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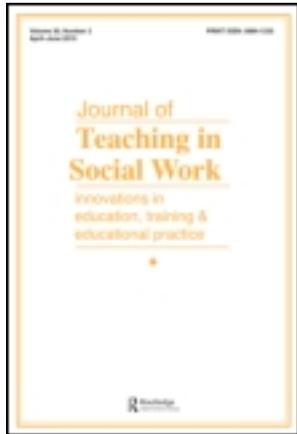
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### Developing Specific Self-Efficacy and Resilience as First Responders among Students of Social Work and Stress and Trauma Studies

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## **Developing Specific Self-Efficacy and Resilience as First Responders among Students of Social Work and Stress and Trauma Studies**

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*This article addresses the challenging task of preparing baccalaureate social work students to master proficiency as first responders in stress and trauma situations. We begin with a brief description of the context, goals, admission procedure, structure, and process of a stress and trauma studies (STS) program. We then compare the development of resilience and general and specific self-efficacy among STS students and graduates, with parallel developments among non-STS students in the BSW program. The evaluation of the program by the participating students should further an understanding of the significance of their learning experience.*

**KEYWORDS** *first responders to stress and trauma situation, stress and trauma studies, social work education, general self-efficacy, specific self-efficacy for stress and trauma, resilience*

### SOCIAL WORKERS AS FIRST RESPONDERS

The relevance of the social work profession is a function of its ability to respond to evolving social concerns. This reality includes the need to address client survival needs that are prominent in the era of globalization, civil

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war, political strife, human trafficking, forced migration, and natural disasters. In these situations, targeted professional interventions are necessary (Wessells, 2009). While the prominent trauma literature and practice tend to focus on long-term mental health interventions (Foa et al., 2005; Shin et al., 2004), there are indications that a window of opportunity for relief lies in interventions that target clients' acute stress reactions. Examples of such work (which enlists first responders) are evident in a number of trauma-related fields today, such as work with refugees (Gupta & Zimmer, 2008; Weine, 2011); communities stricken by disaster (Prasetyawan, Maramis, & Keliat, 2006); schools affected by violent behavior (Newman, 2000; Randell, Eggert, & Pike, 2001); civilian victims of terrorist attacks (Somer et al., 2004), and survivors of sexual and physical abuse (Rogowski, 2011).

Another recent change in focus is from a perspective of treatment to one of prevention. This shift is characterized by work on building resilience in entire populations that may be at risk of or exposed to traumatic events. One example is the work done with residents of the city of Sderot, Israel, which is frequently subject to rocket attacks. The new approach that we will discuss has been shown to provide emotional immunization against trauma before and during the course of traumatic events (Farchi & Gidron, 2010; Fridman-Peleg & Goodman, 2010).

As part of planning for the unthinkable and in recognition of social work's anticipated role in disaster response (Smith, Lees, & Clymo, 2003), Tel Hai College in Northern Israel offers stress and trauma studies (STS) training to a select 20% of its students as a supplementary curriculum in its BSW curriculum.

## STRESS AND TRAUMA STUDIES

### Goals of the Program

The goal of the STS program is to train social work students to serve as first responders in crisis and disaster situations. Accordingly, the program consists of the teaching of theoretical knowledge as a foundation for intervention in stressful and traumatic situations and the imparting of practical knowledge via hands-on experience in sequential interventions of prevention, immediate response, treatment, and rehabilitation in response to posttraumatic situations. The program is designed to cultivate professional self-efficacy by enhancing the students' personal resilience and training them for precise, effective, and successful coping in emergency situations.

### Admissions Process

During the first semester of their first year in the social work program, 60 of the 120 BSW students applied for the STS program; 25 of them were

accepted. The selection process began with a presentation by the STS director to all applicants on the program's contents, demands, required student commitment, and expected outcomes. The candidates then were asked to complete a questionnaire (using a 10-point Likert scale) regarding their position on individual and situational variables that are known to affect response to disaster and mitigation of the risk for secondary traumatization (Shepherd & Hodgkinson, 1990). The candidates also were asked to describe how they utilized two of their personal traits to cope successfully with stressful events in which they had been involved.

