

Book review

Psychological Medicine, 42 (2012).

doi:10.1017/S0033291712002115

First published online 11 September 2012

Resilience and Mental Health: Challenges Across the Lifespan. Edited by S. M. Southwick, B. T. Litz, D. Charney and M. J. Friedman. (Pp. 382; £60.00; ISBN: 9780521898393.) Cambridge University Press. 2011.

The last few decades have seen substantial gains in characterizing the prevalence, correlates, and consequences of stressful and traumatic event exposure, with the majority of the focus on understanding the link between the exposure and stress-related psychopathology [e.g. post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depression]. These lines of research have also made strides towards identifying environmental, psychosocial, biological, and personal history factors that play a role in the development and maintenance of stress-related disorders, which are reviewed in this book. Although it is well documented that the majority of those exposed to a stressful or traumatic life event have a healthy adaptation, substantially less is known about outcomes other than those involving psychiatric distress, despite the great need for understanding these other outcomes. In an effort to provide a foundation for the field of resilience and mental health across the lifespan, the editors have brought together an impressive group of scientists, theorists, and clinicians to contribute to this volume, which consists of 23 chapters organized into five sections. Each section has a single editor, with no overlap of editors across the sections. This afforded the benefit of having a content expert editor per section. However, a resulting drawback is that this likely contributed to redundancy across sections of the book.

The book opens with a thought-provoking Preface that explicates the main conceptual issues that resilience researchers face. The editors note that one possible reason for the dearth of empirical investigation in this area is the inherent challenges with the definition of 'resilience'. It is noted that there is no one agreed definition of resilience, and this is evident in the volume, as each set of authors adopted their own definition. A wide range of definitions have been employed across the chapters (e.g. acute adaptation of neural systems in response to stress in chapter 1 by Feder and colleagues; the ability of individuals to maintain healthy functioning in the areas of mental and physical health following a stressor/trauma by Bonanno and Mancini in chapter 8; resilience defined

as the absence of or rapid recovery from PTSD following rape in chapter 15 by Resnick *et al.*; the broad ability of a system to adapt or recovery from a stressor by Masten and colleagues in chapter 7). The inclusion of varying definitions in the volume has both benefits (e.g. allows for a wider range of research to be reviewed) and drawbacks (e.g. there is little integration or cross-referencing of the chapters to attempt to synthesize the at times opposing viewpoints of the definitions adopted).

Nonetheless, most definitions of resilience utilized in this book, and the broader field, have two points of convergence. First, there must be exposure to adversity, stress, or trauma in response to which an individual or system can demonstrate resilience. Second, the individual or system's post-stressor behavior or health needs to be considered a 'positive response'. In other words, the domain of functioning must be defined, and normative functioning in that domain must be known for purposes of comparison. Masten and colleagues (chapter 7) provide a thoughtful commentary on the definitional challenges to resilience, which perhaps should be read first as it serves as an excellent primer for the rest of the book. Addressing both what should be considered a threat, as well as what should be considered 'good' adaptation, their chapter challenges the reader to critically think about the nuances of the definitional complexities inherent in this field. Covering substantive conceptual issues, they pose key questions regarding issues of timing, specificity (e.g. is resilience the lack of PTSD following a trauma, or should functioning be considered more broadly?), to property (e.g. is resiliency a process, an outcome, or a capacity of an individual or system?). Miller and Harrington (chapter 4) wisely note that many of the variables that have been studied as risk factors for stress-related pathology have been conceptualized as bipolar dimensions, the other end of the distribution are often conceptualized as being related to resilience (e.g. if female sex is associated with PTSD risk, then male sex is associated with resilience). This way of thinking is evident in many of the chapters in the book, most of which do not provide the important caveat noted by Miller and Harrington: this is contingent upon the assumption that resilience is the absence of post-stressor/trauma pathology, a matter of continued controversy.

The first section is potentially of most utility to students new to the field, as it covers in broad strokes neurobiology, emotion regulation, cognitive coping, personality, social support, and religious factors,

thereby providing a general basis of theoretical and empirical knowledge of the various vantage points from which resilience can be studied. These chapters provide thought-provoking theoretical, and where appropriate empirical, models of resilience and lay an elegant foundation for the rest of the volume. Although it is laudable that the authors reviewed a wide range of content, one of the limitations present in some of the chapters in this section is the lack of critical review of the methodologies reviewed. The second section, which covers resilience across the lifespan, is composed of developmentally informed chapters that address phase of life issues of relevance to resilience from birth to later stages of life, and is of interest to developmentally oriented researchers, as well as clinicians who are interested in how resilience unfolds across the phases of life and unique challenges faced during the lifespan. Most contemporary books on similar topics do not have a lifespan approach, which is an innovative aspect of this book and certainly worthy of inclusion. In the third section, issues related to family, community, and cultural resilience

are described, with a heavy emphasis on issues related to prevention, intervention, and treatment. Resilience in the face of specific challenges (grief and loss, disasters, sexual assault, military stressors, terrorism, poverty, and serious mental illness) makes up section 4. Last, resilience as it relates to treatment and training is reviewed in section 5.

In sum, this is a comprehensive volume, contributed to by experts in the field, which describes the state of the science and the inherent challenges in the work that needs to be done to move resilience research forward. I would recommend this book to students, clinicians, and researchers interested in resilience. Strengths of the book include its breadth and inclusion of often over-looked aspects, and drawbacks include the repetition across chapters, and at times lack of critical review of the state of the science. Nonetheless, this volume is highly suitable for students, researchers, and clinicians interested in resilience across the lifespan.

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