

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW OF FAMILY RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Family resilience is a dynamic process that helps families to navigate and overcome adversities and crises. The introduction of general systems theory and its application to family therapy further contributed to developing the concept of family resilience. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of family resilience while highlighting some of the challenges in its conceptualization, whose reconsideration might be of broader importance in future research. Starting from the understanding of the development path of the concept of family resilience, this paper provides insight into how to view the key constructs incorporated in the concept of family resilience. Following this, emphasis in this paper is given to the challenges in conceptualizing family resilience. These challenges include definitions of family resilience, central terms used in models, and variations in the operationalization and measurement of key constructs. The models of family resilience presented in the paper are the ones considered influential in contemporary family studies. They provide frameworks for understanding the processes and cycles involved in family adjustment, adaptation, and response to stress and crisis. The conceptual review offered by this paper could contribute to conducting further research on family resilience.

Key words: Family resilience, adversities, conceptualization, key constructs, models of family resilience

Introduction

Even though there are many differences in definitions, family resilience refers to the ability of a family to adapt, recover, and thrive in the face of adversity or challenging circumstances. It involves the capacity of a family to maintain its cohesion, functioning, and well-being while navigating and

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overcoming stressors or traumatic events. Family resilience is the capacity of a family to maintain its core functioning, cohesion, and well-being in the face of external pressures or internal conflicts. Resilient families possess certain qualities and dynamics that enable them to navigate through difficult situations and maintain a sense of stability and harmony. The concept of family resilience has roots in various disciplines, including general systems theory, family system theory, and ecological systems theory. The shift from focusing on individual weaknesses to recognizing and harnessing individual strengths was an important aspect of this development. The family resilience framework is established by integrating ecological and developmental perspectives within the context of family systems. This approach allows for examining family functions concerning sociocultural contexts and the multidimensional aspects of family life (Maurović et al., 2020). It is essential to note that family resilience is a complex and multidimensional concept, and there is ongoing debate and discussion among researchers regarding its precise definition and nature. Different scholars may emphasize various factors and components of family resilience based on their theoretical perspectives and research interests. This paper recognizes that family resilience is a complex and multidimensional concept and that there is ongoing debate and discussion among researchers regarding its precise definition and nature. To achieve that, it includes understanding this concept's developmental process, existing and emerging challenges in conceptualization, and presenting some of the most influential models of family resilience among researchers and theoreticians. By conducting and offering a comprehensive conceptual review of family resilience, researchers, theoreticians, and practitioners could better understand the multidimensional nature of resilience within families and develop insights that can inform future research, practice, and policy initiatives.

Development of Family Resilience Concept

Resilience is a concept that was initially used in the natural sciences. Later, in the early sixties of the last century, the term resilience was introduced into the social sciences and began to be used more intensively from the seventies among theoreticians and researchers (Ungar, 2012). The development of the concept of resilience and family resilience itself has deep roots in the concept of individual resilience to the basic principles of general systems theory, including

family system theory and related therapeutic models, as well as studies on family stress and coping (Maurović et al., 2020). As a concept, family resilience started to develop from diverse aspects and areas of research. In the field of social sciences, an important step towards defining this concept started in the mid-twentieth century when some of the researchers started the separation from the ideas of psychoanalysis and turned to recognizing and focusing on the strengths of the individuals rather than their weaknesses (Coatsworth & Duncan, 2003). Following this, the humanistic approach continued emphasizing the quality of the individuals' experience and focusing on resources that will allow them to resolve their difficulties (Richardson, 2002). As researchers in various fields started to notice and analyze correlations and dependability among different phenomena, general system theory was introduced (Von Bertalanffy, 1968), which influenced certain research scholars to extend the idea to the level of the family and to develop the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and the family system theory (Bowen, 1978). The application of system theory in family therapy contributed to developing the concept of family resilience (Hawley, 2013), which affected the paradigm shift from the deficit of the family system to its strengths (Sixby, 2005).

As per the previously presented, family resilience is an emerging concept, and there is no consensus in defining it, and the debate about its nature is still ongoing (Klika & Herrenkohl, 2013; Luthar et al., 2000).

