This study followed the guidelines for good scientific practice developed by the Spanish Ethics Committee of the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (CSIC; Spanish National Scientific Research Council).

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