On the basis of their responses, suitable candidates were invited for a personal interview jointly with the director and another professor in the STS program. In this interview, students were invited to explain how their traits, as self-reported on the questionnaire, reflected personal strengths.

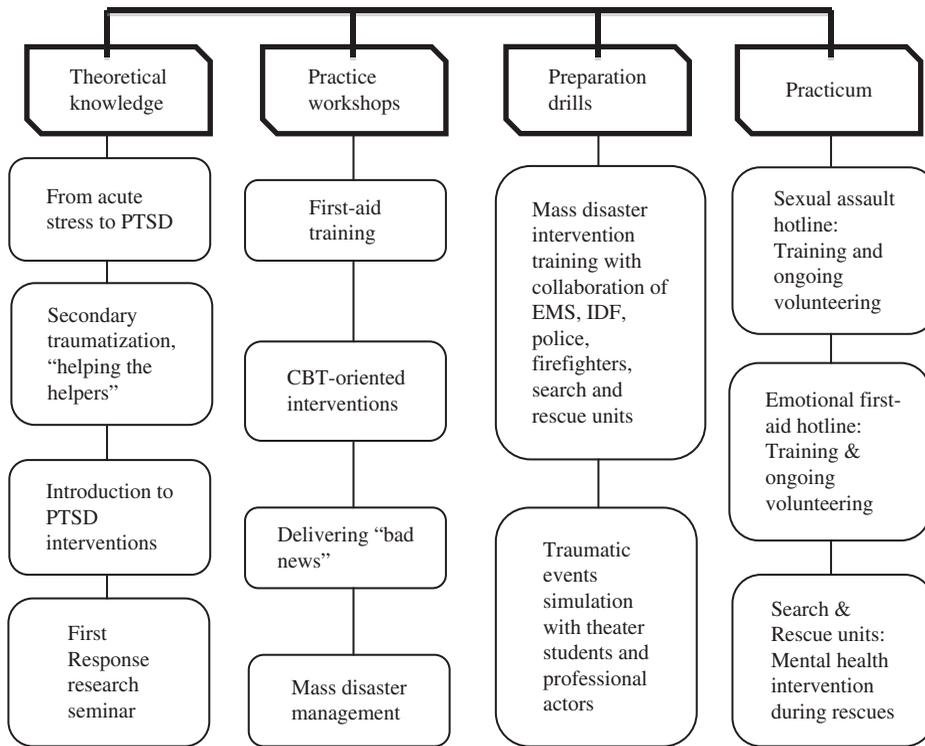
The acceptance decision was based on assessment of each candidate's self-awareness and explanations of virtues, challenges, and difficulties; extra-curricular interests; sense of humor; academic ability; and the possible unique contribution they could make to the group of STS students.

### Program Structure

A unique aspect of the program is that the director is not only a lecturer in the introductory and research courses but is also responsible for managing rescue operations in the field, which will be an important part of each student's experiential training as a first responder.

The STS program (involving 18 academic credits) is divided into four domains, as illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

The theoretical courses provide students with an understanding of the rationale for choosing interventions, ranging from first response in acute stress situations to prolonged posttraumatic reactions. The teaching methodology includes lectures, experiential workshops, and a research seminar. Practice workshops focus on building specific skill sets required for intervention in acute crises on both an individual and a community level. The workshops include 60 hours of first-aid training; preparation for transmitting highly emotional messages in an empathetic tone; exposure to cognitive-behavioral techniques; and familiarity with the components of management at a mass disaster event. Students take an active part in preparation drills. They begin by performing in stress simulations created by a group of local actors, and eventually the students are expected to intervene in a mass disaster drill as part of a multidisciplinary rescue team. STS students also complete the BSW program requirements for a community practicum in a stress and traumatic service setting. During the second year of the STS program, they work 4 hours a week at hotline centers for the prevention of sexual harassment; providing mental health aid; giving assistance to mentally challenged individuals; and staffing search and rescue units.



**FIGURE 1** The curriculum of stress and trauma studies: The four domains.

During the third year, the students initiate a new community project for first responders within these arenas.

