Resilience Portfolios: Shifting to Strengths-Based Approaches for Families Coping with Adversity

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What do people want from life?

Happiness

Meaning

Love
What do people want out of life?

“A CBCL t-score < 60”

“Relatively low levels of anxiety”

“Not too much delinquency”
We are all in this together

- Almost no one is a “zero” on adversity.
- No one is good at every possible strength.
- We need to shift off a deficit lens.
- Myths about passivity and denial among victims are not evidence-based.
The True Burden of Victimization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victimization Type</th>
<th>Prevalence Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANY VICTIMIZATION</td>
<td>86.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGLECT (FOOD OR MEDICAL)</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGLECT FROM PARENTAL ABSENCE</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGLECT FROM INAPPROPRIATE ADULTS IN THE HOME</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGLECT FROM PARENT INCAPACITATION</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPOSED TO PARENT SEVERELY PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICAL ABUSE BY CAREGIVER</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPOSED TO PARENT VERBALLY THREATENED</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL ABUSE</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER FAMILY VIOLENCE EXPOSURE</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICAL ASSAULT BY ADULT</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPOSED TO PARENT PUSHED BY ANOTHER PARENT</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXPOSED TO PARENTAL DISPLACED AGGRESSION</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSAULT BY YOUTH RELATIVES</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICAL INTIMIDATION BY PEERS</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WITNESSED ASSAULT WITH WEAPON</td>
<td>48.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONAL AGGRESSION BY PEERS</td>
<td>49.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSAULT BY NON-RELATED PEERS</td>
<td>50.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOCIAL EXCLUSION BY PEERS</td>
<td>52.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>WITNESSED ASSAULT WITHOUT WEAPON</td>
<td>58.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL DISCREDITING BY PEERS</td>
<td>59.2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Prevalence Rate
RESOURCES & ASSETS:
- External resources
- SES
- Caregivers (kids)/Partners (adults)
- Safe, stable environment
- Community, culture
- Strengths
- Character strengths
- Cognitive abilities

ADVERSITY:
- Victimization, loss, illness/injury, other life events

WELL-BEING:
- Psychological
- Physical
- Spiritual

COPING RESPONSES:
- Dealing with problems, including appraising, seeking help, managing stress

WANT TO MINIMIZE THE HARM OF PAST ABUSE? FOCUS ON THESE TARGETS

WANT TO PREVENT ADVERSITY? FOCUS HERE

Resilience Portfolio Model
(Grych, Hamby & Banyard, 2015; Hamby et al., 2017; Hamby et al., in press)

Violence-specific coping

Violence-specific coping

General well-being
Building Up Your Resilience Portfolio

Despite the universal experience of stressful life events, most people are resilient and many manage to thrive even after substantial adversity. That’s where building up strengths comes in.

No one is a “zero” on the adversity side of the scale. Sooner or later, everyone experiences pain or loss or sees their loved ones experience pain or loss.
Priorities for Future Strengths-based Approaches

• Shifting from glass half empty (ex., insecure attachment) to glass half full (secure attachment) is good, but need to do more to expand universe of strengths under consideration.

• Too much focus on static characteristics, such as demographic factors and other unmalleable (or nearly unmalleable) traits of individuals or environments.

• Limited focus on “outer” layers of the social ecology (family, peer, community).
Understanding development to understand strengths

RESILIENCE PORTFOLIOS
The Poly-Strength Concept

- Everyone has character strengths, but nobody has *every* character strength.
- Defined as the number of above-average scores on strength measures (> .5 SD).
- Strengths—psychological and social as well as physical—also change as we age.
- Looking to identify a minimum density & diversity of strengths that promote well-being.
From the Life Paths project, Hamby, Banyard, & Grych, 2015
REGULATORY STRENGTHS

Emotional Awareness

Emotional Regulation

Honesty and Humility

Sig: Age, Age², Age³
Religious Meaning

![Graph showing the standardized moving average of religious meaning by age. The graph indicates a general increase in religious meaning from age 14-15 to age 45+.]
MEANING MAKING STRENGTHS
Social Support – Friends and Adults

Standardized Moving Averages

Age (In intervals)
INTERPERSONAL STRENGTHS
Most Important Strengths (so far)

• Regulatory:
  – Emotional awareness
  – Emotional regulation
  – Endurance

• Meaning making:
  – Purpose
  – Optimism
  – Religious involvement

• Interpersonal
  – Compassion
  – Generativity
  – Community support

From Hamby, Banyard, & Grych, in preparation & Banyard, Hamby, & Grych, under review
Better Understanding of How to Get to Positive Outcomes

