

INVITED SYMPOSIUM EARA 2018

Resilience in adolescence: Who among youth living under adversity do well and why?

Chair: Frosso Motti-Stefanidi (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece)

Discussant: Jaap Denissen (Tilburg University, the Netherlands)

Friday September 14th, 13.30-15.00, Auditorium 3

Resilience refers to pathways and patterns of positive adaptation during or following significant risk or adversity (Masten, 2014). Individuals draw on complex internal, relational, and external resources and adaptive tools to counter adversity and adapt in response to disturbances, yielding resistance, recovery, or transformation (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, in press). Resilience is a dynamic process because individuals, their relationships, and their environments are always changing. It is not a trait, although there are characteristics of individuals that support positive adaptation under many circumstances. The capacity of an individual to respond effectively to a challenge will depend on the nature of the challenge, its developmental timing, and protective processes embedded in the organism, relationships with other people, and external systems (Masten & Kalstabakken, 2018).

The goal of the symposium is to make a contribution to the burgeoning literature on resilience in adolescence from a European perspective. The four presentations draw on longitudinal data and focus on different indexes of positive adaptation among adolescents and emerging adults, and on both youth's own characteristics and contextual factors and processes as predictors of individual differences in adaptation under conditions of adversity. Schoon's presentation focuses on emerging adults' tertiary education participation and completion when neither parent went to the university. She examines whether higher personal agency and higher parental expectations and aspirations account for the upward educational mobility of some of these youths. Branje's presentation focuses on resilience among victimized adolescents at risk for depression and school failure. She examines the promotive and/or protective role of a number of personal and contextual resources for these youth's positive adaptation. Motti-Stefanidi and Asendorpf focus on Greek and immigrant youth's school adjustment and psychological wellbeing during the Greek Economic Recession. They examine the role of self-efficacy and family-related factors and processes in accounting for resilience among some of these youths. Salmela-Aro focuses on the role of grit, which refers to youth's determination to overcome adversity, in promoting academic well-being. She examines whether and how grit interacts with mastery and performance goal orientations to contribute to the prediction of academic wellbeing. These papers cover a wide range of risks for youth's adaptation and reveal that adaptation is a multi-dimensional construct. Together, they also showcase the developmental and dynamic nature of resilience in adolescence and emerging adulthood.

PRESENTATION 1: Making it against the odds: The role of individual agency

Ingrid Schoon

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The present study examines the role of individual agency in upward social mobility, asking if manifestation of agency among adolescents facilitates tertiary education participation and completion among young people from families where neither parent went to university. Parental education is generally recognised as a key predictor of educational attainment among their offspring, and young people without university educated parents are less likely than their peers with university educated parents to apply to college, and ultimately to enrol in and complete tertiary education. We ask if adolescent agency can compensate for lack of parental resources, enabling young people to do better than expected. The study is guided by an integrative developmental-contextual model of individual agency taking into account person-context interactions. Agency is conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct, involving indicators of intention, foresight, self-efficacy, valuing education and effort expressed by age 14. The study also takes into account the role of parental educational aspirations and expectations for their children, testing for processes of co-regulation. Drawing on data collected for the nationally representative Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE) and Next Steps it is possible to follow the education transitions of young people throughout secondary and tertiary education (from age 14 to 25). A group of young people were identified who were the first in the family to attend university. Their experiences in the education system are compared with those whose parents had already obtained degree level qualifications. The results suggest that after controlling for gender, ethnicity, prior academic attainment, parental occupational status, income, family structure and housing conditions, indicators of individual agency predicted upward education mobility. In addition, we find evidence of co-regulation - highlighting the crucial role of parental support for higher education in facilitating upward educational mobility.

PRESENTATION 2: Processes of resilience among youth experiencing victimization:

A study from adolescence into young adulthood

Susan Branje

Utrecht University, Dept. of Youth and Family, the Netherlands

Youth who are victimized are at an increased risk of experiencing internalizing problems and difficulties with school functioning. The goal of the present study was to examine long-term processes of resilience among victimized adolescents at risk for depression and school failure. Many adolescents show stable trajectories of maladaptive functioning when they are exposed to stress and adversity, such as being victimized. However, other adolescents might have assets residing within the individual and resources external to the individual that might make them less vulnerable to adversity or help them to overcome the negative consequences of victimization. Although pathways that involve significant change are relatively more rare than stable pathways, they are also potentially more informative regarding the personal and contextual factors that account for these developmental changes. We examined the factors that make adolescents resilient to victimization and have positive developmental outcomes into young adulthood in the context of adversity. The longitudinal perspective allowed us to examine resilience as a developmental and dynamic process that varies across time, rather than as stable and static. The sample included 497 Dutch adolescents (54% boys) from an ongoing longitudinal study RADAR (Research on Adolescent Development and Relationships). Data were collected across 9 measurement waves from age 13 to 24 years. Adolescents annually reported their depressive symptoms, school or work functioning, assets and resources. In addition, reports of parents, friends and intimate partners were available. We included several assets, such as personality and self-concept clarity, and resources, such as parental support, friend support and partner support. We conducted longitudinal moderation analyses to test developmental pathways of depressive symptoms and school/work functioning as a function of a history of victimization during adolescence. We tested the associations victimization, assets and resources with development of depressive symptoms and school/work functioning as time-varying factors. In addition to testing our hypotheses at the between-subject level, we also tested our hypotheses at the within-person level. In other words, at the between-person level we investigated whether adolescents high in victimization tend to have better psychosocial adaptation if they have more positive assets and resources than other adolescents high in victimization. At the within person level we tested whether adolescents experiencing victimization have better psychosocial adaptation when they have more positive assets and resources than before. The inclusion of different assets and resources at different points across development from early adolescence to young adulthood enabled us to explore the developmental processes underlying resilience. The results of the study will be discussed in terms of a compensatory model, with direct effects of the promotive factors on psychosocial adaptation, versus a protective factor model, in which assets or resources moderate or reduce the effects of victimization on psychosocial adaptation.