### The Process

The following case study illustrates the dynamic process that typically takes place in the STS program.

During a class with third-year students, a beeper message asking for rescue is conveyed to the lecturer, who is the director of the STS program, the first author of this article, and an appointed leader of rescue interventions in the area. The task was to rescue a group of girls on a school trip who had become dehydrated and were lost in a distant creek. Used to such interruptions, the students listen to the full communication, which takes 10 minutes. The on-call response team of six students, known as the “resilience team,” prepares the “resilience ambulance” available to the program and drives to the scene. During the practice workshops, these students had been prepared to become emotional first responders, when rescuing people in distressed situations, and to also provide appropriate information and assistance to their friends and family members.

Due to the large number of casualties, a second rescue team was needed, which gave us an opportunity to review the protocol for direct first-response intervention with children. At the same time, we activated our community team to gather data on the girls in order to be able to send it to their local social services department. The second team set out for the site with the course instructor.

Upon arrival, the medical crews referred girls with anxiety responses to the “resilience teams.” Due to the large number of girls who needed comforting, a group intervention was deemed appropriate, in addition to individual intervention. The interventions were conducted inside the “resilience ambulance” (in the field) with students using their creative and improvisational abilities, based on the knowledge they had acquired and the personal and professional confidence they already had gained.

The event lasted for three strenuous hours. The following day, a debriefing was scheduled; it included review of the situation, assessment of the intervention, and support for student participants. During this meeting, the lecturer and the students reviewed all the components that were utilized during the intervention. Successful aspects were noted, mistakes were examined, and improvement strategies suggested. The students were active in offering peer and professional support as well as encouraging classmates in need of reassurance.

This case study describes a routine event in the life of the STS study program. It demonstrates the merits of assigning the same person to provide academic and practical leadership and who can make an appropriate tie between class and field. This connection enables students to apply their theoretical knowledge and their practical skills.

### Self-Efficacy and Resilience

Self-efficacy is widely discussed in the social work literature and has recently been used to assess the outcomes of social work education in specific areas (Holden, Meenaghan, Anastas, & Metrey, 2002). Bandura (1997) specifically developed the notion of self-efficacy as a motivating factor:

People guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments . . . People's beliefs in their efficacy have diverse effects. Such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demand, and the level of accomplishments they realize. (p. 3)

A unique aspect of self-efficacy is that it is specific to a task and situation (Pintrich, Schunk, & Meece, 2008). Professional self-efficacy is the belief that one is able to perform well in professional roles (Cherniss, 1993). The contribution of specific self-efficacy to commitment and success in performing social work tasks in fact has been demonstrated by Boehm (2006).

Students with a high sense of self-efficacy are committed to achieving difficult goals and often visualize successful scenarios that lead to positive behavior and outcomes (Yong, 2010).

Success also is contingent upon resilience, a characteristic that enables individuals not only to overcome adversity but also to thrive when facing a crisis (Richardson, 2002). Resilient individuals view change due to stress as a challenge or opportunity to make binding commitments and recognize the limits to one's control (Kobasa, 1979). They elicit support from others, have close and secure attachments, focus on personal or collective goals, and demonstrate self-efficacy (Rutter, 1985).

Based on the roles of self-efficacy and resilience in enhancing motivation and successful interventions—and the unique emphasis of the STS program on experiential learning that focuses on gaining control over a challenging situation—it is the goal of this article to assess the impact of a STS program on participating students' sense of general and specific self-efficacy and resilience.

## Research Questions

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the STS program in preparing social work students to function as first responders, we explored two questions:

1. How do the resilience, general self-efficacy, and specific self-efficacy of STS students differ in the three respective years of study?
2. How do students in the STS program compare with those in the regular BSW program in terms of resilience, general self-efficacy, and specific self-efficacy during the 3 years of study and after graduation?

