

Resilience in children



Abstract

There is a great deal of research into resilience in children, whether they are housed or homeless. However, there is less research about resilience in adults, whether they are housed or homeless. Children's well-being, which includes their resilience, is directly correlated with that of the adults in their families. Given this reality I decided to investigate if resilience reduces negative effects of homelessness in adults and in their transition after becoming housed. The information I find can be useful for those working with adults who are homeless and those making the transition from being homeless to being housed.

Literature review

According to the Stuart B. McKinney Act, a person is considered homeless if he or she “ lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence and has a primary night time residence that is: 1) supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations; 2) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized, including mental health facilities or hospitals; 3) a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, which includes cars and parks. This definition does not include those imprisoned or otherwise detained pursuant to an act of Congress or a state law (NCH, Fact Sheet #3).

Difficult childhoods (including sexual and/or physical abuse, addiction, mental illness, and so on) may play a role in adult homelessness. More women report living with an abusive parent than men (Smith, et al, p. 5). Battered women who live in poverty are often forced to choose between

abusive relationships and homelessness (NCH, Fact Sheet #3).

Approximately half of all women and children experiencing homelessness are fleeing domestic violence (NCH, Fact Sheet #3). Immigrants also cite language barriers (Smith et al, page 13).

Many kinds of people become homeless, leading to a diverse homeless population (Tompsett, p 86). It is important to include the services that are most important for that particular group, especially in this time of limited funds for services (Tompsett, pp 87).

Even though homelessness affects people in different ways, it can have a corrosive effect on people's self-esteem and well-being; fifty-three percent of respondents say that being homeless destroyed their self-esteem and self-confidence. Unlike gender, age, ethnicity and nationality made no difference in how people answered the questions (Smith et al, page 9). Thirty-nine percent of men and nine percent of women said that being homeless led to depression, mental health problems and anxiety (Smith, page 10). However, many women report being depressed and having a history of mental health problems prior to homelessness (Smith et al, page 10). Homelessness can damage: people's capability through loss of skills; their inability to think about employment while worrying housing; their health becoming impaired while homeless; their resilience and self-confidence, particularly men's (Smith, et al, page 9). This emphasizes the need to activities that help people build self-esteem and the social interactions helping them release their capabilities (Smith et al, page 10). The literature I found does not explain how these activities help in this way.

Whether or not people develop depression or resilience depends mostly on their feelings of powerlessness or capability and the belief that one can plan and carry out plans to achieve their goals. In order to become resilient, they must feel they are able to do something about the situations and meet their challenges. Depression can develop when someone doubts their ability to find a successful solution (Grotberg, page 66). Feelings of powerlessness can be changed to those of capability by teaching the five basic building blocks of resilience: trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, and identity (Grotberg, page 67).

What is resilience? Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress; it means bouncing back from difficult experiences (APA, p. 2). Resilience is a person's ability to rely on their own core self-belief and stability, enabling him or her to successfully resist harmful life events that would damage someone else (Smith et al, p. 3). Reactions to stress are not isolated events; they are the consequences of what has occurred before. There is a dynamic interaction of patterns of coping responses, personality characteristics, social support (Tusaie and Dyer, p. 6)

Research shows that resilience is commonplace not extraordinary or exceptional. People commonly demonstrate resilience. Resilience involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone (APA, p. 2). Resilience is a dynamic process whereby individuals can show great coping skills in the face of significant adversity. It is not one-dimensional but a sort of chain reaction that leads to resilience later; that chain reaction begins when children are very young (Gorman, et al).

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Many professionals believe that resilience can be learned. Others debate whether or not resilient qualities are learned or part of one's genetic nature. These resilient characteristics have been referred to as protective factors — defined as “ the positive conditions, personal and social resources that promote resiliency, protect and buffer the individual, and reduce the potential for high-risk behaviors (MHW) footnote the definition — or developmental assets, defined as the “ positive relationships, opportunities, skills, and values that promote the positive development of all children and adolescents” [<http://www.soyreport.org/40developmentalAssets.php>] footnote the definition (Richardson, page 309). Experts disagree about how much of resilience is genetic. People seem to differ in their inborn ability to handle life's stresses. Resilience can be cultivated. To the degree it is learned, resilience seems to develop out of the challenge to maintain self-esteem. (Psychology Today, page 1).

Resilience is a complex process that is in some ways as unpredictable as the weather. A number of negative factors may weaken resilience. Those factors include violence, physical or sexual abuse, direct exposure to alcoholism and removal from the home. The toll increases as the negative factors increase. If resilience is strength under adversity, then multiple-risk exposures (four or more) limit emotional endurance (Gorman, et al, page A53).

