

Resilience and the Effect that Attachment has on Adolescents in Relation to Trauma

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Introduction

Resiliency

Resiliency is a hard topic to operationalize because it makes sense intuitively but has many dimensions of agency, resourcefulness, and social networks in response to adversity (Panter-Brick et al., 2018). The term resilience come from the Latin *resiliens*, or to rebound (Holmes, 2017). In some research it is posed as the lack of a negative. “Resilience is often cast as the polar opposite of vulnerability” (Panter-Brick et al., 2018, pg. 1804). But it is the opinion of this proposal that resilience is the “harnessing of resources to overcome adversity and sustain wellbeing or the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully” (pg. 1804).

Trauma

Trauma is often associated with stresses in life that have a negative influence on an individual and can be seen in many settings like an American inner-city or refugees in a Middle Eastern country. In the study by Panter-Brick and associates, trauma was qualified by events that had happened to the participant, for example the question, “Have you seen someone severely beaten, shot, or killed?” (2018, pg. 1807). This shows that trauma can be negative events that are added to your life or happen to the participant. Another aspect of trauma could be the lack of security for a sustained period of time that has a negative impact on the individual. Inner-city life is more likely to contain economically impoverished neighborhoods characterized by poverty. In these communities, unemployment, ethnic and economic segregation, “underachieving” schools, child maltreatment, mental health problems, violence, and other crimes are more pervasive compared to other neighborhoods. These experiences are common in the inner city and are often associated with stress and trauma (Richardson et al., 2019).

Attachment

In the study by Panter-Brick and colleagues, it is stated that the Syrian refugees drew strength from the positive relations in their community (2018). For both groups, Syrian refugees and Jordanian hosts, family relationships were important to dealing with social, economic, and political resources (Panter-Brick et al., 2018). In the inner city, where there is a significant amount of trauma and stress, if the adolescent had strong parents around the resiliency of the child was noteworthy (Richardson et al., 2019). This research shows that a secure attachment to a support system or mentor is indicative of a positive correlation between resilience.

Study 1

In the study by Richardson and colleagues (2008), resiliency was measured as a symptom of the secure attachment felt by the adolescent to their family. Resiliency was identified in the children with secure attachment to an adult model in their family (Richardson et al., 2019). Researchers have been focusing on identifying processes utilized by African Americans to promote resilience within their children, especially noteworthy is the role of strong, involved parenting (Richardson et al., 2019). When a secure attachment is established it uniquely predicted fewer internalization of problems (Richardson et al., 2019). Therefore, the adolescents with a secure attachment to a parental figure had higher resiliency despite the stress and trauma of living in an inner-city environment.

Study 2

In the study by Panter-Brick and colleagues (2018), resiliency was studied in two different adolescent groups, one who had significant trauma in their lives and one group who had relatively less trauma. The study took place in the country of Jordan and focused on adolescent Syrian refugees and Jordanian adolescents. This study used several reports to assess the resilience level, socioeconomic status, experience of trauma, mental health, and experience of stress in the individual’s life. In this study, the Jordanian hosts who had less traumas in their lives had lower resilience scores. Although the Syrian refugees had more traumas in their life, they did not necessarily have a lower resiliency score than the Jordanian hosts. In the exit interviews, the higher resiliency scores were based on not if the participant had high or low stress/trauma in their life but if the participant found support from their community (Panter-Brick et al., 2018).

Counterclaim

In the study by Hildebrandt and colleagues, the focus is on how stress affects the resiliency of the person, specifically when it come to the aging process (Hildebrandt et al., 2012). This work suggests that psychosocial resources and lifestyle factors can add up to multisystem resiliency which would increase cellular buffering from life stress (Hildebrandt et al., 2012). Therefore, the higher the cellular resiliency the lower the life stress. The research study is stating that having trauma or stress in a person’s life will develop resiliency in the participant’s life that will benefit the individual. This statement may be incorrect in relation to adolescents, since there are positive coping mechanisms that have not been learned, and if those are not established then the participant could turn to easily accessible negative coping mechanisms.

Resilience is the ability to recover from hardship and be able to move forward. Trauma often affects resiliency because it is an event or stressor that has a negative impact on an individual. An attachment, particularly a secure attachment, can counter the effects of trauma in an individual’s life because the individual has someone to help them. In Study 1 and Study 2, resiliency is observed with adolescents who have experienced trauma and higher resilience levels is noticed when there is a secure attachment. This study will focus on resiliency levels of adolescents that have experienced trauma and whether the levels are affected positively or negatively based on the presence of a securely attached parental figure.