Challenges in the Conceptualization of Family Resilience

Many scholars have elaborated on the theory that lies in the basis of family resilience, but more than empirical evidence about the phenomenon is needed. It is important to note that there has been a shift from a static view to its dynamic nature. Additionally, contemporary theorists and researchers emphasize that family resilience is not a categorical state but a continuum and contingent, meaning that families can be more or less resilient and resilient only in some circumstances (Mackay, 2003). Although there is some consensus regarding the definition of family resilience, some differences and ambiguities exist around the conceptualization of family resilience within the human sciences. These ambiguities include (Luthar et al., 2000):

- Conceptualization of family resilience as a trait, process, and outcome;
- Central terms used in models of resilience;
- Variations in operationalization and measurement of key constructs.

Conceptualization of family resilience as a trait, process, and outcome

Family resilience can be seen as a trait, meaning we can see the protective factor as the primary key for the family to survive and rise from adversity. This protective factor is found within the family through positive traits that encourage families to rise out of the crisis (Herdiana et al., 2018, p. 43). McCubbin and McCubbin (1992) define family resilience as characteristic family dimensions and capabilities that help the family to be resilient despite changes and crises. These are positive behavioural responses and competencies of the individual and the family. Viewing family resilience as a trait suggests that certain inherent or stable factors within a family contribute to their resilience across different contexts and over time. These factors can include individual and collective characteristics such as optimism, problem-solving skills, flexibility, effective communication, social support networks, and shared values and beliefs (MacPhee et al., 2015). They manifest themselves under stress or unfavourable circumstances and determine the family's ability to escape crisis or permanent stress. Family resilience can be conceptualized as a capability because it encompasses the capacity of a family to adapt, cope, and recover from difficult circumstances. These capabilities are not innate or static but are developed and refined over time through experiences, resources, and support systems (Walsh, 2003). Trait-based perspectives on family resilience emphasize that some families may possess inherent strengths or protective factors that enable them to adapt and recover more effectively from adversity. These traits are believed to be relatively stable and can provide a foundation for resilience in various challenges (MacPhee et al., 2015).

One of the most famous experts who support the view of family resilience as a process is Froma Walsh. She defines resilience as the ability to survive and rise from crisis or adversity. Walsh describes this through a dynamic process involving positive adaptation to a crisis. Resilience enables a family to develop a positive response to a crisis and encourages families to recover and grow from the experiences of adversity they have experienced. Family resilience

refers to a family's ability to recover from adversity to become stronger and more empowered (Walsh, 2003). It is a set of processes that provide the family with effective ways to escape a crisis or permanent stress. Family resilience is an active process of building, improving, and optimizing integrity and the well-being of family members and the family community as a whole (Herdiana et al., 2018). Understanding family resilience as a process acknowledges the dynamic nature of families and the complexity of their experiences. This perspective emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and support systems to enhance a family's capabilities and foster resilience in times of adversity (MacPhee et al., 2015). Indeed, the understanding of family resilience has evolved to recognize it as a dynamic process rather than a fixed state. While it is acknowledged that family resilience is influenced by the interaction between a family's vulnerabilities and strengths, it is also recognized that this interaction occurs within the unique context of each family facing adversity. The combination of a family's vulnerabilities (such as limited resources or inadequate support networks) and strengths (such as effective communication or problem-solving skills) shapes their resilience in the face of adversity (Maurović et al., 2020; Walsh, 2003).

When we conceptualize family resilience as an outcome, we consider it the result or product of a family's ability to adapt and cope with stressors and challenges effectively. It emerges from the dynamic interplay between the family's vulnerabilities (such as economic difficulties, illness, or relationship problems) and their strengths (such as social support, problem-solving skills, or positive communication patterns) (Herdiana et al., 2018). Achieving family resilience involves leveraging the family's resources and capabilities to navigate and overcome adversity. By drawing upon their strengths, families can enhance their resilience and achieve positive outcomes in the face of adversity. These outcomes can include improved family functioning, increased well-being, and strengthened relationships (MacPhee et al., 2015). However, it is important to note that family resilience as an outcome is not a fixed state. It can fluctuate over time as families encounter different stressors, undergo transitions, and experience changes in their vulnerabilities and resources. The dynamic nature of family resilience highlights the need for ongoing support, adaptation, and growth to maintain positive outcomes in the face of future challenges (Schetter & Dolbier, 2011).

Central terms used in models of resilience

Several central terms and concepts are used to describe and understand the resilience of families. These terms capture key elements of family resilience and the processes involved. While specific models may differ in terminology, the following central terms are commonly used:

Vulnerabilities: the specific characteristics, circumstances, or factors that may increase a family's susceptibility to adverse outcomes in the face of stressors. Vulnerabilities include economic instability, health issues, marital conflict, substance abuse, or inadequate social support (Mackay, 2003).

