

An assignment on resilience in children

[Family](#), [Parenting](#)



Introduction

Resilience is a popular topic in our modern age and it is appreciated as a fantastic quality in people. People who display this quality have been looked upon with respect over the years. In many folk lore, stories, fairy tales and movies, the theme of resilience has been present, and the main hero has been the one who has faced adversity or difficult circumstances, stood his or her ground in the midst of these adversities and then bounced back.

Resilience Bounce Back from whatever Life Throws at you. This quality of not having broken down or crumbled under the pressure of adversity is something that is looked upon as significant by the world. Even in the world of sports, when a famous sportsperson has returned to his or her sport after a major defeat or an injury, the world has marveled at their ability to be able to bounce back in the face of adversity.

Resilience as a quality or a trait is also admired more in vulnerable children. Children are inherently vulnerable. The challenges of living in an environment of abuse, substance misuse and neglect produces an environment which can destabilize even adults. When children are able to manage well and face these adversities, it is commendable. Children in care have had to face more adversities than their peers who are not in care. They also meet more risks and are more vulnerable than their peers as they have been removed from their families and often have to go through multiple placement breakdowns, changes in schools, neighborhoods and social setting. The fact that resilience is being talked about is good as this can help support children who have gone through these difficult circumstances.

It is also been observed that some people are more resilient than others. Also, some people may appear to be resilient in certain things, but then appear to totally lack resilience in other things. I knew a person who was quite resilient when coping with a personal setback of when his wife left him for another man. He worked at finding support through his friends and church network. On the other hand, when his promotion at work was delayed, he found it extremely difficult to cope with the injustice of the situation. Every individual is unique in their own way and a good understanding of our strengths and weaknesses will help us be able to cope in difficult circumstances.

Psychologists have often wondered where resilience comes from. There have been some suggestions that resilience may even be linked to our genes, but a further study discounted this and it was found that significant events and influences in childhood, teen and young adult years have an influence on our personal resilience. From studies, researchers have been able to find out some recurrent themes that influence resilience in individuals.

- Difficult circumstances in childhood – the childhood of most resilient people was quite troubled. People are vaguely able to recall their childhood not being very easy. These people learnt to not give in to their circumstances but to adapt and try and face their situations.
- Being different – resilient people learnt early on in life that they were different than others, and hence they needed to adapt themselves in order to not stand out too overly.

- Troubled families – Families play an important role in shaping an individual and early experiences of family life hugely impact an individual. Coming from troubled or dysfunctional families may have meant that the child had to fend for themselves, stand up to challenges, and act as a carer to younger siblings or even parents. This does contribute towards building resilience in an individual.
- Good role models – Resilient people have had a strong influence of a role model in their early years. This could either be a parent (though mostly it isn't) or another adult. This role model will often model good qualities, values which the child will tend to mirror and these then contribute towards their resilience.

Working in the 'Looked after Children' team over the past two years, I have come across the word resilience a number of times. It is often used in the context of children being supported to build this attribute or in the context of children displaying this attribute. Looked after children or children in foster care have had to go through many difficult experiences that other children do not experience. A child in foster care may have experienced trauma, neglect, exposure to domestic violence, parental substance misuse, abuse in some form, etc. whilst in the care of their birth family. All of these experiences have an impact on a child and their coping mechanisms are shaped and built accordingly. Some children are able to display more resilience than others and appear to be able to cope better with their circumstances and bounce back to normalcy in a certain way. Resilience is not a personality trait and children become more or less resilient depending

on the opportunities that they are given (Promoting resilience in children, young people and families.

Definition

Defining resilience is not easy and people have tried to come up with different definitions. Resilience can be defined as the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges, strengthened and more resourceful. Individuals may display resilience in different measures and ways. One individual may seem to be able to bounce back from difficult situations with some effort, while another may not/ never be able to bounce back when faced with difficult challenges or circumstances. If we look around us, we can see countless examples of people, organizations and nations being affected by challenges and adversities and it is no surprise that all react differently to them. Neenan writes that even having gone through a lot of literature on resilience, it is intriguing of how certain people face adversities while others seem to be not able to bounce back from them.

