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RESILIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

An international roundtable to promote resilience in times of the COVID-19 pandemic

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RESILIENCE FOR THE FUTURE

An international roundtable to promote resilience in times of the COVID-19 pandemic

Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti has organized the event "RESILIENCE FOR THE FUTURE: an international roundtable to promote resilience in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic" to raise awareness and deepen understanding of the real impact of the pandemic on individuals and communities and to bring together international scientific contributions.

Through the activities of its Research Institute for Neuroscience, Education, and Didactics (RINED), Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti promotes health, resilience, and wellbeing, divulgating effective strategies to support individuals facing a constantly changing world.

We will identify preventive and intervention strategies to face the emergency, presenting best practices to rise to the challenges of today.

More specifically, we aim at answering the following questions:

1. How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted different countries?
2. How have different countries evaluated resilience as a resource for preventative and intervention strategies?
3. Did researchers from different countries consider the pandemic a crisis or a catalyst for social change?
4. What studies around resilience could be useful for a better understanding of the Covid-19 pandemic?
5. How could research prepare societies to face emergencies, making the world more resilient for future events?
6. What aspects of the present moment deserve more attention from the scientific community in order to develop a more resilient world?

In the light of participants' contributions, we will highlight the importance of resilience to prepare individuals and communities to face future adversities and changes.

Patrizio Paoletti

President of Patrizio Paoletti Foundation, RINED Research Institute for Neuroscience Education and Didactics

Italy

Spherical resilience as a continuous process: reading opportunity in the crisis, in the light of the Sphere Model of Consciousness

This contribution focuses on the neuro-psycho-pedagogical construct of "spherical resilience" as a useful tool to capitalize on the changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the aim of making the emergency a catalyst for human development. "Spherical resilience" is understood as a continuous and transformative process that does not end with the restoration of a condition prior to the trauma. Instead, it involves the implementation of a dynamic balance, characteristic of continuous development. In this perspective, it is possible to read the changes due to the pandemic as a request to individuals and institutions for a deep transformation of behaviors, attitudes and identities in a resilient way. I believe that this resilient capacity for transformation can arise from a neuro-scientifically based view of self-awareness. The Sphere Model of Consciousness (SMC) is a neuro-phenomenological model that describes the potential functioning of a resilient mind through the geometric representation of a sphere built on three axes that represent the dimensions of subjective experience: Time, Emotion and Self-Determination. The three axes cross each other determining six polarities and an ideal center of the sphere called the "Place of Pre-Existence" (PPE). Around the center, the different dimensions of the Self: corporeal and narrative are represented as concentric circles. The constant re-processing of experience requires awareness of the selves and the ability to shift between them. This shift requires training in the four skills of spherical resilience: (1) self-awareness, focusing not only on the contingent state of manifestation but on the potential dynamics of developing one's identity (2) the ability to recognise the emotional conditioning of experience in terms of reward/punishment, in order to transform negative emotions into neutral and/or positive ones; (3) recalling aspirations and values through training in focusing on specific questions of meaning, (4) continually restructuring experience according to the first three qualities in order to enable one to overcome the habitual self. Spherical resilience is thus implemented in the ability to re-process and transform experiences: the redistribution of pressures across equidistant points allows a new space for self-narration in order to face adversity by prefiguring the desired future for ourselves and society.

Tania Di Giuseppe

Psychologist, head of the Department of Research and Didactics at Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti's RINED institute

Italy

Envisioning the future and the 10 keys for resilience

The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects have highlighted the urgency for individuals and communities to become stronger, both on a psychological and social level. Empowering active and positive resources concerning the inner world and the related social implications is fundamental for building a more resilient humanity, able to face uncertainty and adversities. This aim should be at the core of all future initiatives and interventions in every field of knowledge.

