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Psychological resilience as an adaptive factor of self-esteem of children

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ABSTRACT

This paper aim to point out the multidimensional nature of mental resistance, impacts the children, young people and their families. In particular, it examines the concept of psychological resilience in relation to the factors such as family, school and local community which contribute to the promotion and strengthening it. Based on the literature review, the resilience is a dynamic, developmental and interactive process within individual characteristics work and interact with specific external positive factors (eg. good parenting) that help to promote the resilience of individuals. The research findings provide useful information for education and school practice.

Keywords: mental toughness, family, school, community

Introduction

It is useful to note the meaning of the resilience, firstly. Mental toughness (or otherwise resilience) - new concept of the science of Psychology-refers to the ability of an individual to maintain its mental health and psychological competence in difficult and adverse conditions (Masten, 2007; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Wright & Masten, 2005). Mental toughness is not limited to capacities in adverse conditions or identified with some ability compliance/djustment of the individual to the environment. Moreover, the adaptability can be superficial and conceal serious deficiencies or weaknesses that may emerge later when developmental or social requirements change or become more intense (Rutter, 2000; Yates, Egeland & Sroufe, 2003).

From the above definition of mental resistance does not seem to recognize the "origins" of it. According to the researchers, mental toughness is not defined as an intrinsic and permanent capacity of some special people, but there is a possibility for every human person. This possibility has been an important human psychological tool in order to face difficult situations in life. This does not exclude the fact that the inherent potential contributes to the onset of mental mechanisms / reactions that protect the individual (Luthar & Zelazo, 2000; Yateset al., 2003). Therefore, it is considered to be an active / dynamic process, which depends on the interaction of socio-historical context and the individual, rather than an inherent possession or acquisition of specific skills (Luthar, 2006; Howard, Dryen & Johnson, 1999).

The reasonable question is: Are there specific factors that promote the concept of resistance and mental toughness?

Factors related / linked to resilience

From the literature review, it is highlighted that challenging or stressful conditions and social dysfunctions, so-called risk factors (risk factors), which people may face, form a dynamic status, which can lead to the onset of psychosocial derogations (Fraser, 2004; Garbarino & Ganzel, 2000; Werner, 2000). For example, for school children, these factors may be related to the significant lack of basic emotional skills, due to internal (eg. mental health problems, low intelligence, etc.) or external malfunctions (eg. social problems, parent loss, excessive

social adversity, etc.), resulting in their difficult integration in school and social context. In the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents, apart from the factors mentioned, they seem to have been particularly important migration and repatriation, as teenagers have to deal with both the difficulties arising from their movement and other important factors, such as social discrimination, racism, economic exploitation, working without insurance and general economic poverty (Luthar, 2006).

However, the fact that some children or teenagers manage to positively face the difficulties of life, demonstrates that other factors, as well as some processes, protect them from the negative effects of risk factors. These factors and – self and environmental - reported in the literature by the term protective agents (protective factors) (Masten & Powell, 2003). The same factors act as important resources / poles developing individual and social skills (Garbarino & Ganzel, 2000) and thus as strengthening mechanisms of promotion and culture of mental resistance.

Factors that promote the mental resilience may be:

a) individual characteristics of the child (including positive self-perception, optimism, self-control, self-regulation, self-esteem etc.)
b) characteristics of the family such as harmony and family warmth, loving and peaceful environment between parents and children and relatives etc., normal relationships between all members of the family.
c) other external factors (social, environment, culture) (Werner, 1989; Masten, 2000; Newman, 2002).

According to researchers (Benard, 2004; Sameroff, Morisson, Gutmann & Peck, 2003; Werner, 2000; Masten & Powel, 2003) possible individual elements of children and young people who handle the difficulties , may be as follows:
- ➢ They have developed psychosocial and interpersonal skills and capacities.
- ➢ Their parents and families are supportive and effective.
- ➢ They have a positive self-esteem.
- ➢ They develop adequate self-perception and confidence.
- ➢ They create normal and friendly relationships with classmates.

Children that are vulnerable to stress, states that:
• They have limited internal, family or other reserves /resources.
• They experience more negative emotions.• Have low self-esteem.

The influence of the family (Werner, 1989) is particularly important and powerful factor for the development and the growth of a child. (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003).It should be noted that dysfunctional families and extreme withdrawal social environments are the most serious risk factors for the onset of emotional and behavioral problems during childhood and adolescence (Fiese & Sameroff, 1989). Children living in a dysfunctional family background become unable to form sufficient internal reserves to cope with social challenges a sufficient or positive (Garbarino & Canzel, 2000). Moreover, these children suffer from intense feelings of insecurity and uncontrollable (Zeanah, Boris, & Larrieu, 1997).

The presence of positive external support systems (e.g. families, friends, school, local communities, church) are necessary for the development of the individual (Werner, 1989). Strong social supportive networks are an important factor in promoting the mental resilience (Newman, 2002).

Tony Newman (2002) suggests that there are effective promotional strategies of resistance, depending on the period of development of the child. For the first years of life (prenatal to 4 years) he mentions the importance of adequate maternal nutrition during pregnancy and avoiding smoking. He refers moderate consumption of alcohol by the mother, and in addition he gives great importance to the social support of the mother. During infancy and early childhood it is important that sufficient income parents, social support for the mother, the good quality housing and education for parents are the proper play areas for children. For middle childhood (5-13 years) proposed positive experiences in school, good relationships with peers and teachers are the keystones for the child's mental resilience. Finally, for the early adulthood (13-19 years), positive school experiences, participation of adolescents in a range of activities, strong social support networks and support from parent or another person, help children to develop mental and interpersonal skills.

Conclusions

From the consultation of literature, it emerged that mental resilience refers to the ability of a positive adjustment of individuals in difficult conditions. Additionally, it emerged to be a dynamic process where the individual characteristics and personal stocks can be a protective function, interact with specific external positive factors (eg good parenting) and to contribute to strengthening and promoting the mental strength of the person. British child psychiatrist Michael Rutter (2000) reminds us that if we want to help children and young people, when there are changes in the course of their lives, we should focus on protective procedures. This means minimizing the impact of risks and promoting self-esteem and self-efficacy of children. Mental resistant children have some unique magical abilities or characteristics that protect them from the negative effects of stressors (Masten, 2007) and can not be argued that difficult situations do not create stress or do not feel fear, frustration, anger etc.

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