

# Impacts on resilient capacity of child



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Resilience can be understood as the capacity of a child to deal effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to rebound from disappointments, mistakes, trauma, and adversity, to develop clear and realistic oneself and others with respect and dignity. (P. 297)

This paper focuses on the risks and adversities which affect the resilient capacities of the child as familial adversities and exosystemic and sociodemographic risks and the recommendations for the future generations.

Adversity, according to Merriam-webster online dictionary is defined as: “ A state, condition, or instance of serious or continued difficulty or adverse fortune” The adversities do provide certain amount of risk but “ The resilience process is operative only when the risk condition is present; otherwise, it has no effect on the child’s outcome” Rutter’s study (as cited in Luthar, 2003, P. 31). Most of the studies conducted in this regard focus on the risk factors rather than the risk mechanisms. It is also hard to determine the resilience in children because they have not yet developed the capacity to live independently. Moreover, young children do not have that much variety of socialization as do the adults. The most time they spent is at home “ Young children have not yet developed many skills and functions that underlie potential resilience processes.” (Luthar, 2003, P. 31). Because of most of the time being spent at home, familial adversities play a vital role in the early childhood development. If in adverse conditions such as parents being vulnerable, the children face a great deal of adversity. There are many mechanisms which are involved in risk transmission such as hereditary factors, harsh dimensions of parenting, marital conflicts and stressful family life events. (Luthar, 2003). When the parents are mentally ill, the factor of

attachment gets affected. Studies show that the attachment is decreased in the parents who have depression. Hipwell, Goosens, Melhuish, & Kumar's study as cited in Luthar 2003 stated that maternal depression caused lower maternal sensitivity and insecure infant attachment. "The resolution of mothers' depressive symptoms will more often result in adaptive relationship functioning of children." (Luthar, 2003, p. 35). So, the children who continue to have positive emotional states are less likely to develop behavioral problems adding a positive point towards adaptive functioning. Parental language adjustment for the infants also plays a vital role in building up the child resilience. Therefore, if the mentally ill parents learn to use the patently language, the kids would tend to be more resilient. Resilient children show low emotional reactivity and are more active. To cope up with familial adversities, children use many mechanisms. According to Luthar 2003, there are many distinguishing qualities of resilient children. They are less externalizing but have a better reading skills than vulnerable children and many times they use it as their coping mechanisms. Resilient children are also noticed to possess higher IQ's which plays role is decreasing the effect of the factor of poverty. Maltreatment in the family is another risk factor for the growing children. (Windle, 2010) Resilience among maltreated children is neither common nor uncommon among maltreated children according to the research (McGloin & Widom, 2001). Maltreated children are not able to cope up well and they face adjustment problems (Kim, Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Manly, 2009). Maltreated children are also less popular with their friends and colleagues and do not really have a best friend. Early age maltreatment lowers the self-esteem and in turn lowers the self-control. It also leads to aggression further leading to the rejection from the peers. The resilient kids

in these cases tend to be less aggressive because they understand that they don't have parental bonding as the other childrens do. By being less aggressive and by internalizing emotions, they tend to make Close relationships with friends. (Egeland's study & Herrenkohl's study as cited in Luthar 2003; Kim, Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Manly, 2009). Many a times, kids are maltreated outside the family, in that case emotionally responsive parenting play a vital role in the development of a strong parent child relationship. " Emotionally responsive parenting practices helped establish a positively regulated parent-child relationship, which in turn facilitated children's emotional and behavioral self-regulation, and on that foundation children developed more differentiated competencies" Wyman's study (as cited in Luthar 2003, p. 306). If the kids are maltreated from their parents, the resilient child would either have an outsider else very close to him or they try to substitute the anxiety by making a close friend but close friendship cannot be a substitute for the parental relationship. Nonetheless, it can play vital role in increasing self-esteem in maltreated children in turn promoting resilience in them. " It is possible that a positive reciprocal friendship could lead to decreases in loneliness, increases in perceived acceptance, improved social skills, and changes in working models of attachment; these in turn could result in improved self-perceptions and more prosocial behavior over time" Price's study (as cited in Luthar 2003, p. 175). Many more problems persist in the families which are considered normal and kids are ignored when taking those decisions such as divorce and remarriage. They are also risk factors as they provide the child with challenges and changes to cope up with which they do not deserve. " There is considerable agreement in the research literature that children in divorced and remarried families are at

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increased risk for the development of psychological, behavioral, social, and academic problems in comparison to those in two-parent non divorced families." Amato & Keith's study(as cited in Luthar 2003, p. 183) " and that the risk is greatest for children who have experienced multiple marital transitions." Capaldi & Patterson's study; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair's study." (As cited in Luthar 2003, p. 183) These kinds also have lower self-esteem. The resilient children, in order to cope up with these marital discrepancies make good relationship with peers as well as school teachers. Parental death also restructures the family and thus the child had to face new challenges. Resilient children cope up with divorce and bereavement with their control beliefs. These control beliefs can be categorized as internal and external. " The relations between negative events and total mental health problems were weaker for children with more internal control beliefs than for children who had more external control beliefs" (Luthar, 2003). That means that the children who think that the mental health problems reside in the outside environment tend to get mental illness more often than the ones who think that they themselves can control these control. One more point which can be raised in this regard in the awareness of known versus unknown control. Known versus unknown control is called as secondary control in children as the children who can differentiate between what is an uncontrollable situation can also cope with them very well. Adversities also have a negative impact on people's sense of self-worth which results in the negative outcome on the children.

