

Make Resilience Matter for Children Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence

How Does Resilience Reveal Itself in Children and Youth Exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)?



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Four Year Mixed Method (2017/18)

- Qualitative literature review of resilience and IPV exposure (in review)
- Grounded theory study of adults who were exposed to IPV as children
 - Emergent themes
- Analysis of The National Longitudinal Study of Children and Youth (NLSCY) in Canada
 - Forthcoming

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Adversity of IPV Exposure

- IPV exposure sets a number of children down a difficult path impacting child development
 - Difficulties managing and expressing emotions
 - Relationship problems
 - Aggression and/or depression
 - Trauma effects
 - Problems in academic achievement
- Yet we know a number of children show resilience with healthy adaptation



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What is Resilience?

Resilience is navigating through adversity, where the interplay of personal qualities, relationships, and community and cultural context, support healthy adaptation, over time.

- ✓ more than individual's characteristics
- ✓ dynamic process
- ✓ interplay between the individual, family, community and society over time

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Protective Factors & Resilience – What's the Connection?

Protective Factors

- pre-existing factors that act as buffers for risk and stress; individual traits, inter-personal /relational strengths, and contextual factors /positive environmental influences
- protective factors can contribute to navigating through adversity and towards healthy adaptation

Resilience

- a process of adaptation resulting in successful outcomes – preceded by some form of adversity
- positive adaptation and recovery can occur despite a long period of disruption in functioning; over the life course

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Review of Resilience & IPV Exposure

- Examination of quantitative and qualitative research studies in scholarly journals, 2005 – 2015
- Used key words associated with **child exposure to IPV, resilience**
- 18 scientific studies analyzed after exclusion criteria applied
- Thematic analysis (Braun, 2006) for patterns (i.e. definitions, measures, samples)
- Multiple readers/readings
- **Social ecological lens** was used for second order analysis

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Literature Review – Findings*

- Resilience is defined inconsistently
- Samples are mixed using various forms of violence (poly-victimization)
- Intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience factors dominate
- Very little focus/data on environmental, contextual and cultural resilience factors
- Outcomes focused
- Processes and pathways less clear

**“Take These Broken Wings and Learn to Fly: A Research Review on Resilience and Child Exposure to Intimate Partner Violence Using a Social Ecological Lens” (forthcoming)*

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Research Methodology and Sample Description

Research Questions: What resilience factors can be identified in IPV exposed individuals? What are the resilience processes with IPV exposed individuals?

Methodology:

- Grounded theory method; theoretical sampling
- 15 interviews - 12 useable that were analysed
- Data analysis included open, axial and selective coding - N*Vivo supported
- 2 independent coders
- Preliminary analysis towards theme development

Sample Description:

- 6 females/6 males
- Mean age 32.5 (range 18 – 47)
- Higher education overall but with lower income (high number of students)
- Over half in university; auto salesman, visual artist, contractor, social worker; half non-white
- 7 single; 3 married; 2 divorced
- 7 with children (1-2)

- 3 self-identified as victims of IPV –1 male victim
- 2 self-identified as perpetrators of IPV (males)
- 2 identified mothers as perpetrators of IPV; 1 described mutuality of IPV

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Emerging Results: Escaping

Statements that reflected an awareness that participants found ways of 'escaping' their distressing environments, ways to feel successful:

- *I felt when I went to school and if I saw my friends there I would pretend it was okay and then I was in this space where I could escape for a little while . . . I did treat school like an escape* (1)
- *When I was older I would just go to my friend's house, you know and stay there until you know* (11)
- *I was an A student, I was always reading, writing, writing. It was actually my escape* (4)
- *I was a bookworm, so for me a lot of it was escapism. So trying to find an alternative from the reality I lived in* (6)
- *I had a world inside of me* (3)
- *I would say that if you can try hard on one thing, try hard to escape and find life from there* (8)

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Perseverance and Hope

Statements that reflected a belief in something better, a reason to hope or believe in the possibility of change, that these experiences were not the totality of who they were:

- *I just never gave up.* (3)
- *You can't let life get you down and stomp on you.*(5)
- *There is a light at the end of the tunnel. That they will grow up, they will, they can be successful, they can have good marriages and don't be so sure that everything is rosy at someone else's house. You don't know that.'* (15)
- *You are not defined by your past.* (6)
- *I have a lot of faith in myself and my abilities, and you know, the sort of ability to make friends and that kind of thing* (12)

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Insight and Self-Efficacy

Narratives that reflected an ability to make sense of what was happening; many participants

- described using other families as a benchmark for figuring out what is normal and what is not
- talked about learning to anticipate/cope/find the patterns/how to make it better or to 'fly under the radar' (2) in order to placate or avoid abuse
 - *I always felt sad because I couldn't make them happy and I thought it was always about me failing... I was just self-motivated to look into things that my parents told me and I was very surprised to find they weren't necessarily true all the time* (8)
 - *I always felt that something was not okay...I would feel like I didn't belong anywhere* (4)
 - *Trying to see an alternative from the reality I lived in...this was not the only reality...I had to find a way to not get sucked into his negative energynot losing myself in or getting influenced too much by the environmental factors around me* (6)
 - *You change your behaviour based on what's happening* (7)
 - *I was the rescuer...I tried for a really long time, and then I just gave up...the lie is that it's not going to get better* (3)

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Supportive Others and Community

Narratives about finding some kind of good parenting – from parents or others. A positive relationship with a caregiver:

- *All these women they were these kind women, and they were just kind of in the community, but not right in the community – they helped me – they validated me, they made me feel worthy again...they treated me like I was their daughter* (3)
- *I had my grandmother and two aunts* (4)
- *She's the calm stable one and my dad is like out of control... I saw my mom as this steady stable personality* (6)
- *Different things she's done to me that are almost like a mother would, right, and she would protect me* (13)

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Considerations: Vulnerability

- Chaotic and unpredictable living environment
 - *I can't remember one time that they weren't arguing (14)*
 - *I never just, I never knew how to act (3)*
- Complex Trauma
- Lack of supportive parenting
- Lack of belonging
 - *I don't think I had really good interpersonal skills. I don't think I ever developed them (15)*
- Avoidance
 - *I was always a strong person right? Like nothing you know gets to me...like its rare that anything really you know hits home with me right. I have that protective shell right? (13)*
- Rigid gender roles

We need to think about resilience as a process and opportunity, not something children have or don't have

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Thank you!

Service providers can promote resilience by:

1. facilitating esteem-building activities i.e. talents and skills
2. making connections to supportive adults
3. labeling and validating feelings about the violence; educating about healthy relationships
4. promoting healthier communities with access to child and youth resources, activities, supports

Further research is needed to investigate contextual/environmental impacts and barriers/facilitators to supports



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