Developing Children's Resilience and Overcome Recent Challenges

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Abstract

This conceptual paper begins by clarifying what resilience is, and the importance of resilience for young children. Next, the resilience concept is explored from different views of scholars in the current literature along with ways to use intervention strategies, how to construct resilience in children's lives, defined both of risk factors and protective factors, and a definition of resilience research is discussed. Lastly, implications for practitioners and future challenges in the area of resilience are explored.

Keywords: Resilience, Child Development, Early Childhood, Resilience Research

Introduction

The world is changing rapidly. People face many difficulties such as natural disasters, varied epidemics, and issues related to poverty; children continue to be the most often affected. For example, due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, children were the most impacted, where the schools closed, and children studied at home, leading to the loss of socialization and learning from others beyond their homes (Yoshikawa et al.,2020). Furthermore, the playtime became less than before, where families are reducing the interactions with friends and others to avoid the prevalence COVID-19; all these things influence children's resilience and their behavior (Yoshikawa et al., 2020).

Research on children's resilience has increased during the last two decades. In the past, resilience research has focused on stresses, psychology, and mental health (Southwick et al., 2014). Childhood is the most important time stage in life. Also, it is a memorable period in a person's

life, impacting the future. For instance, there are over one billion children that are affected by wars, and the older children may show more impact, because they are more aware about the negative impact of war in the short or long term (Werner, 2012; Yoshikawa et al., 2020). Werner (2012) stated children who experience war commonly remember traumatic events as images, are less focused, experience insomnia, and increased nightmares. Additionally, early childhood policy makers and practitioners indicate an increased interest regarding resilience as an important area of research for the benefit of children. Early childhood professionals believe early intervention to help children develop resilience is a significant investment toward children's lives as they prepare for adult life. That is, an effort to identify and intervene risks in early childhood will limit the possibility to negatively undermine both a youth's future health and resilience. Hence, children's lives are very important in many countries around the world because they relate to the economic and social well-being of families (Caspi et al., 2016). In addition, the policy makers and practitioners also have an interest in child resilience to aid children to development in full and appropriate ways (Caspi et al., 2016). That led resilience researchers to focus on protective factors to understand it and find treatments to disease prevention (Kalisch et al., 2017). Additionally, resilience research focuses on how children maintain their health in early years until they become healthy adults.

Resilience is very important for children's wellness, and mental health. Resilience is instinctive reaction to stress that can be found during one's existence. As it affects teenagers, youth, seniors, and the elderly on an individual basis, it is now better understood than ever before. Human resilience, as we now know, is entrenched in functioning and healthy connections, it does not occur in a vacuum. Human resilience takes on multidimensional aspects and interpretations as ecological processes and other systems pose fear to human. Resilience promotes and improves children's wellness in the future, where they are able to manage stress, face difficult problems, anxiety, and depression in their life (Bonanno, 2004). Resilience reflects the ability of the child to maintain a continuous balance (Bonanno, 2004). Resilience helps children to reduce the negative impact of the traumatic events on the physical, emotional, and behavioral health that could be develop and appear in adulthood.

The purpose of this paper is to give teachers and practitioners an overview about the concept of resilience, and describe interventions strategies, how to construct children's resilience, strategies to build young children's resilience, risk factors and protective factors, and describe how teachers and practitioners in early childhood could support children to improve their resilience.

Defining Resilience

Resilience is a complex concept and evolves with time. Resilience is when the child is capable to deal with challenges and stresses. Resilience is the ability to overcome traumas by being able to balance between the negative emotion of the traumas and calm down. Resilience is a skill that children develop during the process of growth. The child can be flexible and bounce back from traumas when they develop this skill. The child has strength to withstand the traumas because children are curious, brave, and they follow their instincts. However, resilience is a relative and varied concept because it is defined differently based on differences among people. Resilience is a combination of both risk factors and protective factors that influence individual people's lives,

resilience influences people differently. Therefore, different definitions of resilience exist. Each definition focuses on an important element in the resilience construct.

Southwick et al. (2014) stated resilience may indicate many different meanings that depend on various perspectives, peoples, cultures, and societies. Most definitions agree on several facets, such as health, adaptation, or positive attitude across a difficult time (Southwick et al., 2014). Research defines resilience as a stable line of health behaviour after some difficult events occur; resilient people demonstrate the ability to learn from past negative experiences, indicate a flexible capacity to adopt successful strategies, and show innovation to use varied resources to balance their life and well-being (Southwick et al., 2014).

