PSYCHOSOCIAL VULNERABILITY OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

Social work education has the mission not only of imparting professional knowledge, skills and attitudes to students, but also of developing the person of the student social worker. Social work practice, unlike many other disciplines, involves a close integration of the personal and professional selves of the practitioner. This paper reports on a survey of the psychosocial vulnerability of student social workers at the University of Johannesburg. Seventy one percent (n=370) of undergraduate students agreed to participate in this quantitative study. Results highlight the prevalence and personal and academic impact of death and poverty, as well as a pervasive childhood pattern of abuse and violence. Death and abuse were also found to be associated with higher rates of academic failure. The author argues that social work educators need to work proactively, creatively and authentically in helping students to engage with their own vulnerability.

Key words: vulnerability, education, countertransference, social work, loss, violence

INTRODUCTION

Social work educators are committed to training people to take their place as social workers in the South African context. Our students are drawn from this context and return to this same context to serve as social workers. This context is replete with major psychosocial challenges, the addressing of which is the mainstay of the social work profession – poverty, family and community violence, the oppression of women, ill-health, the marginalisation of certain population groups, the silencing of children and inadequate access to essential services such as education.
Anecdotal evidence from within the Department of Social Work at the University of Johannesburg (UJ) agrees with a handful of studies recently conducted within higher education institutions in South Africa (eg Alpaslan, 2010; Wade, 2009) that our students face the same psychosocial challenges and vulnerability as the communities within which they work. This has major implications for the vulnerability of our students – they are forced to work with the same challenges that they themselves experience. Some students have, for various reasons, not accessed helpful support services, and are thus carrying a frequently long history of trauma.

Educators are becoming increasingly aware of the many ways in which these psychosocial vulnerabilities make our students academically vulnerable. It is, for example, very hard to focus on assignments when you are hungry or to do a public presentation after a close family member has died of AIDS. Students frequently carry a multitude of social responsibilities, such as caring for ailing parents or younger siblings, while taking up the role of learner. This is a relatively new phenomenon; historically, the typical student came to university with no responsibilities other than to learn. The increase in non-academic responsibilities and concerns is exacerbated by the fact that many UJ students’ family homes are far from Johannesburg.

It is surely true that we must, as social work educators, respond in helpful ways to our students’ vulnerabilities. We are employed as educators, not as therapists or doctors, thus our role is limited. We are, however, also social workers – indeed, we are social workers first – thus we have a responsibility towards the well-being and development of all people, including our students. We need to be attentive and responsive to our students’ vulnerability (Collins, 2012). This may entail being aware of it and, at times, adjusting our academic expectations to accommodate this
vulnerability. We may be called upon to provide limited support to students in the midst of a crisis. We are required to refer students for appropriate professional or peer support.

In light of the above, the UJ Department of Social Work determined to investigate the nature and extent of social work students’ vulnerability and the impact of this vulnerability on their personal and academic functioning. It was hoped that such a study would illuminate the challenges and support needs of students, facilitating enhanced student support by the university community. This paper presents key findings from this study, preceded by a review of relevant literature. It is hoped that the paper will sensitise readers to the vulnerability of students and galvanise academics to be more attentive to the personal lives of students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term ‘vulnerability’, as used in the academic domain, is frequently defined in primarily educational terms (eg Addus et al., 2007; Lucas, 1993) – students’ grades, study methods, access to academic resources, class attendance, and so on. This study is focused on vulnerability as a psychosocial phenomenon – those life experiences, located in any of one’s many social environments and at any point in one’s personal life history, that impinge on one’s personal or psychosocial development. These psychosocial vulnerabilities are of intrinsic interest to educators. Of course, they do also impinge on academic vulnerability – the experience of trauma may well harm academic performance and so the relationship between psychosocial and academic vulnerability is important. But the psychosocial vulnerability of students is important in its own right, irrespective of this relationship with academic vulnerability.
Batchelor (2006) discusses the interface between epistemological and ontological voices and argues that educators are fundamentally interested in both. A student’s epistemological voice is about *knowing* – what students learn about (in our case) social work, its theory and skills. Traditionally, this voice has, perhaps, been given primary, even exclusive, attention. The ontological voice is about *being* – that students become what they are studying, that they become a social worker in their identity, their sense of self. Batchelor says that both are important – the epistemological and ontological voices are intricately related to each other. She calls for a “harmony and unity between knowing and being – between epistemological and ontological voices – and an academic identity that is an authentic self-expression” (Batchelor, 2006:791).