Abstract

There are many roadblocks in the world and some individuals are able to leap over those easily, while some people are not. This study will distribute surveys to 200 adolescent students in the Montgomery County area. The survey will be distributed at schools, libraries, and resource centers by providing a link that will electronically direct them to the survey on Survey Monkey. This survey will ask questions about past trauma, current stresses, and if they have a reliable parental figure to depend on. This survey will also assess the attachment relationship with the parental figure. This study will investigate the relationship of experiencing trauma and the negative effect that it has on an adolescent’s life but having a secure attachment to a parental figure will aid them to overcome difficulties.



Methods

Participants

The sample will include 200 adolescents aged between 8-14 that have experienced trauma. There will be over 50 adolescents with secure attachments, over 50 with insecure avoidant attachments, and over 50 with anxious resistant attachments. They will be compensated with 20-dollar Amazon gift cards. These adolescents will be recruited from local youth detention area, schools, libraries, and resource centers. These adolescents will be given an electronic link that will send them to a survey on SurveyMonkey.

Materials

The survey will have 45 close ended questions. Ten questions of the survey will ascertain the kind of attachment the adolescent has to a parental unit using the Attachment Script Assessment (Dykas et al., 2006). Ten questions of the survey will determine the kind of trauma the adolescent has experienced using some of the 21-item Trauma Events Checklist questions (Panter-Brick et al., 2009) and then placed in (high vs low) categories. And 25 questions of the survey will determine the level of resilience the child has using the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008).

There are three kinds of attachments that adolescents are relegated to, secure attachment, insecure avoidant attachment, and anxious resistant attachment. Secure attachment is where the adolescent is confident in the attachment with the parental unit and is able to go to them in times of stress. Insecure avoidant attachment is where the adolescent does not seek a parental unit in times of stress and looks to themselves in times. Anxious resistant attachment is where the adolescent goes to the parental unit but is also not certain of the safety of the connection (Holmes, 2017).

Procedure

Once the adolescents have been recruited to take the survey, they will be asked to take an hour to complete the survey and submit it. This survey will ask close ended questions about the kind of trauma that they have experienced, what kind of attachment they have to parental figures, and what level of resilience the adolescent has. At the end of the survey the adolescents will be given the option of corresponding with trained professionals to help them if this survey brings up some difficult past experiences. Once these surveys are completed, they will be gathered to be review and analyzed.

Predicted Results

The study will use a 2x3 independent factor ANOVA to test the hypothesis. The independent variables will be the attachment levels and the trauma level. The independent variables will be the attachment levels (secure, insecure, and anxious resistant) and trauma level (high, low). The dependent variable is the resiliency score. The resiliency scores will be based on the sum of the answers to the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008).

The results that are expected from this study are that the adolescents with high and low trauma levels that have a secure attachment to a parental unit will have better resilience than the adolescents with no secure attachment (anxious attachment or resistant attachment). The adolescent with low trauma levels with a secure attachment will have better resilience than the adolescents with high trauma levels with secure attachment. The group with the lowest resiliency levels would be the adolescents with high trauma levels and no secure attachment (anxious attachment or resistant attachment). The group with the highest levels of resiliency is the adolescents with low trauma levels with a secure attachment to a parental figure. The resiliency scores are predicted to be impacted negatively by the presence of trauma in the insecure and anxious resistant conditions, but not the securely attachment conditions. The counter example provided by Hildebrandt (2012), would predict that with the presence of trauma, the resilience score would be higher, no matter if the attachment is secure, avoidant, or resistant.

Discussion

The results that are expected from this study is the adolescents with high and low trauma levels that have a secure attachment to a parental unit will have better resilience than the adolescents with no secure attachment (anxious attachment or resistant attachment). And the adolescent with low trauma levels with a secure attachment will have better resilience than the adolescents with high trauma levels with secure attachment. Trauma tends to have a numbing effect on individuals and this numbing can cause individuals to fall behind in their work, school, or social lives. Trauma can cause the resiliency in an individual to decrease as well, making them a less productive individual. And while trauma tends to numb the individual, a secure attachment tends to bolster up the resiliency of an individual.

Resilience is arguably a cornerstone that will make or break an individual’s future. With adolescents who are at a disadvantage because of trauma that they endured in the past, knowing how to set up adolescents who have experienced trauma for success is an advantage that should be considered. With these results, if an adolescent who has experienced trauma does not have a parental unit there should be a resource to set up this kind of accountability. If this kind of connection is established, there can be more productive adults to help with children in the future who will need secure attachments in their life.



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