Leipold and Greve (2009) revealed that resilience means overcoming of the challenges if that does not happen it would not be considered resilience. However, these definitions lead to the idea that resilience is not characterized by the lack of sickness or psychopathology issues, but it relates to how the person overcome the traumas (Southwick et al., 2014). Southwick et al. (2014) believe developing resilience requires a variety of resources in order to enhance the capacity within each person for resilience. Such potential resources may include families, schools, cultures, and communities. Therefore, resilience might be enhanced in several stages such as individual, family, community, and culture (Southwick et al., 2014)

Luthar et al. (2000) define resilience as a dynamic system of adaptation to meet difficulties in context. Luthar et al. (2000) indicate resilience research is vital because it provides understanding toward developing intervention strategies that lead to enhance resilience. Luther et al. (2000) discuss important factors in describing a child's evolving capacity for resilience. Critically, a child uses experience to adapt and enhance new events in life. For example, children can learn multiple skills that help them to adapt with the hardship and challenges around them (Yoshikawa et al., 2020). There are many intervention strategies for young children. Early childhood practitioners could build a program that includes many elements of intervention strategies, such as free play, relaxing, learning new skills, spending more time with their parents, teaching children multiple social skills, including negotiation and interaction skills while they play, self-control, problem-solving, and emotional awareness (Alvord & Grados, 2005; Smokowski, 1998).

Resilience Construct

Southwick et al. (2014) describe how many aspects including mental aptitude, cultural background, genetic coding, demographic factors, and social influence determine resilience. These determinants aid researchers in their further understanding of the resilience construct but remain as a small part of the resilience research (Southwick et al., 2014). Moreover, determinants of resilience can be different based on the challenges and the environments confronted by each person (Southwick et al., 2014). For example, consider the determinants differently influencing a child's capacity for resilience as contrasted between a child who is homeless with a child who had a positive environment and lost their parents. The capacity of a homeless child is less than a child who had lived in a positive environment. The homeless child is missing safety, self-reinforcement, relationship with adult, and less adaption, while the other child has a higher

capacity for resilience because they developed many social skills by interactions with other adults, their parents, siblings, and peers (Cutuli & Herbers, 2014). Additionally, the evidence associated by resilience shows that using varied abilities and incorporating different strategies to mediate challenges indicate developing resilience (Southwick et al., 2014). For example, when the person is able to be flexible and uses problem solving strategies to face challenges incorporates two abilities to face challenges and overcome it.

Studies state the capacity for resilience is filtered through different factors; an emerging capacity to evidence resilient behaviour builds across time through experiencing life events and interacting with family and diverse others. Ungar et al. (2013) describe how Bronfenbrenner's biosocial ecological systems of human development may aid researchers to understand the development of resilience. Bronfenbrenner's biosocial ecological system is a set of complex interactions that occur between the individual, the environment, and a particular society (Ungar et al., 2013).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model helps researchers to predict children's social and physical ecologies and understand their unique challenges (Ungar et al., 2013). Practitioners and teachers realize how this system can help to construct the children's capacity for resilience, especially the individual resilience. The intricate multipart biosocial ecological systems support the development of resilience. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model includes many systems. For instance, microsystems represent relations and roles and meso-systems include interactions, such as families, schools, and religious communities. Exo-systems include social interactions that influence child development indirectly such as through the environment (the place of parents' job). Macro-system includes social and cultural values and Chrono-system cover the change over time (Ungar et al., 2013). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is helping us to understand the processes that contribute to build children's resilience (Ungar et al., 2013).

Strategies for Building Resilience in Young Children

Social Interaction. Werner (1995) describes how resilience can be built through children's interaction with their teachers and friends. Teachers play an important role in supporting children to develop resilience. For example, teachers can be great models for children, where they teach children to control their emotions, discuss ways to manage their emotions, give children opportunity to choose, share and discuss their good and bad experiences with peers, express their feelings, and opinions (Nolan et al., 2014).

Problem Solving. Werner (1995) highlights how the ability to be resilient can be fostered through problem-solving as having children interpret and apply their past experiences and talents. For example, in 1966, there were six boys who went on a fishing trip, then suddenly met a huge storm which shipwrecked their ship and pulled them to a deserted island located in the Pacific Ocean (Bregman, 2020). These six boys were using their past experiences to survive. They worked in two groups, and they drew up a list for garden, kitchen, and guard duty (Bregman, 2020). They also started their day with prayer, singing, and one of these boys called "Kolo" created a guitar, and he played it to help his friends raise their spirits (Bregman, 2020, p. 5). They were eating fish, coconuts, and some birds in the beginning, then they were drinking the

blood and eating the meat, all these skills where learned it from their old experiences had helped them to survive (Bregman, 2020).

Sharing. Werner (1995) declares that using individual talents and sharing with friends their interests and hobbies lead children to raise their capacity for resilience. For instance, the example of the lost children on the deserted island highlights sharing talents and interests, such as singing and praying together. Both are simple interactions; however, the children felt more connected with one another and consequently, raised their well-being (Bregman, 2020).

Positive Care/Interaction. Additionally, Werner (1995) believes positive care and the proactive interaction between children and adults evidence a significant aspect to assist children toward building resilience. Therefore, children who live in positive environments with supportive and caring interactions build capacities for resilience as contrasted with children who confront challenges without support, resulting in a diminished ability to demonstrate resilience.

