

BRIC - Conceptualizing and measuring resilience

Nick Barnes
Barnet Enfield and Haringey
Mental Health Trust, St
Anns Hospital
Anthony
Montgomery
University of Macedonia

In terms of the mental health needs of children and young people, it has become increasingly clear that services, in their current configuration, are unlikely to ever be able to fully address need and demand (Guardian, 2015). The scale of demand has meant a shift towards more preventative approaches (Mental Health Task Force, 2016), with greater emphasis on seeking ways to “turn off the tap”, rather than continuing “mopping the floor”. Underpinning much of this preventative work has been a wider interest in resilience, for both the individual and the wider community, seeking to help children and young people to find the necessary resources to manage difficulties, without becoming overwhelmed and subsequently developing a need for specialist support.

What do we mean by resilience?

Multiple definitions of resilience exist. The original work on resilience aimed to understand what enabled some individuals to overcome difficult life circumstances and risk factors, viewing resilience as being successful adaptation, while hazards/difficulties relating to the individual or their environment increase the likelihood of a problem occurring (Rutter, 1987). Rutter, an early pioneer of the field, sought to locate the emotional and behavioral protective factors that could be useful for the whole population (Rutter, 1987).

Masten has defined resilience as “positive

adaptation to adversity despite serious threats to adaptation or development” developing the phrase of “Ordinary Magic” (Masten, 2001) to assist our understanding of resilience, promoting the building of resilience as something “everyday” - such as a teacher checking in with a vulnerable student about their football match the night before.

Recently there has been a shift away from thinking about negative outcomes and damage caused by risk factors - with a greater interest in building on assets and strengths for both the individual and their surrounding communities - be they families, schools, youth clubs or the wider community environment.

The salutogenic model (Anthonovsky, 1987) possibly best exemplifies a model based on exploring strengths - encouraging the focus to be on the “sense of coherence” to determine whether the individual is impacted upon by the impact of hardship. But current research directions tend towards an emphasis on the socio-ecological context in which people experience risk factors and the identification of resources used for coping. This has been characterized by the Bronfenbrenner ecological model (Bronnfenbrenner, 1998) or Roisman (2002) who explored resilience as “an emergent property of a hierarchically organised set of protective systems that culminatively buffer the effects of adversity and therefore can rarely, if ever, be regarded as an intrinsic property of individuals”. Hart et al, have perhaps refined this definition further, seeing resilience as “Beating the odds whilst also changing the odds” (Boing Boing, 2013)

Ungar (2011) has built upon this work allowing an understanding to be focused not just on the individual but to also think about those individuals

around the young person who might be needed to provide support, and thinking about the young person's place within their family and wider communities. Hence resilience is defined as:

I. The capacity of individuals to navigate their ways to resources that sustain well-being;

II. The capacity of individuals' physical and social ecologies to provide those resources

III. The capacity of individuals, their families and their communities to negotiate culturally meaningful ways to share resources (Ungar, 2011).

Connected resilience and relational mental health

The BRIC partnership have been looking to develop an understanding of resilience that acknowledges the social ecological perspective, whilst also supporting a framework that focuses more on strengths and assets, rather than deficits and difficulties. We are keen to move away from any paradigm that might seek to suggest resilience is something that you either have or you don't have, at an individualistic level.

Our aspiration has to be to focus on a more relational paradigm, building on the understanding of positive youth development within its relational context, enabling the needed support and scaffolding to be understood through relationships with oneself, with others and within our communities.

To develop this more relational approach we need to also consider a relational theory underlying the development of "self" (Ryle, 2002) – a theory which informs our emotional wellbeing and mental health. Understanding this relational model of development, and drawing on tools informed by Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1971), we are then able to explore a relational approach to building resilience.

Connected Resilience is a model that focuses on

building and sustaining connections/relationships – with parents, siblings, peers, schools, communities. Connections that enable a sense of belonging from which one can grow, explore and learn.

The resilience framework, developed by Hart et al, (Hart, 2012) outlines multiple approaches and interventions that can be considered for both the individual, and also across wider systems – to build resilience. The framework allows one to focus not only on the individual, but also on what the systems around the young person can do.

Many variations of the "Whole School Approach" to building resilience or addressing mental health exist (Cairns, 2006) often informed by attachment theory: working with a student within their Zone of Proximal Development (Berk, 1995) by starting where a young person is developmentally, and building on their potential and capacity to learn – educationally and developmentally.

Peer mentoring programmes often demonstrate this relational approach as there has been considerable evidence (Wheeler, 2010) that structured mentoring approaches using Positive Youth Development models result in increased levels of emotional resilience in both the mentor and mentee. Such models are structured around the development of the interpersonal relationship, as well as socio-emotional development and cognitive development. Many existing peer mentoring programmes (MBF, 2012) for young people focus on outcomes such as increased educational attainment or employment opportunities. But more recent developments (Brown, 2015) have been keen to utilize the relational focus of the work and look to build emotional resilience.