Strengths/Protective Factors: These are the positive qualities, resources, and attributes that contribute to a family's ability to cope effectively with adversity. Strengths and protective factors can include supportive relationships, effective communication, problem-solving skills, shared values and beliefs, the resilience of individual family members, and access to community resources (Herdiana et al., 2018; Mackay, 2003).

Stressors/Adversity: Refers to the challenges, difficulties, or adverse events a family may encounter. Stressors can vary widely, including financial strain, unemployment, illness, loss, conflicts, or significant life transitions (MacPhee et al., 2015).

Family Processes: Describes the interaction, communication, and functioning patterns within a family system. Family processes can include cohesion, communication style, conflict resolution strategies, flexibility, and the ability to adapt to change (Buehler, 2020).

Family Functioning: Refers to the overall well-being, satisfaction, and successful performance of a family in various domains of life. It includes aspects such as effective problem-solving, supportive relationships, healthy communication, shared decision-making, and the ability to meet individual and collective needs (Maurović et al., 2020).

Resilience Processes: The dynamic interactions and mechanisms through which families navigate and respond to adversity. Resilience processes can involve problem-solving, effective communication, positive reframing, mutual support,

coping strategies, and seeking external assistance when needed (MacPhee et al., 2015).

Contextual Factors: Acknowledges the influence of broader environmental, social, cultural, and community contexts on family resilience. Contextual factors can include access to social support networks, cultural norms and values, economic opportunities, neighbourhood conditions, and the availability of community resources (Walsh, 2003).

These terms are integral to understanding and studying family resilience. They help researchers, clinicians, and policymakers identify factors contributing to family resilience, develop interventions to support families in times of adversity, and promote positive outcomes for all family members.

Variations in operationalization and measurement of key constructs

Operationalizing family resilience means defining and measuring the concept of family resilience in a way that can be observed, quantified, and studied. It involves identifying specific indicators or variables that reflect the construct of family resilience and developing measurement tools or methods to assess those indicators. In empirical research, approaches to operationalizing resilience have varied - adversity conditions examined have ranged from single stressful life experiences aggregates across multiple adverse events (Luthar et al., 2000). The diversity in measurement approaches and operationalizations of family resilience has led to discussions and debates within the field of resilience research. Some scholars have raised concerns about whether researchers are studying the same underlying construct or if the variations in measurement reflect different phenomena altogether. This issue is not unique to family resilience but is a common challenge in studying complex constructs (Kaplan, 1999). Resilience researchers have conceptualized the connection between risk conditions and manifest competence differently. Some have used person-based data analytic approaches, while other investigators have used variable-based analyses and relied on either main effect models or those involving interaction effects (Luthar & Cushing, 1999). Person-based data analytic approach means that researchers focus on individual-level data and analyse how specific characteristics, experiences, or processes contribute to manifest competence. These analyses often involve studying the experiences and outcomes of

individuals over time. Variable-based analyses approach involves examining specific variables or factors that may contribute to manifest competence. Researchers may examine the main effects of these variables, which refer to the direct influence of a single variable on manifest competence. For example, they may explore how a particular risk factor, such as poverty or exposure to trauma, is associated with manifest competence (Luthar et al., 2000).

In addition to main effect models, researchers have also explored interaction effects. Interaction effects consider how the relationship between variables may vary depending on certain conditions or factors. For instance, researchers may investigate whether the impact of a risk factor on manifest competence differs depending on the presence of protective factors or support systems. These interaction effects help to understand how the interplay between various factors can shape an individual's ability to overcome adversity and develop manifest competence (Card & Bennett, 2015).