At the end of February 2020 Covid-19 reached Italy, causing 139.000 deaths and 7 million infections. The virus and the anti-contagion restrictions provoked psychological distress across many groups and age ranges within the population (e.g., anxiety, depression, stress, sleep disorders, parental burnout). The divorce rate increased by 30%, while domestic violence cases increased by 70%. Remote-learning changed the study-routine of adolescents, and a substantial increase in screen-time emerged across all the age-ranges. Moreover, in the last two years, one million jobs were lost. Although Italy's government has launched a national recovery plan, encompassing health, education, research, social cohesion and digitalization, resilience has not yet been sufficiently explored as a resource for preventive and intervention strategies. In relation to the global emergency, the Patrizio Paoletti Foundation has promoted a specific programme entitled "Envisioning the future - focus on Resilience", which is still ongoing and provides online training initiatives to support different segments of the population during the pandemic, disseminating resilience practices. Among the courses in the programme, the course entitled "The 10 keys to resilience" is currently being tested, which is a distillation of knowledge organised according to the interdisciplinary approach Pedagogy for the Third Millennium (PTM), on how to activate the brain circuits that promote well-being and the ability to cope with change. In order to foster a future where the role of resilience is central, the international scientific community should promote the validation of shared and standardized interdisciplinary protocols and resilience-based best practices.

Golnaz Tabibnia

Neuroscientist, Department of Psychological Science, University of California

USA

How the brain processes stress and the role of resilience to face the future

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has affected each person differently (e.g., some have lost loved ones to the virus, some have lost jobs, some have suffered mental health declines due to social isolation, uncertainty, etc.), there are evidence-based tools everyone can use to cope better with these stressors. In order to better equip ourselves to take action for boosting our resilience, I believe it helps to consider how the brain processes stress and emotions. I would share a few "lessons from the brain" that I believe can help inform resilience-building, including: 1) stress compromises the (prefrontal) brain regions that help us regulate stress and emotions, which can lead to a vicious cycle, underscoring the importance of proactive resilience-building; 2) conversely, active coping strengthens the brain's coping circuitry, making it easier to cope in the future; and 3) understanding that adults can rewire their brains to become more resilient may boost a person's confidence in being able to learn to be more resilient. Furthermore, based on a review of the neural basis of over two dozen behavioral and psychosocial strategies for boosting psychological resilience, my work identifies three general routes for individuals to build resilience: 1) down-regulating the negative (e.g., cognitive reappraisal) by reducing distress-related responses of the amygdala, hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, and autonomic nervous system; 2) up-regulating the positive (e.g., optimism, social connectedness) by activating mesostriatal reward pathways, which in turn can buffer the effects of stress; and 3) transcending the self (e.g., mindfulness, religious engagement) by reducing activation in the default mode network, a brain network associated with self-reflection, mind-wandering, and rumination. An implication of this "tripartite model" is that reducing stressors or the experience of distress are not the only tools we have for resilience-building, that positivity, as well as physical, social, and spiritual activities can be impactful as well.

Rotem Leshem

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Israel

Maintaining mental health and well-being in days of COVID-19 pandemic - Is self-resilience enough?

The COVID-19 pandemic is having an enormous impact on mental health and well-being worldwide. Studies conducted in Israel and other countries indicate a significant increase in widespread adverse effects in the population. The findings of the studies by age indicate that social closure and distance have a greater impact on the socio-emotional state of young children than on the socio-emotional state of adults. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in Israel collected in the first closure show that 25% of parents reported a deterioration in their children's emotional state, with a sharp increase in requests for mental health services, mainly due to sadness, loneliness, and anxiety.

In face of the current turmoil which our populations are facing, one of the many questions arises as to whether a more resilient world can be built after the Covid-19 epidemic and how. While there is general agreement that resilience is an important characteristic of a healthy society, I would like to address two opposing effects of resilience on public mental health that we need to consider when discussing ways to strengthen resilience in the world.

One, is the positive effect of self-resilience that can be achieved when resilience is accompanied by our ability for empathy and compassion for the other, and to become focused-other out of putting the needs of the other above our own needs. In contrast, the second effect of self-resilience can be negative when it involves high psychological hardiness, self-focus, and lack of connection to the other. Self-resilience can reinforce the experience of separation and social alienation when the substrate of the individual is founded on "egocentric being" and detachment from the other, without a sense of brotherhood and responsibility towards the other.

In presenting these two opposing effects, I am interested in making an argument that the self-resilience of the individual does not guarantee us social resilience or mental health. For self-resilience to be a protective factor against mental and social distress of the individual and against the disintegration of the social fabric, especially in times of epidemics and crises, we need to adopt a whole-of-society approach to mental health and to address resilience within the environmental-psychological context.

