Resilience of Children and Youth in War and Political Conflict

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Children in WW II

Millions of children
- Killed, injured, maimed, raped, orphaned
- Enlisted, imprisoned, malnourished
- Evacuated, separated, displaced

Child effects recognized
- Separation & loss; traumatic shock
- Role of caregivers; developmental timing

World responded
- Humanitarian aid; UNICEF founded 1946
- Trauma-focused research & practice

Long-term studies show lasting effects
- Dutch Hunger Winter’
- Radiation
- Holocaust survivors
Research progress since WWII

Resilience science emerged
- Expanded research to understand protective and recovery processes
- Transformative effects on intervention shift focus to strengths and recovery

Developmental perspective grew stronger
- Many systems influence the course of development
- Exposure to violence has complex effects and timing matters

Research on effects of violence on child development
- Maltreatment, domestic violence, war, political violence
- Toxic stress alters brain development, health, and behavior
- Experiences “get under the skin” to change gene expression and biology

Methodology advances
- Measures of neurobiological, social, & cultural processes; cultural sensitivity
- More longitudinal research & statistics for analyzing change
RESILIENCE

Capacity of a system (child, family, community…) to adapt successfully to threats that could destroy or harm the life, function, or development of the system.
Risk & resilience in children linked to

Dose of exposure
- Current and cumulative

Recovery environment
- Physical, psychological, social, spiritual

Resilience in other systems
- Family and other relationships
- Schools and other community systems

Individual differences
- Biological health and stress systems
- Age, sex, personality, sensitivity to experience
Multiple pathways

Optimal zone

Okay zone

Maladaptive zone

Acute trauma

Time

C

A

B

E

D

Masten and others 2015

Masten & Narayan 2012
Severe Chronic Adversity

Conditions improve

Optimal zone

Okay zone

Maladaptive zone

Time

A

B

C
Resilience factors (vary by age)

- **Individual**
  - Problem-solving skills
  - Self-regulation skills
  - Motivation
  - Hope, faith, meaning

- **Family-based**
  - Attachment and emotional security, proximity
  - Positive parenting and caregiving
  - Physical protection
  - Maintaining or restoring routines of family life
  - Religious practices

*Early childhood Caregiving*
Broader recovery context

• School and child care access & quality
• Spaces for play
• Community acceptance
• Cultural routines and practices
• Routines of normal community life
• Recovery rituals and ceremonies
Intervention research

Difficult

- Peltonen & Punamäki (2010) found only 4 gold standard studies
- More now but still scarce

Important early study by Dybdahl (2001) in Bosnia

- Designed to promote quality of mother-child interaction
- Rare study of young children (5 year olds)
- Treatment compared with controls who received medical care
- Improved maternal mental health and child physical health

Reviewers agree on striking lack of evidence given the need
Broad consensus guidelines

Support positive adaptation at all ages
- A sense of safety, calming, efficacy, connectedness, hope

Train first responders
- On family and child needs and responses
- Include caregivers and educators

Reunite and support families
- Locator systems
- Support family roles in child resilience

Restore a sense of “normal”
- Family routines, schools, cultural practices

Build community resilience
- Emergency preparedness, relationships, family supports
Do the ways we raise children hold promise for promoting a culture of peace in the world?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promote</th>
<th>Address</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Healthy development</td>
<td>• Discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Problem-solving skills</td>
<td>• Inequality</td>
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<td>• Respect for others</td>
<td>• Stigma</td>
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<td>• Conflict resolution skills</td>
<td>• Recruitment into violence</td>
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New directions

Expanding areas of research

- Neurobiology of stress & resilience
- Trauma-informed practice
- Intergenerational transmission
- Community resilience
- Cultural processes of resilience
- Multiple-level systems alignment
- Prevention
Resources

Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development


