

## The Lotus-in-the-Mud Phenomenon: Self-efficacy and Protective Factors in Resilient Children

Swayam Prabha Satpathy

SOA University, Bhubaneswar, India

### Abstract

*In a plural society like India, a significant proportion of children live in slums and are deprived of enriching experiences. However, some children evince growth despite adversity. Past studies have indicated that resilience is a positive combination of three resources (I have, I am, and I can). The present investigation was geared to identify protective mechanisms (I have) and self-efficacy. It was hypothesized that resilient children have greater self-efficacy than non-resilient children. The screening of resilient children was carried out with the help of teachers and peers. Teachers from various high schools in the city of Bhubaneswar (located in Odisha – an eastern state of India Union) were asked to identify resilient children in their class. Each teacher was also asked to rate his/her nominated child on several dimensions of resilient behaviour. Peers were also asked to rate the same child on these dimensions of behaviour. The congruence of high ratings was used to identify resilient children. Fifteen boys and 15 girls were thus selected. From similar locations, 60 children (30 boys and 30 girls) were randomly sampled to constitute the non-resilient groups. During the second phase of the study, all children were administered measures of self-efficacy (general and domain-specific), and measure of protective support system. The results indicated greater domain-specific efficacy of resilient children. As hypothesized resilient children indicated greater need for expression and satisfaction outside their family. The possibility of transplantation of these mechanisms in other disadvantaged children was discussed.*

**Keywords:** Resilience, self efficacy, mechanisms, behavior.

### 1. Introduction

Like resilience, self-efficacy is context specific and seems particularly important when individuals face adversity, when positive self-efficacy beliefs are associated with increased motivation and perseverance and an increased likelihood of rejecting negative thoughts regarding own capabilities. Self-efficacy as an important characteristic that distinguishes resilient and non-resilient children and is considered to be the foundation of human agency and is referred to as an important protective factor regulating human functioning and emotional wellbeing through cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective processes. The management of resilient children is a national as well as global concern. While the developed countries have conducted some programs to take care of resilient children and stimulate their growth, no strategic intervention has been undertaken in developing countries. India is a plural society where factors of language, ethnicity and religion cross cut. Furthermore the economic developments of in all parts of India has not been even taken into consideration. There are many pockets where children live in object poverty

### 2. The Role of Self-Efficacy in Promoting Resilience

A potentially important protective factor that has received limited research attention is self-efficacy; this trait is the focus of the present study. Albert Bandura (1981, 1983, and 1999) has been a pioneer in self-efficacy research and Bandura has conceptualized self-

efficacy as individuals' beliefs in their capabilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and agency to exert control over a given event. It is the belief in one's capabilities to produce a certain outcome or goal that is seen as the foundation of human agency (Bandura, Pastorelli, Barbaranelli & Caprara, 1999).

When facing adverse events, those who retain the belief that they will be able to exert control over their thoughts are more likely to persevere in their efforts. Those who are self-efficacious are also more likely to reject negative thoughts about themselves or their abilities than those with a sense of personal inefficacy (Ozer & Bandura, 1990) adolescents.

One central aspect of an individual's self-efficacy is the belief that through the exertion of control one can influence the outcome of events in one's life. Particularly when confronting stress, retaining a sense of control over one's life is an important factor in the successful adaptation to a variety of circumstances (Aspin wall & Richter, 1999). Control beliefs have therefore been conceptually and empirically linked with greater persistence and successful adaptation to stress; such beliefs may be an important Likewise, the development of coping skills in adolescence is critical in helping youth maintain positive adaptation to stressful situations. ways in which people achieve an optimal level of emotional regulation and the capacity to deal with intense situation and feelings (Saarni, 1999). Emotion-focused coping strategies shown to be effective are distraction, cognitive reframing the meaning of the difficult situation and information seeking strategies. The key component to these successful coping strategies is the ability to be flexible in the selection of strategies depending upon the control an individual has over a stressor (Saarni, 1999). Optimal self-regulation occurs when active problem

Solving it is not yet clear whether problem-focused or emotion-focused strategies are more effective in coping with stress. Many problems in coping studies have resulted from a lack of consensus regarding the nature of coping during development; the inconsistent conceptualization of coping has lead to confusion about the way in which effective coping can be facilitated in children and adolescents (Compas et al., 2001).

However, consistent data have shown that, as children and adolescents mature, their repertoire of coping strategies expands (Saarni, 1997). Thus, older children or adolescents should be capable of generating more options to deal with stress and conflict situations.