Also resilience is not the same as coping with the daily demands that any normal day may bring to us (unexpected events, managing work, family friends etc.). Resilience is displayed in more serious circumstances- like having lost a limb in an accident, experiencing a natural disaster, being attacked by an intruder etc. A person known to me lost his job when the organization was restricting. He was a middle aged man with a family who were solely dependent on him for meeting their needs. The man had some savings and those were being used while he carried on his efforts to look for a suitable job. However, even after a year, the man was unable to find a

decent job. The pressure on him was mounting, his savings were fast declining, bills had to be paid, the family had needs etc. Even so, in spite of his sincere efforts, he was unfortunate in landing a job. By this time, the man did not have the same level of enthusiasm as before. Nevertheless, in spite of the building pressure, the man did not break down completely. He kept trying and refused to be pessimistic. He had specific qualities that contributed towards him being resilient in the midst of adversity. Ultimately, he managed to secure a fairly decent job and was able to once again have stability in his life through employment.

Further along on in this paper, I will explore some of the factors that could have contributed towards displaying resilience. On the other hand, another person that I knew appeared to crumble when faced with an adversity. This person had to deal with the loss of a child and that experience significantly impacted him. The person was not able to bounce back to normalcy and ended up being depressed and bitter with life. It is important to note, as Neenan appropriately points out is that an analogy of this kind misrepresents what resilience actually is. Bouncing back may appear to suggest that the person is able to come back into exactly the same state as they were before the adversity struck them. It may be more appropriate to define resilience as coming back from adversity, as bouncing back may not represent the effort it takes in coming back from having faced difficult situations. The person may not be the same even though they have come back, but with effort they have been able to return back to some level of normalcy in their lives. Resilience is also seen as the ability to face a risk or a challenge. This means that resilience is only exhibited when one is faced by a challenge or an

adversity. If the person is able to face, negotiate, bounce back having faced the adversity, then the person is said to be showing resilience. Certain qualities and experiences may help a person face a particular challenge, but they may not be of help when faced with another challenge faces you. This approach to resilience sees it as a person-environment interaction where the person is able to make adjustments in the face of adversity.

There may be different factors that play a crucial role in building resilience in a person, but there are two inherent connected things that play a significant role in resilience in an individual. Researchers asked different people on their understanding of resilience, and one of them said that ' resilience is a combination of two things, a strong conviction on what you are doing, and the belief that what you are doing will make things better, even if the deference is very minute. It was found that self-esteem and self-efficacy have a strong influence on resilience. It is suggested that in order to be able to show resilience one needs a reasonable level of self-esteem. This means that you have a good sense of self-worth in yourself so that you can have a good awareness of your own abilities. If one lacks this, then it will be difficult to bounce back from challenging circumstances. It has also been pointed out that there needs to be constantly high self-esteem rather than just occasional highs. Psychologists have also pointed out that high self-esteem can lead to one becoming narcissist and having a false sense of pride. The people with a good level of resilience were found to be having a high self-esteem but were grounded and humble. A high level of self-esteem often comes from a loving and supportive environment in which children are brought up. Environments like these reinforce a positive view of self in the

individual. However, in an environment where the family is dysfunctional and the parents do not reinforce a positive view of self in the child, this role could have been played by another individual other than the parent. Self-efficacy is also an important contributor to resilience in a person. People with a good level of self-efficacy are not daunted by challenges but rather are excited about them. They do not see challenges as stop signs, but see them as temporary to the situation. They have the ability to take a broad overview of the situation and determine the best way forward. This trait is useful when faced with difficult circumstances, one is not overwhelmed with the situation but is able to determine ways of getting out of the situation in the best possible way. Self-efficacy can also be a product of a positive childhood experience when this trait is nurtured by parents or a significant adult. However, people who have been forced to take on responsibilities from an early age, like in the case of dysfunctional families are able to also cultivate this trait to a greater degree.