Psychosocial vulnerability can be seen as an essential component of the ontological voice. Engaging with student vulnerability is thus an engagement with the student as a person, with their ontological voice. Batchelor (2006) argues that disregarding the being of the student results in poor education, but she also recognises that giving space for this voice is challenging for students, educators and university systems. Nonetheless, Batchelor’s point is that vulnerability is a necessary ingredient for engaging with the being and the becoming of the student. There is, therefore, potential educational value in recognising and creating space for dialogue about students’ life challenges.

Literature on the psychosocial vulnerability of university students, and specifically social work students, is, however, limited (Collins et al., 2010). This is strange, given the extent to which social work students must engage with the vulnerability of their clients and, in South Africa, the extent of social deprivation experienced by many students. It is particularly curious, because social work students appear to have higher levels of childhood trauma than students from some other disciplines (Black et al., 1993). Wade (2009), in her doctoral thesis, explored this subject directly with Unisa students. Yet even in her thesis there is a dearth of literature about the psychosocial vulnerability of
students. Much of her literature is generic trauma literature; literature that is specific to social work tends to focus on trauma in the student’s past, rather than on their current vulnerability.

Drawing on qualitative investigations with fourth year students at Unisa, Wade (2009) describes students’ experience of ‘trauma’ as one that impinges on or is imposed upon one’s life. This results in a loss of agency – an experience of being disempowered. Powerlessness was, for many students, the hallmark of the experience of trauma. This powerlessness was seen as damaging to the self, resulting in a loss of ability to help oneself. Death was specifically cited as an example of trauma, because “one is powerless to prevent it” (Wade, 2009:357). For the same reasons, poverty was perceived as a trauma.

The most frequently reported broad category of trauma in Wade’s (2009:392) study was a range of domestic or school violence and abuse, reported by 88% of participants. The traumas that Wade’s (2009:403) participants found to be the ‘most traumatic’ included the death of a child; being a victim of hijacking, child sexual abuse or rape; being disabled; being HIV positive; or witnessing a rape. Violence emerges significantly here, but is not commonly reported in other studies.

Wade’s (2009:392) second most common trauma, reported by 80% of her participants, was death of a close family member. Similarly, Grant (2009:93) found that among chiropractic students in Durban only the experience of a death in the family (from a list of 16 life challenges) was significantly associated with self-reported failure of academic courses.

Poverty, which Wade (2009:399) had not initially thought of as a ‘trauma’, emerged as a significant life challenge in her study, with 43% of participants citing extreme poverty. Another study of fourth year Unisa students (Lintvelt, 2008) also identified financial concerns as central for
students. Students were anxious about having to pay back their study loans while earning small social work salaries. Some students were particularly concerned about failing social work, which would leave them with a loan and no job. The majority of Unisa’s fourth year students were working, most of these full time, leaving limited time for their studies. Lack of finances was a key factor in explaining why half of South African students drop out within their first three years of study – 70% to 82% of students come from low socio-economic backgrounds (Letseka, 2006; Lindow, 2006). Other studies (Bojuwoye, 2002; Earle, 2008; Jones et al., 2008) confirm the centrality of finances in student well-being and academic progress, although some studies (Malefo, 2000) find no relationship between socio-economic status and academic performance, suggesting a complex relationship between finances and academics.

Some studies (Addus et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2008; Lintvelt, 2008) have shown that concern about family responsibilities has a negative impact on students’ grades. It seems that family problems impinge on the ability of students to concentrate on their studies. South African studies (Letseka, 2006; Lindow, 2006; Naidoo, 2008) found that personal or family factors (e.g. having to carry jobs to survive financially, having a baby, having to travel far to university and needing to care for a sick relative) make it impossible for some students to continue with their studies, contributing to a high rate of attrition among students.