Kaltrina Kelmendi

Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology & Institute of Psychology, University of Prishtina

Kosovo

Resilience and covid-19: focus on the individual, the family and the community

From the beginning of March 2020, when the first cases of COVID-19 were identified, the Kosovo government introduced various measures to reduce the number of deaths and infections from COVID-19. Kosovo is categorized as a low and middle-income country, and pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities were heightened during COVID-19 pandemics. Notable, there is a lack of health care infrastructure, funds, and underdeveloped mental health services, representing an additional burden to provide services during COVID-19. Collaborating with the Ministry of Health, the department of psychology of the University of Prishtina developed several strategies for promoting mental health during COVID-19, including establishing online and phone psychological first aid services and developing psycho-educational videos and webinars. Similarly, support groups for parents, students, and teachers were another support mechanism developed to facilitate the adaptation process to online learning and online teaching.

Notably, all these experiences with digital mental health services are presenting an opportunity to advance mental health care services in countries with very low resources, such as Kosovo. Furthermore, they decreased the stigma about seeking psychological help and provided a broader reach to these services. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic created a new opportunity for the broader inclusion of digital competencies in teaching and learning.

In Kosovo, most of the existing studies to date were mainly focused on the risk factors associated with COVID-19 challenges. However, there is a lack of data on strengths and resources that promote resilience and improve mental health, focusing on a strength-based perspective on support resources, including the individual, family, and community.

Gaye Watson Warthe

Associate Professor, Faculty of Health, Community and Education, Mount Royal University

Canada

Beyond disaster: covid-19 and the need for transformational change through resilience

Canada has experienced significant and continuing impacts from COVID-19. All aspects of Canadian life have been affected with some populations experiencing disproportionate impacts.

Resilience has been largely absent from early discussions of COVID-19. In part, this reflects the belief that the pandemic would be followed by a post-pandemic recovery. With ongoing waves of outbreak and emerging variants, increasingly there is a shift from discussions of post-pandemic recovery to much needed discussion on addressing ongoing challenges including systemic and structural barriers, inequities and the need for change. COVID-19 has underscored the need for transformational change. It is not clear if the change that will be facilitated will be the level of change necessary. During the pandemic, I have been engaged with two continuing research projects and one that is directly related to the lessons learned during COVID-19. Although resilience was not a specific focus of the research, factors contributing to the ability to respond to ongoing crisis, change and uncertainty have emerged as themes across all projects.

Disaster preparedness and the need for disaster preparedness has been the subject of much study during the last twenty-years. While there is evidence that disaster preparedness is necessary, until COVID-19 most disasters were considered relatively short term with a longer corresponding phase of recovery. As we approach the two-year mark of the pandemic with no end in view, consideration of how to support resilience is increasingly important. Understanding how individuals and organizations have integrated what they have learned or learning how to maximize integration and the development of resilient responses mid-disaster would contribute to resilient responses.

Vinca Bigo

Professor and Faculty director at Kedge Business School

France

Mindsets in times of crisis

In my country, Covid-19 has induced fear and lead to democracy being curtailed and all decisions being streamlined by the dominant health discourse. The government knows that populations are prepared to put up with a lot but those for whom liberty and physical sovereignty remains a priority prove to be resilient too.

I think that a pandemic is both a crisis and a facilitator of change. A crisis is a process of transformation. For the government it is a way to govern with less democracy, passing laws and decrees whilst receiving less scrutiny. It is prompting and provoking change with people who are aware climate change is on our doorstep.

My research bears on mindsets, including mental limitations and beliefs that stand in the way of personal and societal progress. Resilience is developed when human beings cease to be enslaved and limited by their mental and emotional patterns. It also bears on ways to calm thoughts and emotions and the development of mindsets that facilitate the identification and manifestation of desirable outcomes.

Research could look at communities that have found ways of living on a smaller and slower scale closer to nature, since large cities are fragile in times of climate and viral challenges. Further research should focus on mindset.