Case Study

A is now a 14 year old girl. She has been in care for 5 years. A comes from a family where she and her two younger siblings experienced neglect. Her parents were into substance misuse and were not able to take care of the needs of A and her siblings. The family had been known to social services for a number of years and when the parents were not able to make the necessary changes to take care of the children's needs, A came into care. Her two younger siblings were given up for adoption. As the story goes, A had grown up with her mum and dad being ordinary people, but then when A was 3 years old, dad got into a drug habit that he passed on to A's mother.

The normal family soon became fairly chaotic when parents began their slow decline. A was soon of a school going age and parents were struggling to maintain jobs. They eventually took to shop lifting and getting involved in other crimes to fuel their drug habit. A started to miss school as parents were unable to get her up on time. A was often left in the care of their ‘ friends’ while the parents were out doing illegal stuff. After they had twins, A was often left in charge to manage her siblings. Social services became involved following referrals by school and neighbors when they reported untoward activity. The parents did not engage well with Social Services and always made excuses when help and suggestions were offered. When A was about 8 years old, her life was not carefree. She was not supported by trusted adults like girls of her age. She had to take care of her siblings often, feed herself at times, take care of her own hygiene and often do chores at her home. One would have thought that all of this and exposure to domestic violence and parents involvement with substance misuse would have affected her negatively and A would grow up with behavioral issues as a result of the early childhood trauma and the neglect that she faced. A is now with her foster carers with the plan for her to be in long term foster care with her current carers. If we look at A’s situation in her early years, it represents a similar story of other children who were in difficult situations when in the care of their birth family. However, the influence of the situation on A seemed to not be significant. A is like any normal girl her age and is a good achiever academically and has shown other developmental milestones. A was also not impacted in her behavior by her early life experiences. When one sees this, one cannot fail to wonder that how could this girl not be

influenced by her circumstances. Having worked with children from similar backgrounds, I have often observed that these experiences lay an almost permanent impact on their tender lives. What made the story of A any different?

While analyzing her story, I came across what seemed to be various positive/protective factors that could have helped A be resilient in her situation.

Some of these were as follows:

The influence of a positive individual in A' life. – A had a maternal grand-father who was quite involved in her life. While A' mum didn't get along with her father, he was involved in their family's life. Often A' grand-dad would come and visit them and spend time with the children. Almost every other weekend, grand-dad would come and take the children out for a little outing, this was even a simple thing like going to the park or going to the corner shop for a little snack. It was almost as if the children waited for grand-dad's next visit and were almost willing to go through their horrible life just to be able to have those few moments with grand-dad.

A had a good circle of friends at school and in her neighborhood. A was always very popular with her teachers and peers alike at school. She was a pleasant girl and was always very courteous and warm. The friends probably contributed in A being able to display resilience in her situation. 3. A also displayed a very positive attitude, to the effect that she seemed to be almost immune or thick skinned to the chaos going on in her life. Till this day A does not look back with any regret or ill feelings towards her childhood life and the

neglect and trauma that affected her. She is determined to do the best in her life and move on.

The above are just some of the protective factors that could have influenced A to be resilient in her situation. Certain strategies or interventions promote resilience in individuals. We shall discuss these in the light of the above case study.

Contact with a positive individual will help to overcome the negativity associated with exposure to domestic violence. In A's case, her maternal grand-father was this positive individual in her life. Grand-dad was visiting A almost weekly and was able to encourage her and take a stock of how things were going for the children.

Case Study 2

Child B is 12 years now, and grew up in a home where his father was an alcoholic. Child B's mother and father were in a relationship for about 3 years, then broke up and came together again. Once under the influence of alcohol, the parents always got into arguments and there was domestic abuse that the children had to witness. When sober, the father would present himself as loving and caring. Social Services got involved after referrals from neighbors and self-referrals. B's mother suffered from depression and was diagnosed with mental health issues. She was on medication for her mental health issues.