### **3. The Present Study**

The present study is focused on the nature of the converging constructs of self regulation and self-efficacy as they facilitate the development of coping in resilient children. Although many traits are thought to be associated with resiliency, not all of these characteristics have been empirically demonstrated to be valuable protective factors for adolescents experiencing adversity. Although self-efficacy has been shown to be clearly connected to competence and self-regulation, relatively little research has focused on how this trait relates to resilient behavior in the face of adversity, as well as in normal development. In the present study, high school students were assessed on their level of adversity and competence to determine whether they currently exhibited resilience. Students' self-efficacy and locus of control beliefs were assessed to determine the presence of efficacious and internal regulatory beliefs. Two tasks, one a verbal anagram task and the other a story telling exercise, were used to assess students'

The present study is interested in using a multifaceted approach to measure these constructs in adolescents as well as obtaining a measure of coping strategies that students might be using in their daily life.

1. Measures of Behaviour Checklist.

The checklist is used for teachers and peers to nominate resilient children and describe them in several dimensions. Each respondent is given a definition of a resilient child and asked to nominate 5 resilient children each of the columns is used resilient child named. Twenty statements are provided. The statements concern both academic and social excellence. Each respondent is asked to indicate a 5 point scale the degree to which a resilient child identified by his/her corresponds to a statement. The items are keyed in both the directions with suitable reversing of items, scores the items are summed for each resilient child. Thus each respondent provided five different scores for five children. Theoretically, effective and flexible coping strategies are employed to achieve the optimum level of self-regulation. Broadly, the two main coping strategies used to deal with stress are emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies. Problem-focused strategies are active problem solving methods used to resolve the stressful relationship between the self and the environment (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen & Wasdworth, 2001). Emotion-focused coping strategies are ways in which people achieve an optimal level of emotional regulation and the capacity to deal with intense situations and feelings (Saarni, 1999).

Children who demonstrate resiliency seem to have an outgoing social personality at all ages. Resilient children are characterized as very responsive to all people and objects, (Murphy :1987; Murphy and Moriarity 1976), and as affectionate and cuddly (Werner 1985). Werner and Smith (1987) found them more communicative and more actively involved in social play. It is not yet clear whether problem-focused or emotion-focused strategies are more effective in coping with stress. However, consistent data have shown that, as children and adolescents mature, their repertoire of coping strategies expands (Saarni, 1997). Thus, older children or adolescents should be capable of generating more options to deal with stress and conflict situations.

## Low Competence Groups

The first analysis focused on defining the individual participants into resilience categories based on their level of competence and level of adversity. Competence was defined as adequate when an individual was higher than one-half a standard deviation above the sample mean on all of the following competence measures: self-reported aggression, self-reported delinquency, parent reported aggression, parent reported delinquency, social behavior or academic achievement. Low competence was defined as falling more than one-half a standard deviation below

## Discussion

The results in this study provide support for the hypothesis that self-efficacy is a trait present among competent adolescents facing adversity. There were four major findings of this study:

- 1) The resilient and competent groups were similar in terms of self efficacy, secondary control engagement and response complexity; the items were significant differences were found
- 2) The four groups were more similar on a number of measures of self-efficacy, coping, and persistence than expected and
- 3) There was a surprisingly large group of students in the low competence/low adversity group and this group was characterized by low levels of adversity and high levels of aggression and delinquency

4) self-efficacy and complexity of response to difficult situations emerged as the items that distinguished the resilient adolescents from the maladaptive and the low competence/low adversity group. These findings add to the knowledge about personality characteristics that may promote good outcomes and that characterize those adolescents who remain competent despite adversity.

## **Resilient and competent students**

Overall, the resilient and competent adolescents look very similar on almost all of the self-report measures. The main difference between the two groups was that the resilient group reported a higher level of delinquent behaviors, a finding that has been noted in other studies (Masten, 1999). The two groups did not differ on scores of self efficacy, control perceptions, responses to stress, persistence, or coping strategies. This finding is consistent with the original hypothesis that the resilient and competent groups should look similar because resilience by its very nature implies that those individuals are competent based on determined criteria. The fact that few differences were found between the resilient and competent groups is an important finding that replicates several studies reporting the finding that resilience is a phenomenon where certain aspects of normal functioning have been promoted (Masten, 2001). Therefore, even under the threat of adversity, successful adaptation can be achieved if the basic systems of functioning have been preserved. So the fact that in this study adolescents in the resilient and competent groups scored similarly on a number of measures lends support to the current held contention that resilience is an “ordinary” phenomenon in which adaptation systems have been maintained despite challenge .