PRESENTATION 3: Resilience among youth living in Greece during the Economic Recession:

The role of social and personal capital

Frosso Motti-Stefanidi* & Jens Asendorpf**

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The present study examines whether different family and personal resources are promotive and/or protective of youth's adaptation and wellbeing particularly during times of an Economic Recession. Both variable-centered and person-centered analyses are conducted to test the hypothesized significance of resources for resilience. Two cohorts of 2100 adolescents are compared. Cohort 1 data were collected before the economic crisis (2005) and cohort 2 data were collected during the economic crisis (2013). Participants were 12 years old and in the first year of middle school. The first cohort was enrolled in 12 public schools and the second cohort in 14 public schools Athens (total of 103 classrooms). Cohort 1 consisted of 50%, and cohort 2 of 63%, immigrant students. The study is grounded on a risk and resilience framework (Masten, 2014). Multiple methods and informants were used to assess youth's adaptation. Adaptation indices were academic performance (GPA, school records), school engagement and conduct (teacher-rated, Motti-Stefanidi & Asendorpf, 2017), emotional wellbeing (SDQ, Goodman et al., 1998, self-rated). Resources were parents' education and employment status (parents' report), parental school involvement (teacher-rated) (Motti-Stefanidi, Asendorpf, & Masten, 2012), youth's self-efficacy (self-rated, Bandura et al., 1996). To match the two cohorts, we used Inverse Probability of Treatment Weighing (IPTW). Variable-focused analyses were conducted with MPlus7. We run multilevel analyses based on linear random coefficient regression models. Cohort was treated as a classroom-level predictor. Most of the resources were promotive of youth's positive adaptation, i.e. predicted better adaptation in both cohorts. Parental education and school involvement had a specific protective role during the economic crisis for youth's academic achievement, and parents' employment status for youth's conduct. The results were not significantly moderated by immigrant status. Person-focused analyses were conducted comparing groups defined by their adaptation (positive adaptation defined by scores above the 40th percentile of the distribution of adaptation outcomes in cohort 1) and cohort membership. A cumulative index of adaptation was also calculated. Resources were divided in good-enough resources (scores above the 40th percentile in cohort 1) and low resources (scores below the 25th percentile). A key finding is that youth with good-enough scores on all resources had equally positive adaptation before and during the crisis. In contrast, youth with low scores on all resources had significantly worse adaptation during the crisis. The findings suggest that family and personal resources confer general advantages for youth's adaptation but may be particularly important for overcoming adversities linked to a systemic economic recession.

PRESENTATION 4: Does It Help to Have “Sisu”?

The predictive and interactive role of grit in academic wellbeing

Katariina Salmela-Aro

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Grit is of special interest in Finland. The Finnish word “sisu”, which denotes a determination to overcome adversity and is perceived by Finns as a hallmark of their national character, is often translated as grit. Defined by Angela Duckworth and colleagues (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087) as “trait-level perseverance and passion for long-term goals,” grit encompasses the ability to maintain one’s interest, exert effort, and persist at tasks over long periods of time. The present study aims to examine the associations between grit and academic wellbeing and how grit interacts with mastery and performance goal orientations contribute to the prediction of academic wellbeing. The participants are drawn from 925 Finnish 11th graders, (68.5% female, ages 17/18). Structure Equation Modelling with latent moderated structural (LMS) equation approach were used. After controlling gender and 9th grade GPA, results showed that both consistency of interest and perseverance of effort contributed to students’ academic wellbeing, with an exception that consistency of interest did not affect school engagement. We also found a compensatory interaction between performance-avoidance orientation and perseverance of effort in predicting school engagement and burnout, indicating that perseverance of effort is more important for students with higher performance-avoidance orientation to promote engagement and alleviate burnout in school. The results suggest that grit play an important role in enhancing academic wellbeing. Moreover, on a subsample we used the Experience Sampling Method via smartphones (N=8 378 beeps). Only half of the variance in grit was on the between level, indicating that grit is not wholly stable. Students’ propensity to give up increased as the classroom activities became more challenging. Grit showed the opposite effect: when classroom activities were more challenging, the students experienced more grit.