Socio-political factors in students’ social environments may also have an influence on student wellbeing and academic performance. A study conducted in Israel, comparing Jewish and Arab social work and nursing students (Ben-Ari & Gil, 2004), suggests that the higher levels of depression and psychopathology among Arab students is probably due to a complex brew of social and political marginalisation, being part of a minority group, protracted tension between Arabs and Jews in the region and relative poverty.
Earle (2008:123) highlights the increasing social vulnerability of social work students at the Universities of Limpopo and Stellenbosch, but observes that “the increase in the number of students whose backgrounds predispose them to carrying such personal and social burdens has placed an increasing load on the shrinking number of social work educators, who in the past considered it part of their work to assist students in dealing with such issues”. In Limpopo, the key social issues were **unplanned pregnancies** among young unmarried social work students and **HIV**. Some students terminated the pregnancies before they became public knowledge, which students generally regarded as compounding the problem.

While these vulnerabilities may be prevalent among all university students, and indeed among all South Africans, a study of students presenting at the Student Counselling Services at UCT in 2001 (Schreiber, 2007) found that students from **Humanities** were more likely than students from the Engineering and Built Environment Faculty to report for counselling. There are, no doubt, various interpretations of this result, including the notion that Humanities students are more open to seeking help. But the possibility that Humanities students, such as social workers, are more vulnerable should not be overlooked.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a descriptive approach and quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The main aim of the study was descriptive – a great deal is known about vulnerability and trauma and some studies have already been conducted within higher educational institutions in South Africa. Consequently, there was no need for an exploratory approach. The quantitative design was appropriate, because our intent was to identify a range of predetermined experiences and responses,
not to provide in-depth descriptions of these experiences. The cross-sectional survey design was appropriate as the study was essentially an expanded prevalence study.

The population was defined as all undergraduate students studying social work at the University of Johannesburg in July 2010 – approximately 520 students. Ordinarily, with a population this size and with a survey design, a sample of the population would be taken. However, we decided to study the entire population for various reasons, including a concern to not miss low prevalence but high impact vulnerabilities.

The data collection tool was a closed-ended, self-administered questionnaire, the content of which was influenced by Wade’s (2009) study. The four-page instrument (plus covering letter) comprised three sections:

- **Demographics.** Although the study was anonymous, information was collected on gender, age, population group, distance from family home, degree, year of study and number of courses failed.

- **Life Challenges.** A set of 22 life challenges that students may have experienced was listed. For each life challenge students were asked if they had experienced it, and if so when it took place, to what extent it currently bothered them and to what extent it interfered with their academic studies. There was space for students to add their own self-defined life challenges.

- **Support Systems.** Students were asked to select the one life challenge that currently bothered them the most (Question 34 or Q34). In regard to this challenge, they were asked to evaluate the support from family, university friends, lecturers, tutors and counsellors. The results of this section of the questionnaire do not form part of this paper.
After exploring various options for administering the questionnaire, we decided that a paper administration of the survey would be most appropriate. Data were collected during social work lectures during the second semester of 2010. Lecturers announced the study in one class, providing the rationale and procedure for the study, assuring students that participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that there would be no negative consequences for declining to participate and no incentives for choosing to participate. A letter to this effect was loaded onto Edulink at this time.

The following week, the lecturer handed out the printed questionnaires during the last 30 minutes of class. Students were reminded that they could decline to complete the questionnaire if they so wished. Completed questionnaires were placed in boxes at the exits from the lecture venue. Some students were not available to complete the questionnaires on the day and completed them the following week.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Faculty of UJ Humanities Ethics Committee. Students were provided with the contact details of the freely-available campus counselling services. During the preparation for the study, students were encouraged to seek counselling if the study evoked strong feelings. Students were provided with a written summary of the report upon completion of the study.