## **Similarities between Resilient and Competent:**

Another important overall finding was that, for a number of factors, the four groups did not differ, especially on the measures of persistence, responses to stress, control perceptions and selection of coping strategies. There are a number of reasons as to why these similarities may have occurred. For the persistence task, it may be the case that the adolescents’ ability to persist on a verbal task may have been more related to their intelligence, than to their ability to persist in difficult situations. Certainly the ability to persist in difficult situations is a trait that would likely be useful for someone faced with chronic and/or acutely stressful situations, for the greater the degree of internal resources available the better off that person will be when faced with difficult situations (Saarni, 1999). However in this case, although persisting on a verbal task was difficult for most students, the degree to which the adolescents persisted was not related to their resilience. What was found was that the students who were better at verbal tasks, often with a higher academic results, they performed better compared to the other participants

A final finding that is noteworthy is the lack of differences observed in the selection of best and worst coping strategies for each of the participants. In fact, the coping strategies selected were more or less similar across the four groups of students.

## **Limitations of the Current Study**

This study had a number of limitations that require caution when interpreting the results. First, the sample size here was too small to be able to generalize the results to a larger population of students. Also the data presented here are casual between self-efficacy, coping mechanisms and resilient behaviors cannot be concluded from this study. In addition, the sample was disproportionately composed of females, so the present study cannot be generalized to male students.

In retrospect this measure did not include enough items about potential stressful situations in home and school life. There was an attempt made to gather more detailed information from the stud parents about the type of family and home adversity faced however the response rate for the parental surveys was too low to include the parental ratings in the estimates of adversity.

## Directions for Future Research

Future research in the study of resilience should address questions of how resilience can be fostered in so many diverse ways and environments. There are numerous ways for adaptation throughout development to occur, and it would be especially interesting to know more about the diverse situations that positive outcomes can be fostered, particularly for those adolescents developing competence in the face of adversity. Future studies may reveal more clearly the nature of how resilient youth are able to adjust and develop normally under diverse and adverse conditions.

In addition, while this study focused on self-efficacy as a potentially important trait for resilient adolescents there are still a number of characteristics that may operate to promote positive outcomes and have yet to be explored. Such potential protective factors include self-confidence, talents and religious faith. The more attention focused on the nature of positive processes that promote competence in the face of adversity, the more this research will be able to offer in order to promote competence in individuals throughout society

## References

- [1] Aspinwall, Lisa G., & Richter, Linda. (1999). Optimism and self-mastery predict morerapid disengagement from unsolvable tasks in the presence of alternatives. *Motivation and Emotion*, 23 (3), 221-245.
- [2] Bandura, Albert, & Cervone, Daniel. (1983). Self-evaluative and self-efficacy mechanisms governing the motivational effects of goal systems. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45 (5), 1017-1028.
- [3] Bandura, Albert, & Jourden, Forest J. (1991). Self-regulatory mechanisms governing the impact of social comparison on complex decision making. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60 (6), 941-951.
- [4] Bandura, Albert, & Schunk, Dale H. (1981). Cultivating competence, self-efficacy, and intrinsic interest through proximal self-motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 41 (3), 586-598.
- [5] Bandura, Albert, Barbaranelli, Claudio, Caprara, Gian Vittorio, & Pastorelli, Concetta. (2001). Self-efficacy beliefs as shapers of children's aspirations can career trajectories. *Child Development*, 72 (1), 187-206.
- [6] Bandura, Albert, Barbaranelli, Claudio, Caprara, Gian Vittorio, & Pastorelli, Concetta.(1999). Self-efficacy pathways to childhood depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76 (2), 258-269.
- [7] Compas, Bruce E., Conner-Smith, Jennifer K., Saltzman, Heidi, Thomsen, AlexandraHarding, & Wadsworth, Martha E. (2001). Coping with stress during childhoodand adolescence: problems, progress, and potential in theory and research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 127 (1), 87-127.