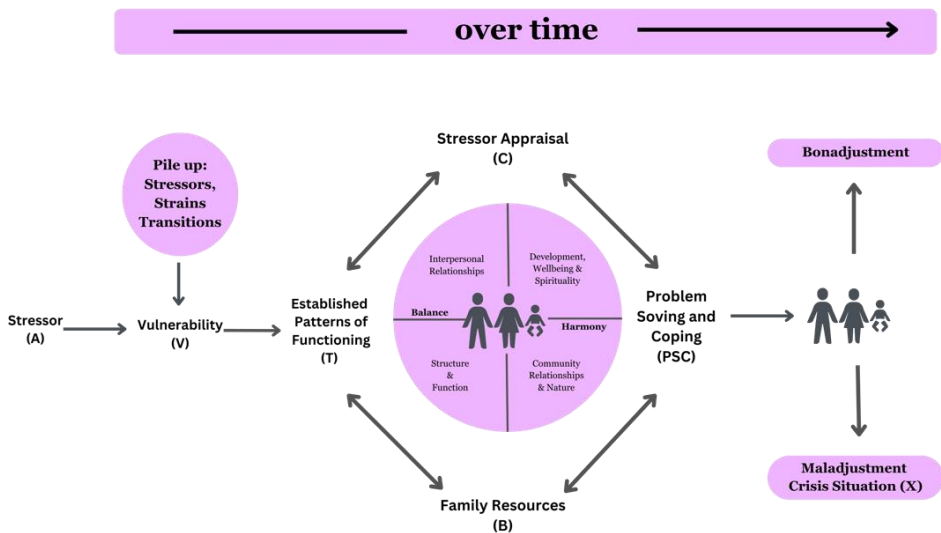
Without any universally employed operationalization of resilience, researchers must clearly explicate the approaches they select to define adversity and competence and provide justifications for choices made on both conceptual and empirical grounds (Luthar et al., 2000).

Models of Family Resilience

H. McCubbin Model

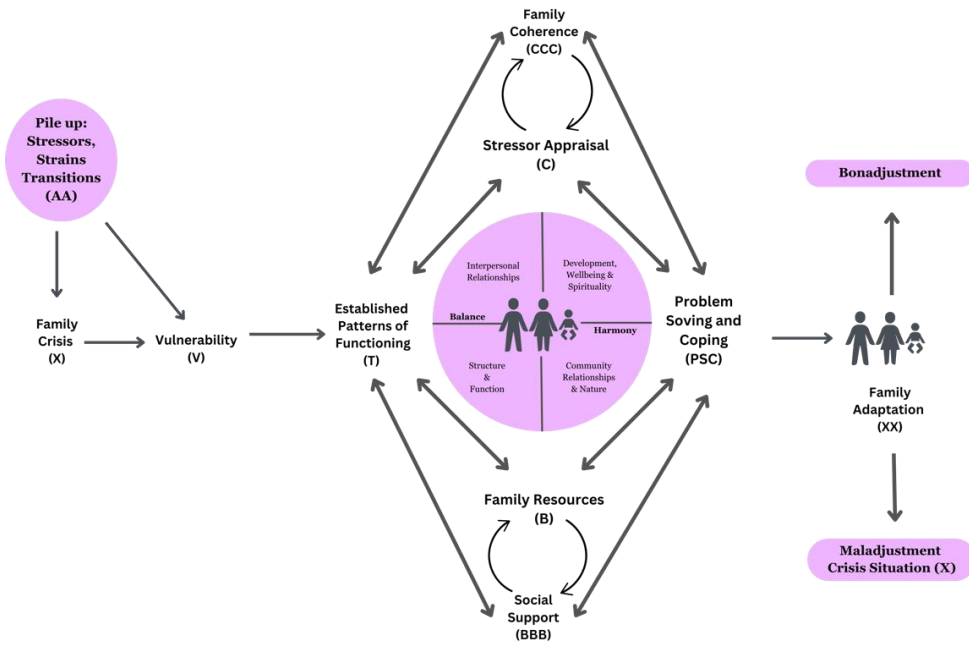
McCubbin summarizing his previous models of stress (T double ABCX, double FAAR model, and Typological Model of Family Adjustment and Adaptation), constructed the "The Resiliency Model of Family Stress, Adjustment, and Adaptation" (McCubbin et al., 1996). The resilience model is represented by two large interactive cycles - adjustment and adaptation cycle. The adjustment cycle is the family system's response to stress, and the adaptation cycle is the family system's response to crisis. Stress is a state of tension that arises due to an imbalance between the demands and abilities of the family if it does not require a significant correction of the patterns of family functioning. A crisis is a state of imbalance and disorganization that requires new patterns of family interactions and functioning (Zobenica, 2012).

The adjustment cycle consists of interactive components that shape the result. It can lead to reasonable adjustment (bonadjustment) or maladjustment (crisis). The response to the crisis begins a new cycle of resilience-adaptation. The adjustment cycle (Picture 1) starts with the stressor (A), which is interactive with vulnerability (V), which is shaped by a series of family stresses (pile-up). Vulnerability is interactive with the established patterns of family functioning (T), and all of them are interactive with family resistance resources (B) which are interactive with the family appraisal of stress (C) and with family coping strategies (P). As a result of this cycle process, families can end up in crises (maladjustment/crisis) or with good outcomes (bonadjustment).



Picture 1. Adjustment process – Resiliency Model by McCubbin et al., 1996.

