



Resilience: A literature review

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Abstract

Adversity in one's life is inevitable and can come in a person's life in various ways such as a life threatening illness, a traumatic event or a natural calamity. The process through which one adapts to these life changing situations and stressful conditions is termed as resilience. Resilience facilitators have been classified as individual and societal protective factors whereas barriers to resilience have been classified as biological, social, psychological and spiritual barriers. Recent research emphasizes resilience to be a process that can be learned and developed rather than a trait.

Key words- resilience, adversity, facilitators, barriers.

Introduction

Every individual born on this earth goes through adverse events. Adversity can come in various forms such as death of a loved one, loss of a job, acute illness, or any traumatic events, which are all very challenging life experiences. Many people react to such circumstances with a flood of strong emotions and a sense of uncertainty. Yet people generally adapt well over time to life-changing situations and stressful conditions, for which positive adaptation is required. One such positive adaptation is resilience. Resilience is an ongoing process that requires time and effort, and engages people to take a number of steps to cope with the adverse situation.^{1,2}

Resilience is an individual's ability to bounce back from a negative experience. Resilient people are like *emotional rubber bands as they are* stretched to the limit by life, without breaking, they eventually bounce back into something that resembled their previous shape or even more resourceful. The American Psychological Association defines resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress.¹



In reality, resilience is found in every individual and it involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed. Resilience is considered a process, rather than a trait in an individual. There is a common misconception that people who are resilient experience no negative emotions or thoughts and display optimism in all situations. Contrary to this misconception, in reality resiliency is demonstrated within individuals who can effectively and relatively easily navigate their way around crisis and utilize effective methods of coping. In other words, people who demonstrate resilience are people with positive emotions and attitudes; they are keen to effectively balance negative emotions with positive ones.^{3,4.}

Early research on resilience mainly focused on children and adolescents.^{5,6,7} As research on resilience broadened, factors that predicted or promoted resilience have been examined in other contexts as well, that are discussed in this article.⁸

Resilience facilitators

Resilience facilitators are those factors which enables an individual to cope successfully with the adversity and have been categorized as individual and societal protective factors by many researchers.

Individual protective factors

The individual protective factors identified among children are an easy temperament, good self-monitoring skills, self-control, good communication skills, an internal locus of control, high self-esteem and self-efficacy. These abilities enable them to manage strong emotions and have a sense of commitment and control in facing future challenges. Deliberate planning by the child leads their adult life to be different, with high self-esteem, confidence, a sense of direction, good problem solving skills, aspirations for the future, and make the young person feel that they are in control of their lives.^{7,9}

Some of the protective factors identified in studies among adult cancer survivors which they believed to be their assets during cancer experience are self advocacy, taking a proactive stance, optimistic attitude, self-determination, perseverance, independence and courageous coping. Survivors had expressed that the key resilience factors in their journey with cancer as acceptance of the situation by setting goals, focusing on potential solutions,



taking responsibility for their own life, escaping from the role as a victim of circumstance, building a support network and planning a flexible strategy for dealing with future challenges. All these factors encourage individual to deal with adversity in a positive and constructive way.^{10.11.12}.

Evidence also shows that they used Complementary and Alternative Medicine as a means to enhance their sense of control over their cancer experience, and enabled them to become spiritually reconnected, and to holistically improve their health and well-being. Specific mind-body techniques used by the survivors are progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, meditation, yoga, music and massage. There is strong evidence that regular counseling sessions helped women with cancer to feel more relaxed. Spirituality is highlighted as a fundamental component of the healing process. After an extensive review of more than 200 articles, Fosarelli concluded that there is a general positive association of better health or faster healing with greater religiosity.^{10.13.14}

Societal protective factors

Societal protective factors identified in children are the presence of a stable adult figure, close positive bond with at least one adult in a caring role and affection from members of their extended families. Parenting style, spending significant time together as a family, positive role models, socialization and external support networks such as church, school, or work, play significant roles.^{5.6.7}

Studies demonstrated that societal protective factors identified in adults with life threatening illness like cancer are perceived social support associated with positive adjustment to illness. Social support mentioned in studies included support from one's spouse, family members, friends, colleagues and even medical professionals. The benefits of Cancer Support Groups have been stressed upon in most of the studies done on cancer survivors. By sharing information, ideas and emotions, group participants could assist one another find comfort in knowing that they are not alone in experiencing difficulty. It is also reported that doctors, nurses and surgeons are very supportive during the notification process and cancer treatment, which empowers survivors and increase their sense of self-efficacy.^{15.16.17}



Barriers to resilience

Barriers to resilience or potential barriers are those factors that prevented or delayed a persons' recovery through the adversity. It has been classified under biological, social, psychological, and spiritual factors.

Biological barriers

Studies identified biological barriers at different phases of the illness. The early phase barriers are late diagnosis, insensitive or impersonal notification by medical professionals, lack of clear communication, not taking a holistic approach to cancer diagnosis and treatment and not acknowledging the impact of cancer on sexual response. During treatment phase the barriers identified are non adherence, lack of access to resources and missing information regarding treatment. Some of the transition phase barriers mentioned in literature are dealing with changes to identity and body image, returning to work, and uncertainty about health and effects of treatment. Follow up phase barriers include ambivalence about discontinuing treatment, fear of future, follow up appointments, and long term effects of treatment.^{10,14,16}

Social barriers

Social barriers are feeling like a burden to family and friends, not having access to social network, medical community not addressing the biological, psychological and spiritual needs of the survivors, lack of affordable healthcare and social stigma. Living with perceived worries about family, children, transmission, spouses' acceptance and other's pity towards them are repeatedly stated in many studies. Financial implications such as loss of income and assets during treatment and worry about the future also become a barrier.^{17,18}

Psychological barriers

Psychological barriers are fear, anxiety, depression, feeling lack of self efficacy to cope and manage cancer, feeling less attractive and sexually undesirable. Across ethnicity, survivors expressed similar fears regarding recurrence, death, pain, and suffering, which are often identified as a larger fear than dying. The role of rumination and the way young people remember illness-related events significantly alters how they picture their future.^{10,11,18}



Spiritual barriers

Spiritual barriers identified in literature is feeling of anger of being abandoned or punished by God. Having such feelings can create feelings of hopelessness and delay or obstruct the journey through the adversity.^{12,13}

Conclusion

Resilience is multifaceted and it refers to the positive adaptation of individuals, despite exposure to adversity. It is a dynamic process in which individual, psychological, societal and spiritual factors assist an individual to develop or regain their mental health or acts as a barrier. By understanding the facilitators and barriers to resilience, health care personnel can identify the needs of patients, and improve quality care in a more meaningful way.

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