Attitudes and characteristics of resilient people

Research often focuses on limitations, negatives and the problematic. As a result, strengths may be often overlooked. Research shows that women between the ages of 35 and 43 years who had overcome homelessness and found that they had personal, interpersonal and transpersonal strengths such

as pride, moral principles, determination, and commitment to personal relationships citation. These strengths served to protect them from adverse health outcomes associated with being homeless. Homeless adolescents found numerous pathways to health. In particular, participants exhibited self-confidence and considered themselves to be the primary resource for health promotion (Rew and Horner, p. 90). Research also shows that the motivation for engaging in health promotive behaviors stems more from positive factors or strengths, such as the desire for growth and human potential than from negative factors (Rew and Horner, p. 91).

Resilient people harness inner strengths and rebound more quickly from a setback or challenge. Those who are less resilient may dwell on problems, feel victimized, become overwhelmed and turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse (Mayo Clinic, p. 1). Those who lived with relationship trauma can develop resilient qualities associated with resilience. They may develop strategies for managing chaos that can become assets if they can work through their downside. Those who have thrived despite the odds can be inventive when dealing with problems. Their ability to think outside the box – think differently, unconventionally or from a new perspective, be creative and smart-thinking footnote the definition — when solving complex family situations shows creativity and originality, which are assets in all areas of life. Humor is another asset of those coming from problematic backgrounds. Humor is used for very specific reasons, including managing the unmanageable, lightening the family's emotional load by easing tension, and finding alternative ways to bond and feel good (Dayton, pages 99-100). Steve

At the heart of resilience is a belief in oneself and a belief in something larger than oneself. Resilient people don't let adversity define them, move towards a goal beyond themselves and transcend pain and grief by perceiving bad times as a temporary state of affairs (Psychology Today, p. 1). Resilient people see their problems as a temporary state of affairs rather than a permanent state; tend not to globalize; have the capacity to see beyond themselves into a different kind of life; believe that life will work out (optimistic) (Dayton, page 101). Resilience helps us understand that adversity can help develop strength (Dayton, page 103).

There are many ways to build resilience, including: 1) reach out to make connections, create a support system, find someone who believes in you wholeheartedly, find people who can help you (Psychology Today, page; APA, page 4; Mayo Clinic); 2) keep things in perspective (APA, page 4; Mayo Clinic); avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems; 3) accept that change is a part of living; move toward your goals; take decisive actions; look for opportunities for self-discovery; nurture a positive view of yourself; maintain a hopeful outlook (APA, page 4; Mayo Clinic); take care of yourself (APA, page 4). 4) Reframe and reinterpret past events to find the strengths one had all along (Psychology Today; Dayton, page 107). 5) Be self-aware; gain skills and tools for staying safe; help others; teach parenting skills, when possible (Gorman, et al). 6) Learn from your experiences (Mayo Clinic, p. ; Collingwood, p. 2). 7) Don't retreat from life; ask penetrating questions and answer them honestly. 8) Take a while to think through the problem to find the best solution and then tell yourself to take the first step (Dayton, p. 108; Collingwood, p. 2). 9) Develop inner resources and strengthen inner self;

work through unresolved issues from the past; maintain good boundaries; stay away from “ victim thinking” (Dayton, pp. 108-109).

Activities help people build their self-esteem and the social interactions that help them release their capabilities. These activities include creative writing, art and crafts, music, and walking. Doing so enabled them to relax and feel more positive about life, as well as developing transferable skills. These activities also reached those who were most vulnerable and marginalized, including those misusing substances and those most severely mentally ill (Smith et al, page 10). Steve

The most commonly reported sources of informal support include family, friends, as well as faith and community organizations (Smith et al, page 13). The amount of contact homeless people have varies depending on their circumstances.

Services are often identified as a key source of support and are used in a variety of ways. Services that participants consider the most important include affordable housing, day centers and shelters, learning and training opportunities, translation services, detox and substance abuse programs, and other health services (medical and mental health) (Smith et al, pages 13, 15, 18). People experiencing homelessness use services in different ways (Smith et al, page 21). Some need practical help for brief times while others likely need those services for much longer. The best services are those that are inclusive, open access and treat their service users with respect and empathy (Smith et al, page 21).

Employment and entry to the labor market are currently thought of as the main way out of poverty and welfare dependency. Developing job skills that improve their chances of employment is important but should happen at the expense of activities that build self-esteem and social interactions (Smith et al, page 21).

Developing resilience is a personal lifelong journey, one worth making.