Mental health (42%)

Spiritual well-being (47%)

Post-traumatic growth (58%)

Subjective well-being (58%)

Physical health (24%)

Adversities and strengths accounted for 1-19% of the variability in well-being, while strengths accounted for 23-49%.
Prototype of the Resilience Portfolio Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Resiliency Portfolio</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 20 36 43 16 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 34 7 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 11 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 22</td>
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<td>15 29 5 9 31 10 5</td>
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<td>10 2 3 15 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 5 1 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Compassion**
- **Generativity**
- **Community Support**
- **Optimism**
- **Purpose**
- **Religious Meaning Making**
- **Emotional Awareness**
- **Emotional Regulation**
- **Endurance**

**Interpersonal Strengths**

- **Meaning Making Strengths**
- **Regulatory Strengths**

*Bold Line = Above Average*
*Dotted Line = Average*
The Resilience Portfolio Interview: Beta version

• **Instructions for providers:**

  • This is a semi-structured interview, designed to help providers and advocates of all types include strengths and resources in assessment. The topic areas are based on the Resilience Portfolios research program (learn more at [http://lifepathsresearch.org](http://lifepathsresearch.org)). This is an ongoing project to identify the most important strengths for coping with adversity. The questions focus on the most promising strengths from this research as of October, 2016.

  • There are no right or wrong answers and no one should be expected to be good at every strength listed here. The end of the interview includes a few brief suggestions for matching needs to interventions. Every effort has been made to provide suggestions consistent with the current state of scientific knowledge, but please note that this area of research is in its infancy.

  • This is the Beta version of this questionnaire. We have used these and similar questions in focus groups, interviews, and surveys, but this is a new version for clinical settings that will be going through a review and evaluation process and will almost certainly change with feedback.
Introduction

• In times of stress, your strengths and resources are very important. These next questions will help us identify the strengths and resources you have available now, and some areas where you might need additional support. You might be surprised to learn how many strengths you have. We will use these to help develop a plan for coping with your problems and moving forward with your life.

• We have found it useful to talk about strengths by focusing on specific stories from your life. It sometimes takes a minute or two to figure out which story to tell so take your time, but something will likely come to mind. [Note to interviewer: If needed, encourage them to describe a specific event and not make general statements such as, “My family is a big help to me.”]
Part 1: Stories of Coping & Support

1) Sooner or later, everyone has to deal with some kind of problem, often a serious problem. Let’s start by thinking about what helps you when times are tough. We have found that it is helpful to talk about a specific problem or challenge, and how you handled it. [Note to interviewers: It does not have to be the reason for referral and an older problem may be more informative]. What happened, where and when did it take place, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a few words about how you handled what happened and how it shows how you cope with challenges.

[Interviewer note: Make sure to ask about the various ways the client responded to this challenge, including emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses and any changes over time. You want to get as much as possible about their coping processes.]

2) Who do you know that is most supportive of you? Think about family, friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, ministers or others in your community. Tell me a story about a time that someone really helped you. Who was it, and what kind of support did they offer you?
Part 2: A Portfolio of Strengths

• Next, I am going to ask you about some specific strengths that have been especially helpful to other people when they deal with hard times. No one is good at everything, and I don’t expect you to be good at all of these. We can use this information in two ways. First, we want to make sure we are taking advantage of your best coping skills. Second, we can identify any areas that might need strengthening and make sure our work includes those areas.

• We will discuss three areas: meaning making, self-regulation, and interpersonal relationships.
Meaning making

3) Let’s talk about finding meaning in your life. You might find meaning through religion or spirituality, but you may also find meaning through your role in your family or community, or your commitment to some goal or group. How do you find meaning?

4) Optimism. Optimism means feeling hopeful about the future. Tell me a little about whether you see yourself as more optimistic or pessimistic, and any areas where you feel particularly optimistic or pessimistic.

5) Purpose. Where do you see yourself on the path to finding a purpose for your life?

6) Religious or spiritual involvement. I know that some people do not attend church or belong to a religion, but if that is an important area for you, it would be helpful for me to know more about that. If it’s not, that’s ok too and then we will know to focus on other types of meaning making.
Self-regulation

7) Emotional awareness. Would you describe yourself as someone who is “in touch” with your feelings most of the time, or does it sometimes take you awhile to realize that you are upset or angry?

8) Emotional regulation. We all get upset and angry sometimes. Learning to control our behaviors when we are upset can be challenging, but is an important part of effective coping. Tell me a little bit about how things usually go when you get upset or angry.