## METHOD

### Research Population

The population for this study was the total student body in a 3-year Israeli baccalaureate social work program specifically during the 2010–2011 academic year and after 2 years as graduates. The population included a total of 600 people: 360 students (285 in the general BSW program and 75 students in the STS program) and 240 graduates (190 of the BSW program and 50 of the STS program). An invitation to participate in the research was sent to all members of the cohort by e-mail. Human subjects approval was received from the college's Institutional Review Board for this research. Responses

were received from 171 students (47.5% of the student cohort) comprising 105 (37%) of the students enrolled in the general BSW program and 66 (88%) of the students enrolled in the STS program. Of the 71 graduates who responded, 35 (18.4%) had studied in the general BSW program and 36 (72%) in the STS program. The research participants included 191 (79%) women and 51 (21%) men, with an age range from 21 to 53, and a mean age of 29 years.

### Research Instruments

A demographic questionnaire was compiled in order to collect data on each participant's gender, age, and such study-related variables as program and year of study, graduation date, field of practice, and place of work.

We employed the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to measure self-efficacy. (The GSE assesses general sense of perceived self-efficacy and predicts the respondents' ability to successfully cope with challenging tasks and adversity in different domains of human functioning.) The GSE uses a 10-item Likert-type scale (4 = *absolutely true*; 1 = *not at all true*) deployed to obtain a composite score. Its validity correlated positively with positive emotions, dispositional optimism, and work satisfaction, and it correlated negatively with anxiety, depression, and health problems. Reliability of the GSE has been tested across 23 countries, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .76 to .90 (Yong, 2010); Cronbach's alpha in this study was .84.

For the purpose of this research, we developed a measure of specific self-efficacy for stress and trauma work based on an adaptation of the measure for specific self-efficacy (for fundraising) developed by Boehm (2006). The measure consists of seven statements that refer to the respondent's perception of self-efficacy regarding the capacity to act successfully in the field of stress and trauma; ability to influence people or organizations to contribute; knowledge of useful informants and contacts; proficiency in negotiation skills; expertise in using stress and trauma techniques; ability to form an appropriate support network; and mastery of required skills. The students were asked to denote the degree of their agreement with each statement. The internal reliability of the original scale was .85, and the Cronbach's alpha for the present scale was 0.86.

The Connor-Davidson Resilience scale (CD-RISC) was used as a measure of the ability to cope with stress. This is a five-factor scale that includes 25 items, each rated on a 5-point scale (0–4). Factor 1 reflects the notion of personal competence, high standards, and tenacity. Factor 2 corresponds to trust in one's instincts, tolerance of negative affect, and the strengthening effects of stress. Factor 3 relates to the positive acceptance of change and of secure relationships. Factor 4 speaks to control and Factor 5 to spiritual influences (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

The CD-RISC has been tested in the general population as well as in clinical samples and demonstrates sound psychometric properties, with sound internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ), test-retest reliability, and good distinction between those with greater and lesser resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for this study was .85.

## Procedure

An invitation to participate in the research was extended to all first-, second-, and third-year undergraduate students and all the graduates of the BSW and STS programs in the 2010–2011 academic year. Those who were interested were sent an e-mail link that provided access to the questionnaires.

## RESULTS

### Research Question 1

How did the resilience, general self-efficacy, and specific self-efficacy of the STS students differ during their 3 years of study?

As shown in Table 1 the resilience and general self-efficacy of the participants in the STS program increased moderately from the first to the third year of study. The difference in specific self-efficacy began with a sharp increase from the first to second year, and this continued into the third year. A one-way between-group analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of change from year to year on the STS students' scores on resilience, general self-efficacy, and specific self-efficacy. A statistically significant difference at the  $p < .05$  level was found only for specific self-efficacy ( $F(2, 99) = 4.7, p = .004$ ).

### Research Question 2

How do students in the STS program compare with those in a general BSW program in terms of resilience, general self-efficacy, and specific self-efficacy over the 3 years of study and after graduation?