Spiritual Life. Supporting the spiritual aspect of life is important for children and adults. Bregman (2020) describes children spending time singing and praying. Werner (1995) believes that in addition to children interacting with people, spirituality/religion enrich their balance between hope and reality.

It is crucial for children to face varied challenges; this requires suitable and adequate coping reactions (Leipold & Greve, 2009). Leipold and Greve (2009) discuss how the development of resilience varies and depends on how children manage stress and overcome challenges. The successful mediation of difficulties and the management of stress depend on a child's abilities to adapt and successfully navigate new problems in life.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

Southwick et al. (2014) describe children possessing different abilities and protective factors at each developmental level. Southwick et al. (2014) indicate children start their first interaction with family, school, friends, or other people, generating from these complexities relationships with others in the whole ecological system. That means we could not study resilience of an individual, without the study of the family, community, and culture which belong to it. Therefore, Southwick et al. (2014) confirm the resilience must be studied through the collaborative efforts of many experts who study resilience from different domains such as, "engineering, ecological, biological, individual, family, organizational and cultural resilience" (Southwick et al., 2014, p. 11).

Southwick et al. (2014) believe children recognize problems and difficulties. As they grow older, children become more aware and understanding of different events (Southwick et al., 2014). In a diminished social environment, Werner (1993) cautions *risk factors* arise. Werner (1993) identifies one or more risk factors including stress, parental alcoholism, poverty, chronic disagreement, parents with mental health issues, and mental illness. Therefore, these children experiencing a range of risk factors remain more likely to face problems in their life especially if they grow up in negative environments. In contrast, the *protective factors* include positive relationships with parents or caregivers, positive interactions with other people, positive self-

control behaviours, ability to assume responsibility, resourcefulness to solve-problems, capacity to share interests with friends or family members, willingness to participate in activities with friends, and ability to adopt healthy habits (Werner, 1993). These protective factors assist children to develop their resilience, and they become supplementary to support children's ability to overcome future challenges. This means, children are more apt to recover after experiencing hardships (Werner, 1993).

Resilience Research

In the recent years, the resilience inquiry was focused on three important aspects: what are resilience qualities, how does resilience process, and when does innate resilience appear (Richardson, 2002). Resilience research went through several stages (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). The first focus of resilience research was on the individual. After that, the psychologists recognized that there are many outside factors that might affect a child's resilience (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Next, the psychologists were starting to study whole communities, such as family, culture, and social economy (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). The psychologists and researchers were paying attention to understand how risk factors and protective factors interact together to support relative resilience in children (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Researchers realize that resilience is considered as different because each case has an especial setting, age, and domain (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). The work on determinates of resilience in empirical studies enriched children's resilience; also, it supported children to enhance their resilience in many aspects (Southwick et al., 2014).

Improve Children's Resilience Inside and Outside the School

Teachers and early childhood practitioners can support children's capacity toward resilience during learning whether inside or outside the school. However, parents play an important role in supporting children's capacity of resilience.

Build a Strong Relationship with Children. Children need to be interactive with others. Teachers must spend enough time with each child. Also, they must show care about children by supporting them while they pass through difficult times and ask them if they need help. Children need to feel they are surrounded by a strong connection from the adult. Positive relationships with adults helps children to learn and develop their resilience skills (Ungar et al., 2013). Southwick et al. (2014) mentioned parents have an important role to foster children's resilience in the early years.

Learn From Experience. Teachers can encourage children to think about their negative and positive experiences as important moments that teach them, even if those experiences happened inside or outside the classroom (Bonanno, 2004).

Discuss the Bright Side in Each Experience. Teachers can discuss what is the positive side in each experience, whether it negative or positive (Bonanno, 2004).

Self-enhancement. Teachers can support children to improve their resilience by self-enhancement by giving them an opportunity to express their feelings, reduce negative emotions, and calm down in stressful moments by mindfulness practice (Bonanno, 2004).

Label Emotions, and Laughter: Teacher and parents can tell the child that people can pass through different experiences and feel different emotions, such as sadness, anxiety, stress, jealousy, and frustration. Teachers and parents can also tell the child that it is normal to feel one of them as reactions to the events, but you have to learn how to calm down and control it (Bonanno, 2004). Bonanno (2004) mentioned that a person who laughs and smiles while they are talking, show more resilience toward traumas in the next few years after a tragedy.

Conclusion

In sum, resilience is a relative concept. This means, the capacity for developing resilience varies among children. Influenced by culture, economy level, and community, it is important for both researchers and practitioners to consider the child in a holistic perspective. Resilience research shows various views (Luthar et al., 2000). The resilience research presents a different interpretation based on the different perspectives. There is no global validity to follow through in interpreting the resilience research (Luthar et al., 2000) However, what is known is that in order to develop a capacity for resilience, it is critical that adults provide children with trusting and caring interactions and help those children have numerous risk-free opportunities to rehearse adaptations, use different resources, and practice problem-solving (Southwick et al., 2014).

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