9) Psychological endurance. Endurance is the ability to keep going even when times are tough. For example, to stick to routines and to see something through to the end, even when it turned out to be much harder than you expected. It also can mean staying true to your values even when that is hard to do. Describe how well you keep going during difficulties and hard times. Again, I’d like to hear about a specific time in your life.
Now let’s turn to your relationships with other people. I’d like to know about your approach to relationships, and also a little bit about your family, friends, and community.

10) Compassion. Compassion means being aware of and caring about other people’s feelings. Compassion can also mean wanting to help others when they are in need. Do you think of yourself more as someone who keeps to yourself, or do you tend to notice what is going on with other people?

11) Generativity. Generativity refers to investing in the next generation or the future of a community. Parents invest in their children, of course. There are many other roles that are about helping young people or investing in the future, including teachers, coaches, and many volunteer or community group roles. Tell me about some of the ways that you try to “pay it forward” to the next generation.

12) Social support. Social support can come from many places, including family and friends and also from the broader community where you live. Describe your social support or ways in which you would like to have stronger relationships with others.
HOW TO STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE PORTFOLIOS

(approaches that really work)
Using the results to plan prevention and intervention

• It is beneficial for the therapeutic alliance to work on positive goals together with your client. There are many techniques for improving strengths, but here are a few examples of evidence-based strategies for improving some of the key strengths identified in the Resilience Portfolios research program.

• Note: Regulatory strengths are often the “weak leg of the stool.” In our interviews, person after person after person told about how getting married, having a child, finding a church, or getting a good job motivated them to better regulate. Use interpersonal and meaning-making strengths to build up self-regulation.
Narratives

• Personal narratives on meaningful topics, such as your personal values, improve:
  – Emotional awareness
  – Emotional regulation
  – Purpose

• For an extra boost—
  – Let someone else read it!

• Values narratives, such as the Laws of Life essay, can work in prevention settings (unlike trauma-focused narratives, which are only for intervention).
Meditation

• Mindfulness meditation improves:
  – Compassion
  – Emotional awareness
  – Emotional regulation
Exercise

• Regular exercise (actually most routines, even sleep!):
  – Endurance (yes improving the physical improves the psychological kind too!)
  – Optimism
Volunteering

- Volunteering improves:
  - Generativity
  - Community support (both how much you feel & how much there is!)
Spirituality & Religion

• Spirituality/religious involvement:
  – Tap into something bigger than yourself does
  – “Religion without spirituality” movement
Deliberate Practice

• Deliberate practice/goal-setting/”personal best” improves:
  – Purpose
  – Endurance

Wanda Rutkiewicz, first woman to successfully summit K2, Wikimedia commons.
A Few Tips

• It’s good for all of us to get outside ourselves. In the navel-gazing department, more is not necessarily better. Find a person, a group, a place, or a cause.

• Adversities are part of everyone’s story—they belong in any life narrative—but the goal is to both integrate them and put them in perspective so that they do not become the defining feature of someone’s identity.

• Regulatory strengths are often the weak leg of the stool, especially among adolescents & young adults. In our interviews, person after person after person told about how getting married, having a child, finding a church, or getting a job they cared about motivated them to straighten out this part. *Use interpersonal and meaning-making strengths to build up self-regulation.*
Narrative Exercise

(20 MINUTES) EXAMPLES:
DESCRIBE A LIFE CHANGING EVENT (GOOD OR BAD). WHAT HAPPENED?
HOW DID IT CHANGE YOU? YOUR VALUES?
DESCRIBE A LESSON YOU LEARNED “THE HARD WAY”
HAS LIFE BEEN “GOOD/BAD TO YOU?” EXPLAIN.
Conclusion: Hopes for Prevention & Intervention

• Understanding people’s strengths opens up possibilities for building on these.

• It seems likely that not everyone needs the exact same resilience portfolio. A density & diversity approach can help identify gaps & targets for prevention & intervention.
We’ve Only Just Begun
Free resources:

Narrative and strengths-based resources at http://lifepathsresearch.org

Resilience Portfolio Interview can be found there, under tab for Educators and Therapists

The VIGOR, a new strengths-based safety plan for domestic violence: http://thevigor.org

Psychology Today blog: http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-web-violence (includes blogs on communication skills)

Letter to My Teenage Daughter About Sexual Assault

Letter to My Teenage Son About Sexual Assault
ResilienceCon 2017: April 17-19 in Nashville

- Learn more about resilience in a beautiful retreat setting, with a new “disruptive” approach to conferences with fast-paced and interactive formats.
- See http://lifepathsresearch.org