**TABLE 1** Mean Scores Regarding Resilience, General Self-Efficacy, and Specific Self-Efficacy by Year of Study for Participating STS Students

Scale	1st year <i>N</i> = 24		2nd year <i>N</i> = 21		3rd year <i>N</i> = 19		Graduates <i>N</i> = 35	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Resilience	29.1	4.9	32.5	5	32.2	5.7	30.4	5.7
General self-efficacy	31.8	4.5	34.1	3.7	34.4	4.1	34.1	3.8
Specific self-efficacy	33	5.3	37.2	4.2	38.2	4.7	36.6	5

**TABLE 2** Mean Scores Regarding Resilience, General Self-Efficacy (GSE), and Specific Self-Efficacy (SSE) by Year of Study for STS and BSW Students

Year		STS			BSW			T	Sig.
		Mean	N	SD	Mean	N	SD		
1st Year	GSE	31.8	25	4.5	31.4	26	4.4	.37	.715
	SSE	33.0	24	5.3	32.2	24	5.7	.55	.585
	Resilience	29.1	23	4.9	26.8	27	5.4	1.57	.124
2nd Year	GSE	34.1	22	3.7	32.6	44	4.2	1.4	.158
	SSE	37.2	20	4.2	30.2	41	5.9	4.7	.000
	Resilience	32.5	20	5.0	29.9	40	7.2	1.4	.162
3rd Year	GSE	34.4	19	4.1	32.7	34	4.1	1.45	.152
	SSE	38.2	19	4.7	31.8	34	5.3	4.35	.000
	Resilience	32.2	19	5.7	28.5	33	5.5	2.25	.029
Graduates	GSE	34.1	34	3.8	33.5	35	3.7	0.62	.54
	SSE	36.6	36	5.0	32.3	34	3.5	2.73	.008
	Resilience	30.4	35	5.7	29.3	34	3.8	0.94	.35

As shown in Table 2, significant differences between social work students in the general BSW program and those in STS were found only for resilience and specific self-efficacy.

A contrast of the resilience of social work students in the BSW program with those in the STS program revealed a significant difference only among the third-year students ( $T = 2.25$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ).

Comparison of the specific self-efficacy of social work students in the general BSW program with those in the STS program revealed no difference between the two groups among students who were at the beginning of their studies but revealed a significant difference among second-year ( $T = 4.7$ ,  $p = .001$ ) and third-year students ( $T = 4.35$ ,  $p = .001$ ). Among those who had already graduated, the difference between the two groups was not significant.

During their studies, our data show significant gains, especially in resilience and specific self-efficacy, among STS students when compared with the students in the BSW program. However, among the graduates, a decline is indicated. The findings did not indicate that general self-efficacy was affected by participation in the STS program or functioned as a distinguishing factor between the groups.

### Focus Group Evaluation

In order to better understand whether the students recognized growth in their self-efficacy and resilience skills and attributed them to participation in the STS program, all current STS students were invited to provide feedback about the program. A lecturer from the BSW program (the second author of this article) moderated a 90-minute focus group for each year of study, with an average participation of seven students in each group (28% of the students

currently enrolled). The moderator explained that the goal of the discussion was to obtain qualitative feedback in order to evaluate the program and to prepare a scholarly publication. Confidentiality of individual responses was assured, and students were asked to sign a consent form for this use of the data. All group sessions were tape-recorded and transcribed.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using two processes: data reduction and inductive content analysis. Each of the three authors independently read the transcripts and made notes, and then we met and discussed the content of each focus group and agreed on their salient themes. Statements that only one of us highlighted and those that were labeled differently were discussed and agreed on (dual coding). We then compiled the results into a set of raw data themes (creating tags). Using inductive content analysis, the consensual themes were gathered into integrated concepts (Patton, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

## FINDINGS

In line with the quantitative results, the STS students acknowledged an incremental increase in specific self-efficacy during their 3 years of study. Although the foundations they attributed for this increase differed, the trend was stable.

### First-Year Students

The first-year students evaluated their initial practical experience on a continuum from inadequate professional confidence to supportive personal confidence.

#### INADEQUATE PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE

For some students, the expectation to function as helpers before acquiring a solid knowledge base or being provided with clear directions led to frustration.