- [8] Connell, J.P. (1985). A new multidimensional measure of children's perceptions of control. *Child Development*, 56, 1018-1041.
- [9] Conner-Smith, J.K., Compas, B.E., Wadsworth, M.E., Thomsen, A.H., & Saltzman, H.(2000). Responses to stress in adolescence: measurement of coping and involuntary stress response. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 68 (6), 976-992.
- [10] Cowen, Emory L., Wyman, Peter A., Work, William C., Kim, Julia Y., Fagen, Douglas B., & Magnus, Keith B. (1997). Follow-up study of young stress-affected and stress-resilient urban children. *Development and Psychopathology*, 9, 565-577.
- [11] Feather, N.T. (1969). Attribution of responsibility and valence of success and failure in relation to initial confidence and task performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 13 (2), 129-144.
- [12] Lengua, Liliana J. (2002). The contribution of emotionality and self-regulation to the understanding of children's response to multiple risk. *Child Development*, 73 (1), 144-161.
- [13] Luthar, Suniya S., Cicchetti, Dante, & Becker, Bronwyn. (2000). The construct of resilience: a critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development*, 71 (3), 543-562.
- [14] Masten, Ann S. (2001). Ordinary magic: resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*, 56 (3), 227-238.
- [15] Masten, Ann S., & Coatsworth, Douglas J. (1998). The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments: lessons from research on successful children. *American Psychologist*, 53 (2), 205-220.
- [16] Masten, Ann S., Hubbard, Jon J., Gest, Scott D., Tellegen, Auke, Garmezy, Norman and Ramirez, MaryLouise. (1999). Competence in the context of adversity: pathways to resilience and maladaptation from childhood to late adolescence. *Development and Psychopathology*, 11, 143-169.
- [17] Newcomb, Michael D., Huba, George J., & Bentler, Peter M. (1981). A multidimensional assessment of stressful life events among adolescents: derivations and correlates. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 22, 400-415.
- [18] Ozer, Elizabeth M., & Bandura, Albert. (1990). Mechanisms governing empowerment effects: a self-efficacy analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(3), 472-486.
- [19] Saarni, Carolyn. (1999). *The development of emotional competence*. New York: Guildford Press.
- [20] Saarni, Carolyn. (1997). Coping with adverse feelings. *Motivation and Emotion* 21 (1), 45-63.
- [21] Sherer, M., Maddox, J.E., Mercandante, B., Prentice-Dunn, S., Jacobs, B., and Rogers, R.W. (1982). The self-efficacy scale: construction and validation. *Psychological Reports*, 51, 663-671.
- [22] Godilano-Sarmiento, B. A. N. J. I. E., and C. H. R. I. S. T. I. A. ALMARIO-Guevara. "Students 'conceptual Understanding And Attitude On Climate Change Resilience And Mitigation Practices.'" *International Journal of Educational Science and Research (IJESR)* 6.2 (2016):7-16
- [23] Ekhaese, Eghosa N., et al. "The Domestic Architecture in Benin, a Good Place for Building Resilience." *International Journal of Humanities, Arts, Medicine and Sciences (BEST: IJHAMS)* 3.3 (2015): 17-28.

- [24] Rahmah, Nur. "Examining Self Efficacy Of Pre-Service Physics Teachers In South Sulawesi." *International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences (IMPACT: IJRANSS)* 6.5 (2018):25-30
- [25] Varghese, Reney, T. Selvin Norman, and Samuel Thavaraj. "Perceived stress and self efficacy among college students: A global review." *International Journal of Human Resource Management and Research (IJHRMR)* 5.3 (2015): 15-24.
- [26] ZARABI, PUNEET SANDHU1& DAZY. "Self-Regulated Strategy: Effect On Self-Efficacy And Well-Being Of Students With Learning Disability." *International Journal of Human Resource Management and Research (IJHRMR)* 9.1 (2019):29-38
- [27] Elsayed, Ashraf M., Yasser A. Shehata, and Ossama M. Badawy. "Comparing The Effect Of Simulation Based Learning Versus On-Scene Learning In Self-Efficacy On Marine Cadets." *International Journal of Library & Educational Science (IASET: IJLES)* 1.2 (2015):1-12
- [28] Orge, A., and Novrina Bigilda. "Stressors and Coping Mechanisms of Faculty, in Selected State Universities and Colleges in Region III, Philippines." *International Journal of Human Resources Management (IJHRM)* 7.1 (2017): 15 - 22.
- [29] Patil, Suma, Pb Khadi, and VU Muktamath. "Influence Of Home Environment On Urban And Rural Infants Physical Growth Status." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IJHSS)* 5.5 (2016):101-106.