The questionnaires were electronically scanned and the data were analysed in SPSS, using descriptive statistics, correlations, t-tests, ANOVAs and discriminant analysis. “Life impact scores” (LIS) were calculated by averaging the items that asked if a life challenge currently bothered them (this is termed “personal impact” or PI) and interfered with their academic studies (“academic impact” or AI) – all of these are scored on a scale of 0 (no impact) to 3 (a lot of impact).
Three hundred and seventy (n = 370) students participated in this study – a response rate of 71%. The majority of participants (88%) were studying a Bachelor of Social Work degree, followed by ten per cent studying a Bachelor of Psychology. A quarter of the participants (24%) were in their first year of study, a little over third (38%) in their second year, a further quarter (25%) in their third year of study and the remaining 12% in their fourth or fifth year of study. The majority of participants (85%) were women, African (91%) and 22 years or younger (73%). The largest group of participants (28%) came from the Gauteng province – the remaining 72% came from outside of Gauteng, viz Limpopo (24%), Mpumlanga (20%), Kwa-Zulu Natal (11%), other provinces (9%) or other countries (8%).

RESULTS

Each of the 22 life challenges listed was mentioned by at least five students. Half of the participants (48.1%) reported experiencing from one to four of the 22 life challenges and a further third (35.2%) experienced five to seven challenges. Two clusters of life challenges emerged as most prevalent and as having the greatest negative impact on personal well-being and academic life: death and poverty. These will be discussed first, followed by other salient challenges.

The Top Life Challenges: Death and Poverty

The experience of the death of loved ones was the most commonly reported life challenge among our students. Seventy seven per cent reported the death of someone who was close to them; a third of students (32%) reported the death of one or both parents. This very high rate of loss among students comes with similarly very high life impact scores (LIS) (1.85 for the death of parents and 1.59 for the deaths of other loved ones); these impacts are ranked third and tenth highest. The
Impact scores were higher for personal impact (PI) (ranking second and fifth for parents and others) than for academic impact (AI) (ranking ninth and sixteenth respectively). The lower academic impact may be because most parental deaths occurred five or more years ago, probably before the students began studying. It seems, then, that death-related losses are both prevalent and harmful to students, particularly at a personal level. The death of parents or other loved ones were second and third most frequently rated items in Q34, which asked participants to select the one life challenge that was currently bothering them the most.

Experiences related to poverty are the second most frequently mentioned life challenge among social work students at UJ. Forty-four per cent of students reported struggling to survive financially. This challenge had the highest LIS (2.41), the most negative PI (2.41), with nearly two thirds of these participants (63%) reporting that it currently bothered them “a lot”, and the most negative AI (also 2.41, and the only challenge to exceed a score of 2 for academic impact). It is clear, then, that current financial difficulties are experienced by a large percentage of social work students and that they have a very substantial impact on personal and academic well-being. This item was the most commonly selected item in Q34 – indicating that students experienced current financial struggles as their single biggest concern.

A third of students (36%) reported growing up in poverty, 79% of whom reported it as occurring in 2005 or earlier (i.e. during childhood). Together, 55% of participants reported growing up in poverty or currently struggling financially, with 41% of these reporting both. Growing up in poverty had the fifth highest LIS (1.79). It was reported as having the sixth (1.89) and fifth (1.68) highest PI and AI respectively. It is thus clear that a history of poverty continues to impact on current living. Growing up in poverty was the fourth most frequently rated item in Q34.
In addition, nearly a quarter of students (24%) indicated that they are responsible to care for family members (parents or siblings); with half of these indicating that this is a current responsibility. This life challenge had the fourth highest LIS (1.84). It ranked eighth in terms of PI (1.86), but second in terms of AI (1.81). It seems that students are not unduly concerned about their responsibility towards family members, but that it does threaten their academic progress. Nearly half of these students (42%) report that their family responsibilities impact negatively “a lot” on their studies.

A correlation matrix was calculated between the 22 life challenges. These last three challenges (struggling to survive financially, growing up in poverty and caring for family members) formed a cluster of items, suggesting that they are different facets of the same variable, viz ‘poverty’. Interestingly, however, none of these items correlated significantly with any of the other 19 life challenges. Given the pervasive and foundational nature of poverty, as underlying many social ills, one may have expected the experience of poverty to be more closely associated with or even predictive of various other challenges. But this does not appear to be the case among this sample.