*The difficulty began when I was supposed to be the helper. I approached a woman who was hysterical and inadvertently did what was forbidden. Although we talked about it later in class, this was a hard day for me.*

*Suddenly I'm holding someone's hand and she is screaming. I had no idea what to do, so I kept telling her to sit down.*

*I had no idea what to expect, and was surprised at what happened.*

The consequence was a feeling of helplessness.

*I felt so frustrated and unable to create functional tools.*

*My attempts to lean on familiar schemas led to paralysis.*

The misunderstood expectations were exposed during debriefing of the drill in class.

*Afterwards, in class we spilled everything out and then we realized that we did not do what was really needed.*

For these first-year students, the requirement to deal with incidents of stress and trauma was overwhelming.

#### PERSONAL CONFIDENCE

A few students relied on their innate self-confidence:

*I believe in my personal ability to deal with surprises in life.*

One student was aware of the essential role of learning from success.

*When I feel I am doing well, I believe in my ability, and that gives me confidence that I can transfer to other areas of activity.*

Some students were able to focus on specific abilities in order to boost their confidence.

#### ROLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Being considered to be “helpers” supported positive outcomes.

*When traveling to help in the south, I felt we were treated as the “welfare brigade” coming to give relief to anxiety victims. It boosted my confidence.*

*During the briefing we were referred to as helpers. That gave me a sense of intuition and creativity that made me able to function.*

These students were able to enlist personal self-efficacy to boost their confidence.

## Second-Year Students

The second-year students expressed more confidence in their ability to deal resiliently with situations of uncertainty and helplessness.

*Now I am calm and confident in my ability to adjust successfully and be resilient in uncertain situations that previously would have made me feel helpless.*

*The program reinforces feelings of competence to deal with things that previously seemed unimaginable.*

However, they were divided in attributing this confidence to theory, practice, experience, or personal intuition.

*When I know the theory, I feel I can be more flexible.*

*I find myself relying on my intuition and uncomfortable with directive action based on protocols and guidelines.*

The practical experience of functioning as helpers in real-life situations of stress and trauma during the second year provided students with awareness of their resilience. Their individual perceptions of their functioning were related to their unique ways of linking theory and practice.

## Third-Year Students

The third-year students highlighted the unique nature of STS by comparing it with the regular social work program.

*The [STS] program made me aware of the specific knowledge and skills required in the area of stress and trauma in contrast to the diverse methods in the social work advanced methods course.*

Most of them expressed a sense of mastery concerning knowledge and skills and were able to generalize and apply them to additional areas of their work with clients.

*I feel confident that I can identify the signs that provide me with an understanding and give me direction for intervention.*

*The program gave me a feeling that I have the tools needed for immediate assistance, and I use that a lot with all my clients.*

Some wondered whether they were fully prepared.

*I feel I need more experience in managing crisis situations before taking such responsibility myself.*

The third-year STS students were approaching the end of their studies and looking forward with both confidence and apprehension to functioning as certified social workers in the field of stress and trauma.

## DISCUSSION

The research findings suggest a significant rise in specific self-efficacy and resilience among students in the STS program. We attribute these findings to their STS training, since comparison with results for similar students in the general BSW program indicated that the specific self-efficacy for dealing with stress and trauma did not develop spontaneously and was not a result of general social work education.

A possible explanation for the relationship between the STS training model and the increase in the specific self-efficacy of the students may be the inclusion of all four essential sources needed for boosting self-efficacy, as described by Bandura (1997): Providing an opportunity for successful mastery experiences; witnessing social modeling of fellow students who are succeeding in completing the tasks; engaging in social persuasion through verbal encouragement from others; and developing awareness of one's psychological responses, and learning how to minimize stress and elevate mood when facing difficult tasks.

All four elements are included in STS, as can be seen in [Figure 1](#). Students in the program are given the opportunity to experience success through participation in experiential learning and practice drills. These activities enable them to witness their peers in action, providing effective and competent assistance to stress and trauma victims. In addition, they receive ongoing praise and encouragement from service users, fellow students, and cooperating professionals. Development of mastery and competence is based on the perception of stress and trauma situations as a challenge (Kobasa, 1979; Rutter, 1985). The STS program, by providing opportunities for social workers to function successfully as first responders, contributes to perceiving such situations as a challenge that can be handled effectively by professionals who appropriately are trained to do so.

