Resolving emotional pain from trauma and loss: Impact of resilience

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Introduction

- Psychological resilience is the ability of an individual to remain unaffected by or to successfully adapt to perturbation.
- Individuals with great resilience experience more positive emotions, and report less chronic pain.
- Similar brain pathways are activated in experiences of physical pain and emotional pain.
- No research has explicitly addressed the potential relation between resilience and emotional pain; the purpose of this study is to examine that relation.

Hypotheses

- H1: People who write about resolving experiences will have higher resilience scores than those who do not write about resolution.
- H2: People who write about resolving experiences will react less than those who do not write about resolution.
- H3: People who write about resolving experiences will have higher PANAS Positive Affect scores than those who do not write about resolution.

Methods

- Participants (N = 100) were randomly and equally assigned to write about a personal experience of emotional pain or trauma.
  - Mostly women (n = 78)
  - Average age 20.3 years (SD = 3.1 years)
- Resilience Scale
- Positive and Negative Affect Schedule
- Coding Manual
  - Resolution (Resolved, Unclear, Unresolved)
  - Response intensity (0-100)
  - Situational intensity (0-100)
  - Three independent raters trained to criterion

Results and Discussion

- H1 supported
  - Those who indicated resolving aversive events tended to have higher resilience scores than those who wrote about not resolving stressors, or were unclear.
- H2 not supported
  - No difference between response intensity and resolving life events.
- H3 supported
  - Those who wrote about resolution tended to score higher on the PANAS positive affect scale than unclear and unresolved groups.
  - Inter-rater reliability for resolution coding was 75%; all discrepancies used a third-rater as a “tie breaker.”
  - Positively correlated with the PANAS positive affect subscale.

Limitations:

- Poor interrater reliability for response intensity.
- Undergraduate sample limits emotionally painful and traumatic experiences.
- Resolution of trauma and emotional pain were regarded as equivalent.
- Future studies should interview participants about emotionally painful events and utilize multiple measures of resolution.

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Tables

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<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Comparison of Resolving Aversive Life Events</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Resolution Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unresolved (N = 23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience Scores</td>
<td>129.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20.19)</td>
<td>(14.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANAS Positive Affect</td>
<td>21.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6.76)</td>
<td>(7.39)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PANAS Negative Affect</td>
<td>33.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>(6.11)</td>
<td>(7.34)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Situational Intensity</td>
<td>68.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>(13.17)</td>
<td>(13.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Intensity</td>
<td>29.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(10.91)</td>
<td>(10.21)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* indicates a significant one way ANOVA at the p < .05 level. Means of differing subscripts significantly differ at the p < .05 level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Correlations of Resilience, Situational Intensity, and Response Intensity Across Various Measures</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Resilience Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resilience Scale</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDI</td>
<td>.57**</td>
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<tr>
<td>PANAS Positive Affect</td>
<td>.33**</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>PTCI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Situational Intensity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Intensity</td>
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*Note: "*p < .05; **p < .01.

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