The scientific community should recognize its researchers are embodied, sensing, biased, emotional, and that these dimensions, when acknowledged, stand to facilitate more peripheral and connected ways of being, thinking and acting in a world that requires deeply humane approaches and connections moving forward.

Tal Dotan Ben-Soussan

Director of RINED Research Institute for Neuroscience Education and Didactics, Patrizio Paoletti Foundation

Italy

Increasing resilience: molecular and electrophysiological changes following quadrato motor training and meditation

At this historic moment, which is characterized by exponential stress due to the covid pandemic pushing anxiety, we need tools to help us cope better. The threats of illness and possible death or lasting symptoms; job insecurity; social isolation (or its opposite, too much togetherness in small, crowded living spaces); the upending of daily routines; financial losses; for some, the looming threat of eviction; for others, the impossibility of keeping a business all affect our immune system, sense of security, awareness and information processing. What may be required in order to adjust are internal tools such as different cognitive and sensorimotor training paradigms, through which people can enhance their cognitive, emotional and physical wellbeing and become more resilient. In the current talk, I will discuss the underlying biological and neuronal mechanisms mediating improved cognitive and emotional functions, extending previous knowledge regarding the benefits of training for increasing emotional, molecular and neuronal resilience.

While stress suppresses many brain functions and has negative neuroplastic effects, such as on brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) synthesis, which is important for learning and neuronal plasticity; some antidepressant treatments were found to increase BDNF. Nevertheless, injection of BDNF was previously found to produce an opposing depression-like response, emphasizing the importance of activating the body's own resources. To this aim, we utilized the Quadrato Motor Training (QMT), a specifically-structured movement meditation. QMT was found to improve neuronal communication, attentive relaxation and creativity, all of which are important factors related to resilience. QMT was further found to increase proBDNF, enhance brain function, information processing and reflectivity. In the current talk, I will shortly share these results in relation to resilience and emphasize the usefulness of integrating training such as the QMT and meditation across the lifespan. I will also share two protocols which we are conducting aimed at increasing coping during covid in high school and university students focusing on the importance of language and search for meaning that may aid in coping with stress and increase physical, immunological and emotional well-being.

Sherry Hamby

Professor of Psychology and organizer of "ResilienceCon", University of the South, Tennessee

USA

Overcoming the "great resignation crisis" through resilience

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the United States, not only in terms of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths, but also in revealing the extent of ongoing health disparities and the fragility of our public health system. Although there has been much ink spilled on the ways that people have been responding resiliently to the pandemic, efforts to support the psychosocial strengths—at all levels of the social ecology—that are needed to cope with such a global disaster have been scattershot. Nonetheless, it is clear that the pandemic has spurred many social changes, such as what is being called the "Great Resignation" in the U.S., as the pandemic has led to classic post-traumatic growth responses such as re-evaluating one's priorities in life. In my work on resilience, I have been surprised to learn how central 'meaning making' is for overcoming trauma. This can apply to Covid-19 because it is essential to help people connect to something larger than themselves in the response to any trauma, and more focus on the public good might help motivate people to follow public health guidelines. We need more basic research on the strengths that help people the most during global emergencies, and more intervention research on what helps people develop these strengths.

Nandan Bhattacharya

Assistant Professor, Human Resource Development Centre, Jadavpur University

India

Resilience as a tool for psychological well-being

In India, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the whole country. Consequences were immense especially on economic, political, social, psychological and educational fields. Regarding the issue of resilience, anxiety and depression were two major factors which affected people severely. We observed both existential and identity crisis due to prolonged lockdown and detachment from all sorts of social activities. Unfortunately, resilience was not a government's resource for prevention and intervention strategies.

The pandemic was both a factor of crisis and a facilitator for change. On the one hand it caused severe crisis due to inadequacy of medical facilities and death. The social isolation caused mental health problems, particularly in children. The education sector is disturbed causing drop out, frustration among the students. The economy is jeopardized (e.g.. issue of recession, migratory laborers). But it has also facilitated a few changes. People exhibited wonderful altruistic behavior during Covid-19, a good practice as a coping strategy.

Our study was on the patients and the treatment team of Covid-19. Fear of death, isolation and burnout are causing tremendous anxiety and depression among people. We engaged them in art therapy for resilience. Almost every participant expressed their relief from stress by crying signifying the release from a high alert tension.