An additional outcome, evident among the students who were near the end of the program, was the significant increase in resilience of STS students compared with students in the regular social work program. This added resilience provided graduates with a view regarding stress-related situations as a challenge or opportunity, reinforcing binding commitments,

and recognizing the limits of their control. In light of the goal set for social work education of providing graduates with sufficient confidence in their ability to apply what they have learned in the complex, demanding settings of social work practice, this achievement is very important (Petrovich, 2004).

An unexpected finding was the decline in specific self-efficacy for stress and trauma and resilience among graduates of the STS program, compared with the increase found among graduates of the BSW program. This decline may be explained by the gap between professional fantasies, developed during socialization for a profession, and the realities encountered in practice (Cory & Cory, 2011). It suggests that the confidence built during a study program needs to be maintained through continued practice and that specific skills will require support and acknowledgement within a graduate's work environment. Retaining and enhancing the specific self-efficacy and resilience also might be achieved by inviting STS graduates to take part in regional drills and their pursuit of continuing education in this area.

## CONCLUSION

Bridging the gap between theory and practice has been a key topic of concern in the field of social work education since it began in the early twentieth century (Clapton et al., 2006; Collingwood, Emond, & Woodward, 2008). Practice should be based on theory, and theory should develop in accordance with practice realities (Teigiser, 2009). Yet we know the process of bridging theory and practice is fraught with tension (Parton, 2000), and it is quite demanding both for practicing social workers, and for students (Fisher & Somerton, 2000; Watson & West, 2003). Some programs rely on innovations in field work (Clapton et al., 2006; Collingwood et al., 2008; Miller et al., 2005; Tsien & Tsui, 2007; Wilson, Walsh, & Kirby, 2007) and others on the use of a variety of teaching techniques geared to help students make this integration in the classroom (Campbell, Scott-Lincourt, & Brennan, 2008; Dodd & Jansson, 2004; Gillingham, 2008). A different approach, which has gained limited attention to date (Lam, 2004; Lefevre, 2005; Watson & West, 2003), supports the direct involvement of students' classroom instructors in the field (Clapton et al., 2006, 2008; Tsien & Tsui, 2007).

By uniting the roles of the academic lecturer and practice teacher, the STS program may offer a unique example of successful integration between theory and practice. In the model, the teacher of theory plans the experiential learning and then implements and supervises it in the field. In this situation, teachers and learners *share* the responsibility for integration between theory and practice. The teacher is responsible for presenting the theory and for its implementation in the field as well as supporting the students' efficacy in performing according to theoretical guidelines in a field setting. Such combining of academic course work and field experience has been found to

increase feelings of professionalism, self-efficacy, and culturally competent skills among participating students and to be effective, for example, in teaching a preventive approach in child welfare practice (Carten & Goodman, 2005).

### Limitations of the Research

A limitation of the study was the disproportionately high response rate of STS students (and graduates) compared with the general population of BSW students and graduates. This outcome partially may be explained by the fact that the head of the STS program sent out the invitation to participate. The relatively low response by graduates may be explained by the fully understandable detachment of students once they leave the study program and become regularly and heavily involved in the world of work.

This was a cross-sectional exploratory study, aimed at determining the contribution of participation in STS to the development of general and specific self-efficacy and resilience. Our data revealed differences between the two groups—the general BSW and the STS students—at a distinct point in time. A longitudinal study to establish baseline data for each cohort and to follow these changes over time might be valuable in assessing the impact of these variables over several years, especially for graduates during their professional job and career changes.

Nevertheless, this article presents a model for preparing social workers to be first responders in situations of stress and trauma. Assimilating such a model, as part of an undergraduate social work program, of course is subject to the current debate regarding a comprehensive versus a specialization focus for this degree. Our preliminary findings, however, do show that BSW students can benefit and generalize from focusing on a specific subject area, such as stress and trauma, provided theory and practice are integrated and growth in self-efficacy and resilience are firmly supported.

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