Other Life Challenges

Table 1 below summarises the results of several other salient life challenges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life Challenge</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
<th>Life Impact</th>
<th>Personal Impact</th>
<th>Academic Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Score Rank</td>
<td>Score Rank</td>
<td>Score Rank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol or drug abuse in the family</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>1.53 12th</td>
<td>1.24 9th</td>
<td>1.24 15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV or AIDS in the family</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>1.42 17th</td>
<td>1.13 12th</td>
<td>1.13 17th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student living with HIV</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1.54 11th</td>
<td>1.33 19th</td>
<td>1.75 3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Challenge</td>
<td>Prevalence</td>
<td>Life Impact</td>
<td>Personal Impact</td>
<td>Academic Impact</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Rank</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student mugged or assaulted</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>18\textsuperscript{th}</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminated a pregnancy</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>2\textsuperscript{nd}</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over a third of students (39%) reported the presence of alcohol or drug abuse in their family. In contrast to most challenges, which were reported as occurring either recently or in the past, substance abuse was reported as occurring throughout the participants’ histories, suggesting that substance abuse in their families is chronic. The impact scores, however, were relatively low, as indicated in Table 1. Thus, although prevalent, the impact of family substance abuse on personal and academic well-being is comparatively less significant.

A significant percentage of participants (37%) mentioned HIV and AIDS in the family as a life challenge. This accords with the high prevalence of HIV in Southern Africa. While recent studies have confirmed a comparatively low prevalence of HIV among South African students – 2.2% of university students in Gauteng were found to be HIV positive (HEAIDS, 2010:31) – this finding makes it clear that HIV remains prevalent in the families of our students. The impact scores are low; however, though the higher PI rank relative to AI suggests that while the HIV status of family members is of concern to students, this concern does not impinge substantially on their academic life.

Only 4.2% of the participants (15 individuals) reported that they themselves were living with HIV. The life challenge had the third highest AI but the third lowest PI. This dramatic difference between personal and academic impact is noteworthy and requires more in-depth investigation. Despite the
small number of students living with HIV, the high academic impact makes this an important though focused area for student support.

Just over one third of participants (35%) reported that they were mugged or assaulted. Most of these experiences were reported as having taken place in the past two years, suggesting that these may have occurred in Johannesburg or perhaps even on campus. We have anecdotal knowledge of some of our students being mugged on the way to or from campus. The impact scores are, however, low.

Twelve per cent of participants indicated that they had terminated a pregnancy, with most of these taking place in the previous year. When comparing the approximate dates of the abortions with the dates UJ studies were commenced, it seems that 16-23 of these 42 students (nearly half) had their abortions while they were UJ students. This life challenge had among the highest impact scores.

Experiences of Abuse

A substantial number of students reported various forms of abuse, the majority of which are reported as having taken place in 2005 or before, thus in childhood. A quarter (24%) reported being emotionally abused, 14% indicated that they were sexually assaulted or raped, 12% said they were physically abused and 10% said they were sexually abused. In total, a third (33%) of participants reported one or more of these four forms of abuse, 41% of whom reported two or more. Although not very prevalent, these experiences of abuse elicited comparatively high impact scores. Sexual abuse, for example obtained the sixth highest LIS (1.77) and emotional abuse the seventh highest (1.76). These four types of abuse also correlated highly with each other, forming a coherent cluster
that can best be termed ‘abuse’, most of which was reported as occurring in 2005 or earlier, thus most probably in childhood. This clustering is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Intercorrelation of Life Challenges**

Physical abuse also correlated with substance abuse in the family, which in turn correlated with the death of a loved one. This may suggest a co-occurrence of physical violence and substance abuse within families, which may also increase the risk of death in the family. Emotional abuse was also correlated with witnessing domestic violence between the participants’ parents, perhaps suggesting a congruence between an emotionally and physically volatile family context. The experience of sexual abuse correlated with the participants miscarrying a baby, which logically correlated with the death of a child. Finally, sexual assault correlated with witnessing a suicide attempt, both pointing to high levels of violence and trauma.
In combination, Figure 1 suggests a cluster of highly traumatic life experiences, most of which entail violence in intimate or family relationships. Interestingly, only one these ten life challenges (death of a loved one) emerged as a major life challenge. This may point toward a somewhat latent cluster of traumatic life experiences that underlie and perhaps exacerbate other life challenges. This cluster is rooted in violence, probably within the family or other intimate relationships, but perhaps also in the broader community. This suggests a more amorphous vulnerability that is less easy to address and requires an integrated and holistic approach towards personal development.

