

Enhancing adolescents' well-being and resilience

Chair: Prof Carmel Cefai, University of Malta

This symposium examines adolescent resilience and well-being from various perspectives and in various contexts, with five papers from, Italy, Croatia, Ukraine, Malta, Norway, Greece and Cyprus.

1. Resilience processes among young people in Ukraine: Build resilience with peers

Francesca Giordano, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore., Milan Italy (presenter), Shannon Lipscom (Oregon State University), Philip Jefferies (Dalhousie University, Canada), Kyong-Ah Kwon (College University of Oklahoma, USA), Marianna Giammarchi (Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan, Italy)

The war in Ukraine significantly affected the mental health and the well-being of its young people. Like other communities affected by war, Ukraine's youth are at risk of developing psychopathological symptoms, and there is a shortage of mental health and psychosocial support services to address this. Resilience-building initiatives present an alternative approach to supporting the well-being of young people by promoting protective processes to enhance the likelihood of positive development in the context of adversity. Emerging research findings suggest that young people themselves can serve as powerful facilitators of such initiatives with one another. Yet, evidence about culturally and contextually relevant protective processes is needed to guide such interventions, especially among young people experiencing war in conflict areas. In this study, we identified various key protective processes facilitating the adaptation of Ukrainian experiencing war, while also preparing to implement a resilience-building intervention as a facilitator. Through thematic analysis of transcripts of three training sessions with 15 Ukrainian youth, we identified the following themes: positive thinking, sense of control, emotion awareness and regulation, close personal relationships, and community support. Findings also highlighted the cultural and contextual nuance of these protective processes, as well as individual differences in the ways they co-occurred and manifested within each youth. Results have implications for developing tailored yet flexible resilience-building interventions that can be delivered by lay people, including youth with their peers.

2. Teaching Resilience in the Summer School "Practicing Resilience, Preparing for Recovery": Examining Learning Processes and the Related Outcomes

Lana Batinić, PhD, Catholic University of Croatia (presenter), Francesca Giordano (Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan Italy), Jasna Ćurković Nimac (Catholic University of Croatia).

As the world undergoes rapid and dramatic changes, such as wars, natural hazards and climate change, affecting people and ecology in interconnected ways, building adaptive

capacity is crucial, especially for youth. Indeed, youth are the future leaders, and their ability to cope well with stress and obstacles while performing to their full potential as well as their ability to form collaborative social networks to deal with changes are critical. In 2022 and 2023, the members of the Catholic Universities Partnership in Croatia and Italy, organized a summer school for Ukrainian students and other international students, on "Practicing Resilience, Preparing for Recovery". The aim was to strengthen students' ability to successfully deal with major adversity, especially in the context of Ukrainian war, and, by gaining useful information on how to transfer such strategies to other members of their community. The current study is aimed to explore the summer school participants' learning experience, namely (1) learning how to foster self-resilience in students; (2) teaching students how to foster resilience in their own local community; (3) establish a collaborative network of youth resilience enablers among participants. The sample was made of the summer school participants. Using mix of qualitative and quantitative measures, results show that learning outcomes are related to the each of the 3 targeted learning process. These results will be presented and discussed in the context of the importance of promoting resilience teaching programs for youth.

3. Promoting the well-being and resilience of young people with mental health issues: A photovoice study with young people

Prof Carmel Cefai, University of Malta (presenter), Rachel Spiteri (University of Malta), Rita Sorly and Gro Jensen (Arctic University of Norway).

Qualitative studies on European youth struggling with mental health challenges, has to a lesser extent focused on experiences related to promoting well-being, from service users perspectives. In this paper, we explore the experiences of what promotes mental health and resilience amongst young people with mental health issues from Malta and Norway. Two groups of young people with mental health issues living on small islands in Malta and Norway respectively participated in the study making use of photo-elicitation within a participatory research approach. Through a thematic analysis of the photos with the young people themselves, we identified various issues raised by young people on what they find supportive and resilience-enhancing as young people living with mental health issues in the community. Issues like having a voice and right to participate in intervention, family support and friends, leading autonomous and independent lives, animals as therapists, and need to address stigma, were some of the issues raised. The paper concludes with the implications of the findings for enhancing the wellbeing of young people with mental health issues living in the community.

4. School climate as a protective factor for resilience and well-being: Universities as agents that support school communities during crises

Chryse (Sissy) Hatzichristou, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (presenter), Aikaterini Lampropoulou (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece), Panayiotis Lianos (University of Ioannina, Greece).

Crises situations and adversities that have occurred throughout the world emphasize the need to support schools and especially vulnerable groups of students. This paper

describes current theoretical approaches that highlight the positive characteristics and capabilities of individuals and systems, especially during adverse times. Key findings of research studies conducted during crisis periods in secondary schools by the Laboratory of School Psychology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens are briefly presented, illustrating the protective role of school climate in fostering resilience and well-being. Participants include all key members of the school community (students, teachers, parents). The findings have informed the development and implementation of school-based intervention programs that focus on promoting school mental health and student well-being. The description of the various actions developed and implemented by the LSP highlights the important role of universities in bridging the gap between theory, research, training, and practice, to promote resilience and well-being in school communities at a national and transnational level.

5. The Transferable Skills Inventory (TSI-21): How can it inform targeted interventions for adolescent resilience?"

Alexandros Lordos, University of Cyprus (presenter) and Georgia Christou, University of Cyprus

The acquisition of transferable skills, also known as life/soft skills, is attracting widespread global interest due to their crucial role in empowering children and young people to accomplish their goals in various domains, including their personal lives, education, and employment. Transferable skills are a broad umbrella term that includes competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, cooperation, growth mindset, and leadership, among others. While international organizations, such as UNICEF, have developed conceptual frameworks for cultivating such skills, the literature lacks complete, psychometrically validated tools that holistically assess these skills. The Transferable Skills Inventory (TSI-21) was designed to address this need. This presentation discusses the psychometric properties of TSI-21, an 84-item self-report questionnaire comprising 21 sub-scales, each measuring a specific skill and how can be applied in clinical work. Data were collected from a sample of 6,643 adolescents recruited through 200 schools in Ukraine to validate the tool. Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed that a Correlated Factors Model best fits the data. It suggests that TSI-21 subscales should be treated as distinct but interrelated skills without collapsing them into a higher-order, or general, "socioemotional competence" factor. Psychometric Network Analysis indicated three inter-connected sub-clusters – executive skills, social skills, and prosocial mindset – along with a high centrality of Growth Mindset, Distress Tolerance, Receptive Communication, and Intergenerational Partnership, suggesting that these might be foundational skills. Overall, the TSI-21 is a versatile tool for the comprehensive assessment of interventions and can provide novel insights into risk factors and potential entry points for the holistic socioemotional development and resilience of young people.