For cohorts where there are recognized vulnerabilities – such as being in the care of the local authority, or growing up in a family with parental mental health difficulties – then focused interventions allied with peer support are proven to have significant impact (Cooklin, 2013). Interventions such as the Kids Time Workshops

Resilience Framework (Children & Young People) Oct 2012 – adapted from Hart & Blincow with Thomas 2007					
	BASICS	BELONGING	LEARNING	COPING	CORE SELF
SPECIFIC APPROACHES	Good enough housing	Find somewhere for the child/YP to belong Help child/YP understand their place in the world	Make school/college life work as well as possible	Understanding boundaries and keeping within them	Instil a sense of hope
	Enough money to live	Tap into good influences	Engage mentors for children/YP	Being brave	Support the child/YP to understand other people's feelings
	Being safe	Keep relationships going		Solving problems	
	Access & transport	The more healthy relationships the better	Map out career or life plan	Putting on rose-tinted glasses	Help the child/YP to know her/himself
		Take what you can from relationships where there is some hope		Fostering their interests	
	Healthy diet	Get together people the child/YP can count on	Help the child/YP to organise her/himself	Calming down & self-soothing	Help the child/YP take responsibility for her/himself
		Responsibilities & obligations			
	Exercise and fresh air	Focus on good times and places	Highlight achievements	Remember tomorrow is another day	Foster their talents
	Enough sleep	Make sense of where child/YP has come from		Lean on others when necessary	
	Play & leisure	Predict a good experience of someone or something new Make friends and mix with other children/YPs	Develop life skills	Have a laugh	There are tried and tested treatments for specific problems, use them
Being free from prejudice & discrimination					
NOBLE TRUTHS					
	ACCEPTING	CONSERVING	COMMITMENT	ENLISTING	

Figure 1. The Resilience Framework (Reprinted with the permission of Angie Hart)

allow for the children and young people to understand their parent's difficulties and distress, but also believe that there is a trusted adult available to support them if they feel overwhelmed.

Lastly building resilience within the community seeks to have a positive impact on all – individuals, parents, families, schools, businesses, housing estates etc. Much of this work has been focused on the concept of Social capital (Sanders, 2016) “the collective value of all social networks (who people know), and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (norms of reciprocity)” - and how this enables the people to feel a sense of connectedness within their community. By developing a relationally informed approach to resilience, we are interested in

exploring this perspective of “connectedness” – as there is clear evidence that community resilience can be built up and developed if those within the community feel more connected and engaged in community life (McKenzie, 2015).

How to measure – what to measure?

Attempting to operationalize the concept of Connected Resilience is challenging. However, there are multiple ways of showing that a young person feels connected with their peer group, their school, their family and their community. What can be more problematic is measuring change, being

difficult to determine causation and impact of interventions.

At an individual level there are many tools available to directly measure resilience, with the CYRM (Liebenberg, 2012) SRS (California Department for Education, 2004) and the RSCA (Prince-Embury, 2005) being some of the most frequently used measures. Not all of these tools are validated for showing change, but all offer a baseline perspective for resilience and connectedness.

One can also explore an indirect measure of resilience – through components that make up resilience. Tools such as Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires (Goodman, 1997) Wellbeing scales (Tennant 2007) or self-efficacy (Rosenberg, 1965) tools can all be correlated with a young person's Connected Resilience.

Building on the idea of connectedness, a focus on family and parent-child relationships can be helpful. The Family Functioning scale (Moos, 1994) explores relationships within a family whilst the Schools Organisation and Climate Scale (Hart, 2000) takes this model and applies this to a school setting, and the Social Support Index (McCubbin, Paterson, & Glynn, 1987) seeks to combine family and peer networks. Broadening this ecological perspective even further, the Health Promoting School Scale (Deschesnes, 2003) helps focus on a specific community and relationships within, with a focus on a sense of satisfaction, whilst the Social Capital Scale (Onyx, 2000) builds on the wider framework mentioned previously, allowing for a broader, more holistic sense community resilience.

Lastly, tools such as the WARM measure (Mguni & Bacon, 2010) are designed as a way of "Taking the Temperature of Local Communities" offers a good example of how to measure a community's overall connectedness and resilience.

Summary

Resilience needs to move from an individual to a

socially connected model, that addresses the development of the self within a socially saturated world. Congruently, the word 'resilience' is evocative of a reaction rather an active/preventive strategy that identifies potential threats to well-being. A greater focus on salutogenic concepts will help to address this pathogenic bias.

There are a considerable number of measurement tools available. In this paper, we have developed the idea of connected resilience, and the challenge is to link this new concept to evidence suggesting that the effective mastery of social and emotional skills supports the achievement of positive life outcomes, including good health and social wellbeing, educational attainment and employment, and the avoidance of behavioural and social difficulties.

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Nick Barnes

Haringey Adolescent Outreach Team, Barnet Enfield and Haringey Mental Health Trust, St Anns Hospital, Tottenham, London, UK

Nick.Barnes@beh-mht.nhs.uk



Anthony Montgomery

Department of Educational & Social Policy, School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts, University of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, Greece

antmont@uom.gr