**Measuring Vulnerability**

In order to assess the relationship between psychosocial vulnerability and demographic variables, a Vulnerability Index (VI) was calculated by adding, for each participant, the number of life challenges reported and the sum of the LIS scores for those challenges, yielding a VI that can range from 0 (no life challenges experienced) to 88 (all 22 life challenges experienced and all had maximum negative impact on both personal life and studies). The mean VI score was 11.4, with a standard deviation of 9.0 and a range from 0 to 52. The VI was subsequently used to compare the levels of vulnerability of students across demographic groups.

The VI was not found to be related to gender, how close students’ families were to the university, or when the students started their studies. Age, however, was significantly and positively related to VI ($r = .24$, $p < .001$), with older participants reporting higher VI scores than younger participants.

Of particular significance is the finding that VI was significantly positively correlated with the number of courses failed ($r = .18$, $p < .01$). This was confirmed by an ANOVA ($F = 3.00$, $p < .05$). Vulnerability increased in an almost straight line from 10.4 among those who did not fail any
courses to 17.9 among those who failed four or more courses. While failing courses may increase vulnerability (for example, increasing the financial pressure on families to pay for courses to be repeated), it is more likely that higher levels of vulnerability have a negative impact on academic performance, resulting in the failure of one or more courses.

To further explore this finding, each life challenge was correlated with the number of courses failed. Only two challenges yielded statistically significant results. Experiencing the death of someone the student cared about \( r = .14, p < .01 \), which was reported by 70% of students, and experiencing physical abuse \( r = .13, p < .05 \), which was reported by only 12% of students, were the only life challenges to be associated with higher rates of course failure. Other life challenges that one may have expected to be related to course failure, such as poverty, showed very low levels of association. Finally, a step-wise discriminant analysis was conducted to see which life challenges would best distinguish between those who failed no courses and those who failed one or more courses. The only challenge to enter the analysis was the death of a loved-one, showing the high salience of death for student academic well-being.

**DISCUSSION**

These data show that psychosocial vulnerability is highly prevalent among social work undergraduate students and that these life challenges have negative impact on both personal and academic well-being. In particular, death and loss, poverty, and a pervasive childhood experience of abuse appear to be most salient and deserving of our attention. However, other life challenges, such as living with HIV or terminating a pregnancy, while not prevalent, may have a high impact on those few individuals who experience them.
This study lends support to those cited earlier, which showed the importance of death, poverty and violence. It is not certain that these findings are unique – students in other departments and faculties may experience similar or different profiles of psychosocial vulnerability. There is very little evidence in other literature to say that social work students are different from, for example, engineering students. This is, perhaps, an area for further research – the current study could be replicated among a selection of other disciplines.

Furthermore, this study was conducted only among UJ students and cannot be generalised to other universities. However, these findings do resonate with those of Wade’s (2009) and other studies, suggesting that this pattern may be common.

Recalling Batchelor’s (2006) argument that education must harmonise the epistemological and ontological voices of students – both their knowing and their being – these findings indicate the grave importance of social educators attending not only to the development of professional knowledge, skills and attitudes among social work students, but also to the student as person.

Students need the opportunity, in safe and regulated environments, to explore their psychosocial vulnerability, to come to a greater understanding and acceptance of this vulnerability, and to understand and recognise how and when it impinges on their practice. This could be done through personal reflective journaling, which encourages students to reflect on themselves and their personal life experiences in relation to the information they learn in theory and practice (Van Breda & Agherdien, in press). Students almost certainly need to be educated about the theory of countertransference, how it manifests in practice and how it can be managed in ethical and professional ways (Feller, 2011). Students need to see their lecturers modelling this kind of open,
transparent and vulnerable behaviour, to learn that it is both acceptable and appropriate for social work students.

While social work educators are not able to undo the vulnerability of students’ past or to serve as counsellors, we are able to promote an educational milieu that encourages and facilitates students to become aware of their vulnerability and to seek assistance in reducing and regulating their vulnerability, thereby assisting them grow as people and as social work professionals.

REFERENCES