Exosystemic risks also affect the life of the growing child. Poverty is the biggest and one of the widely discussed and researched risk factors for

resilient children. (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005; Luthar, 2003) Poverty in the early childhood is a big adversity in itself and it brings with itself many more adversities. “ Early childhood poverty, by which we mean living in a family prior to the age of 5 whose income falls below a specified level necessary for minimum coverage of basic expenses (usually the federal poverty thresholds set by the U. S. Census Bureau), clearly meets these criteria” (Luthar, 2003, p. 268) poverty brings with itself many other hardships as in a poor home, your neighborhood effects, your friends and peers are also in accordance with the neighborhood you live in. Violence and victimization also persists in a poor urban environment and poses its effect on the growing kids. Crime rates, robbery and sexual misuse and assaults are also common among the urban population and adolescents mostly became the symptoms of the assault. If the adolescence is not a victim, still the media portrays the picture of the assaulted teens injecting fear in the other teen groups. Living in these kinds of environment also provokes aggression, anxiety and depression but these responses are protective responses so that the adolescents can get out of the fear (McGloin & Widom, 2001). Victims of violence are also not able to cope up with the schoolings. Community centers on the other hand, plays as a protective factor. The adolescents who are involved in after school church activities and sports or are a member of a club tends to get less involved in non-acceptable behavior as stealing etc. according to Quinn’s study (as cited in Luthar, 2003)

Rates of participation in organized afterschool activities are lower for youth in low-income families compared to their more privileged counterparts. Such

activities are less available in poor communities because they are generally locally funded, including reliance on fees for service (p. 359)

Exposure to violence also poses high risk to the growing children. Children usually adopt two types of coping when in environmental adversities i. e. Active and avoidant coping. In active coping increases coping efficacy which in turn lowers the levels of mental health problems. Whereas avoidant coping leads on to lower efficacy which results in internalizing problems. One more finding in regards to resilient personalities is that the children who adjust in adversity had low responsiveness to the feelings of others. These children also have low emotional responsiveness.

Perceived racial discrimination is an unavoidable adversity for the kids. Racial discrimination lowers the self-esteem of the kids as well as induces depression so the kids who have to face it may find hard to adjust in such kinds of environment where they are racially discriminated. Minority youth as well as kids find it very difficult to adjust in the environment where they are racially considered low. Racial and ethnic discrimination "... can induce stress and loss of control and can evoke frustration, anxiety, and a feeling of injustice" (Bowser's study; Fernando's study; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton's study (as cited in Luthar 2003, p. 419). Many kids do not develop the sense of racial discrimination till they have enough cognitive skills. The study with the portorican kids indicate that most of the 8 years old were not able to comprehend what racial discrimination actually is and were not able to tell apart if the teacher is strict with all the kids or just the black kids turning the home work late and letting go the white ones without punishments. The cognitive abilities play an important role in realization that what is happening

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with them is not merely their own fault but the mere attitude of other people among their race and ethnicity. " Attributional ambiguity has been cited as one of the reasons that members of minority groups do not often judge personal mistreatment to be racial and ethnic discrimination" Crocker & Major's study (as cited in Luthar, 2003, p. 424). The protective factors for the children with high risk of racial discrimination is of not being familiar with the language of the prejudiced or being a good athlete or achieving high on educational grounds. There are two factors for the mediators of the effects of racism i. e. internalizing the negative feedback and constant anxiety of being discriminated.

Disasters are also an adversity and a major adversity in which one do not know what they would be going through. Children find it very difficult to cope up as disaster brings with it many other adversities to face. The unicef resilience report of 2011 clearly stated the floods Pakistan went through and the funding which is required to restore. Most of the above mentioned factors apply to the disastrous situation as the children might have lost one or both of their parents, economic crisis, maltreatment due to lack of resources etc.

Despite the knowledge of resilience and its adversities, this topic have been long neglected in the context of research due to the vast horizons it possess and in this way, we do not know on which grounds we stand as a country in making the children resilient. Pakistan, being a monsoon country, is high risk for floods and Pakistan had a major flood in 2010, still no researches are being done on the grounds of resilience to find out how the adversities are affecting the children. If they are resilient, what factors in Pakistani kids is



helping them to be resilient and what role do the adversities play on the micro level and on the macro level in building the personalities of the children.

As Werner stated in his study (as cited in Luthar 2003, p. 408), “ As long as the balance between stressful life events and protective factors is favorable, successful adaptation is possible. However, when stressful life events outweigh the protective factors, even the most resilient child can develop problems.” The only way we can protect the children is either to decrease the adversities or to increase the protective factors to balance out with the risk factors.