

Definitions of resilience for stress studies

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Exposure to stress is unavoidable in our daily lives. Most people might be subjected to at least one extreme stress (e.g., potentially life-threatening traumatic situations) that can cause serious adverse effects on their mental health [1]. For that reason, resilience has become a topical research issue among researchers in the fields of medicine, mental health, and science to help people improve their capability to withstand stress.

One of the most crucial steps to effectively studying resilience is giving it an appropriate definition. In the plenary meeting of the 29th Annual International Society for Traumatic Stress, experts from different disciplines thoroughly discussed the definition of resilience, including the meeting's chair (Steven Southwick) and panelists (George Bonanno, Ann Masten, Catherine Panter-Brick, and Rachel Yehuda). The meeting was organized in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in November 2013 [2].

In conclusion of the discussion, four definitions of resilience were proposed:

1. Resilience is a stable trajectory of healthy functioning after a highly adverse event;
2. Resilience is a conscious effort to move forward in an insightful and integrated positive manner as a result of lessons learned from an adverse experience;
3. Resilience is the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability, function, and development of that system;
4. Resilience is a process of harnessing resources to sustain well-being.

All panelists also emphasized the complexity of resilience as it has distinct meanings for different individuals, families, organizations, societies, and cultures. Moreover, people's resilience degree also varies depending on the conditions and types of stress they face [2].



Figure: Stressed person (CC BY-SA 4.0); https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Headache-1557872_960_720.jpg

Such high complexity and variance of resilience might be lessened if we view it from the information-processing perspective. Assuming that each person is an information collection-cum-processor with homeostasis, they must constantly exchange information with the external environment to prolong its existence [3]. A person's resilience can be deemed as the capacity to maintain homeostasis when exposed to harmful information (including old and new information) in the external environment. With this information-processing-based definition, researchers may be able to reduce the complexity and variance induced by different social beliefs about resilience [4-6].

References

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