Still today mental health is a subject of hesitation and prejudice in third world countries. Research regarding such issues with proper scientific approach must be carried out not only from the psychological perspective but from the viewpoint of social sciences.

I feel optimum resilience of a person can only be achieved by societal resilience as a whole. It must be a TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More) work. Therefore now the time has come to perform cross discipline work coalescing Science, medical sciences, Psychology and Social sciences and other relevant disciplines.

Aras Bozkurt

Associate Professor, Department of Distance Education, Anadolu University

Turkey

A new normal in which nobody should be left behind

The pandemic has affected every layer of Turkish society: resilience was perceived and evaluated as a factor for preventative strategies.

The pandemic was, metaphorically, a double-edged sword. It offered a crisis with many lessons learned. It was kind of a benchmark test to reveal our strengths and limitations. However, it also facilitated and even accelerated many issues such as digital transformation of institutions and digital competencies of individuals to survive in a new normal where keeping social distance has become a new norm.

In my research, I have focused on individual and institutional resilience with a specific focus on education. I see the pandemic as a change agent that fueled transformation in education. This is important in the case of Turkey because the overall population is around 85 million and from primary education to higher education there are around 30 million students. That means our actions related to the Covid-19 pandemic affect one-third of the whole population. In this regard, my research directed issues such as equity and social justice, and the digital divide which had negative effects and I intend to understand this reality and identify the measures to mitigate the side effects. As well as considering the social and psychological impact of the pandemic, we also need new pedagogical strategies such as trauma-informed pedagogy of care and empathy.

We have to improve and sharpen our skills to be adaptive, to ensure the sustainability of social and communal institutions and embrace the notion that we shouldn't leave anyone behind. It is a challenging vision, yet we must make it possible by generating scientifically proven or validated strategies

We have to unite and stand as one against a global threat. To do so, we need to share our experiences and know-how and make the global community more open and transparent. I would like to put a special emphasis that terms like open science and open knowledge must gain more attention as we need such approaches to survive as a global society.

Cecilia Mwangi
e Anthony Muriithi Ireri

Lecturer,Department of Educational Psychology, Kenyatta University

Kenya

The psycho-social component of resilience to cope with pandemic-related student discomfort

Since March 2020, the pandemic has impacted all sectors of the Kenyan economy. The Covid-19 containment measures led to increased levels of: unemployment; lost income; pandemic-related mental health challenges like depression, alcohol and drug use, insomnia, anxiety, bereavement, stigma and discrimination. The pandemic also increased cases of: gender-based violence; violence against children; and teenage pregnancies. It also reversed the gains made on SDGs through loss of study time and school drop outs; the global economic recess; tax relief measures; increased poverty; lost livelihoods and businesses.

At the onset of the pandemic resilience was not tapped into as a resource for prevention responses. However, with time interventions started embracing resilience-building strategies although such efforts remain largely non-specific/non-programmed.

In Kenya, the pandemic led to an increase in public awareness of the pandemic and its changing trends; Covid-19 vaccine acceptability and uptake; uptake of media messages about Covid-19; devolved government interventions; new innovation; uptake of technology (especially e-learning and online work); and increased multi-sectoral collaboration.

Our research, which has mainly focused on resilience in education, could relate to Covid-19 by helping duty bearers know how to build students' psycho-social resilience to lessen the pandemic-related psychological distress. Our work could also inform curriculum designers to mainstream resilience into the curriculum and education sector plans.

Research could prepare societies for emergencies by enhancing the understanding of the nature and impact of disasters as well as the various forms of societal vulnerabilities and responses. Research could also map out society resilience capacities and propose models for integrating various forms of grassroots' response and coping mechanisms based on lessons from earlier emergencies.

We think that the scientific community can make the world more resilient by: (a) Sharing more knowledge about disasters; (b) Promoting awareness and understanding of the dimensions and role of psychological resilience; (c) Designing evidence-based guidelines, standards, and models for resilience programming at the individual, community, organizational, and multi-sectoral levels; (d) Encouraging adoption of culturally-sensitive resilience capacity building interventions; (e) Advocating for the role of local support mechanisms in resilience building in times of disasters.

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