B had started to display behavioral issues by the time he was 7 and was in foster care. By age 9 B had moved to about 4 different placements as the

carers were not able to manage his behavior. B had to be moved to a special school by age 10 as he was not able to be safe with foster carers. He was displaying aggressive behavior and was not engaging with them. B was also showing aggression at his school towards his peers and staff. B was moved into a therapeutic school which catered specially for children who had needs similar to him.

B was clearly impacted by the chaotic environment that he grew up in. He had witnessed domestic abuse, was impacted by mental health issues of his mother, and there was substance misuse in the family, toxic-trio as it is referred to among professionals.

Child B has 2 half-siblings, aged 15 and 8. The child aged 15 was living with him when they were in the care of their birth family. The sibling aged 15 did not present any similar behavioral issues, and is in fact doing very well socially and in her education. The youngest sibling has sensory and attachment issues.

Analysis

Different individuals respond to issues differently. If we look at the first case study, there were some protective factors that were similar to those in the first case study. Child B had a maternal aunt who was involved in the family's life. The mother used to visit the aunt regularly with the children. The aunt was a strong influence in their life and was known to regularly encourage and support them. B did have a good relationship with his aunt. However in the case of B, it is evident that the supportive adult did not have

the same effect as in the case of child A. At the same time, A's older sibling did not seem to be effected by the family's circumstances as B was.

Resilience in teams and at the work place

In my previous work place, I was a manager and had a team of 8 people working with me. We were working for a development organization and our work involved supporting development projects for children in India. Our organization was one among many working in the same field. The work was demanding and stressful. We were working at a branch office, and for some reason people at the head office did not quite like the people working at the branch office. This resulted in the branch office staff often being neglected in terms of the support that we could access, and being left out of key news updates. This feeling of being left alone resulted in some of the staff losing motivation and feeling abandoned. I as the manager saw this as a threat to productivity and staff retention. We were also facing competition from another organization that was wanting to take over our work in the territory that we worked in. In India, development organizations are often assigned territories that they should work in by the government.

As the manager I undertook some steps in order to deal with the situation and build the resilience of the staff. We started having regular meetings in which we always set aside some time for team building exercises. These helped keep the team united and close to each other. I explained to my management that our team was feeling left out and was not being supported enough. The management thankfully understood the situation and wanted to help us. They agreed to have monthly Skype meetings wherein the branch

office would be included in the head office monthly meetings and key updates could be shared with us.

We also did a resource check for our team and this gave us a reality check to the team in terms of the resources that we had. This helped to boost their confidence in themselves and in the team as a whole. I also had an open door policy wherein any team member could come and talk to me if they had an issues.

Six months after these small steps were taken, team members felt better and more supported. They did not think that they were being neglected by the head office as the monthly Skype meetings helped them. These small efforts helped boost staff confidence and improve the resilience of our team as a whole.

Resilience in self

Working as a social worker in the Looked after Children's team has its own amount of stress and challenges. Heavy case loads, helping needy children with their behaviors, dealing with difficult parents and placement breakdowns cause a lot of stress and tensions at the work place. One can get overwhelmed if one is not watchful and let things get to you. I find it helpful to talk things with a colleague and regularly have the support of my manager and just keep him in the loop when things get chaotic. I also benefit from regularly exercising and leading an active lifestyle. When stress levels are high, I tend to gravitate towards junk food and will like to stuff myself with it, be it crisps or cookies. I think that the body finds comfort in the extra calories that it can get when it is stressed. Obviously this has a detrimental

effect on one's health. I find it helpful to not have access to such kinds of things when I am under stress. This acts as a deterrent to me wanting to stress-eat during stressful times.

I also tend to draw strength and cope better in quiet reflection and spending time in prayer. It is very relaxing for me to wake up early in the morning during stressful days and just have a quiet time of reflection and prayer before the day brings its challenges. However, there can be days when I am not able to bounce back from adversities quickly, and can be left a bit overwhelmed and stressed out.