The response to the crisis begins a new cycle of resilience - adaptation. When the response to stress leads the family to an imbalance, to a state in which the patterns of family functioning cannot respond to the demands of the disorder, a crisis occurs (Picture 2).



Picture 2. Adaptation process – Resiliency Model by McCubbin et al. (1996).

A family in crisis, which is also a process, still has many accompanying life difficulties (AA) from which it needs to reach the level of (good) adaptation (XX). Good adaptation (bonadjustment) is characterized by balance and harmony in family relations, family structure and functions, good health, spirituality, and balance in family and relations with the community and natural environment (McCubbin, 1996). For the family to achieve good adaptation, it goes through the following interactive processes: T - the creation of new patterns of family functioning and modification of existing patterns. B - uses internal resources and capacities. BBB - uses the network and social support. The family uses family assessment from C - Stress appraisal to CCC - family coherence. Finally, established patterns of family functioning, family resources, and family assessment of the situation influence family problem-solving and coping (PSC).

F. Walsh Model

Froma Walsh has contributed significantly to the understanding of family resilience and developed a model highlighting key processes and factors involved

in family resilience. The model emphasizes the importance of understanding family functioning within the broader ecological and developmental contexts.

In order to explain the processes in the different subsystems of the family and the broader systems that interact with the family in overcoming family problems, Walsh defines her model of family resilience (Walsh, 1993). Family resilience is a family's ability to overcome adversity and the potential for personal and relational transformation and family growth. In recent works, Walsh (2002, 2003) introduces an ecological and developmental perspective to the concept of family resilience. The ecological perspective explains the family connection and adaptation to various institutions of the social environment. The developmental perspective includes understanding the functioning of the family in the context of a particular stage of the life cycle with consequent difficulties that create the context of a specific stressor.

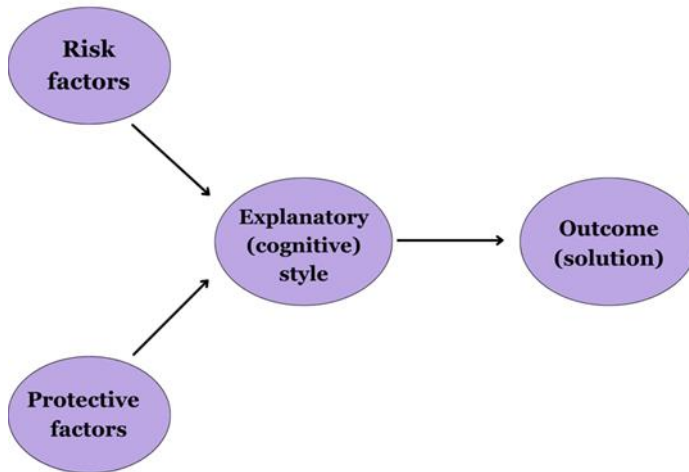
According to F. Walsh (2003), the framework for understanding family resilience aims to identify key family processes that reduce stress and vulnerabilities and promote growth and strengthen the family to overcome adverse life circumstances. Walsh places family resilience processes in three main areas of family functioning: family belief system, organizational patterns, and communication. The family belief system is the way the family evaluates the crisis; beliefs help family members to understand the meaning of the situation. Whether the family will overcome it or not depends on what meaning the family gives to the crisis. Family beliefs encourage a positive view of the situation and encourage seeking spiritual support (Walsh, 2003). When a family is struggling with a crisis, it is most helped by a sense of coherence. It allows the family to define the situation as manageable, meaningful, and understandable; thus, the family can normalize and contextualize the crisis. According to Walsh, belief systems include giving meaning to difficulties, worldview, transcendence, and spirituality. Family organization-organizational processes are the next group of processes that comprise family resilience, including flexibility, connection, and social and economic resources (Walsh, 2003). In times of stress, the family activates its resources, reduces stress, and reorganizes itself to meet the changes. Flexible families can change when necessary but maintain stability through existing functioning forms (Walsh, 1993). Social support is vital in times of trouble because it provides practical and emotional support. The connection of family

members is also vital because it strengthens support and cooperation and respects each family member's differences, boundaries, and autonomy. Communication processes comprise the third group of resilience processes, including clarity of communication and emotional exchange, and collaborative problem-solving (Walsh, 2002). In times of crisis, clarifying the situation as much as possible is crucial to enable and facilitate decision-making and foster understanding among family members. Communication enables clarity in the family situation, which encourages the process of forming the meaningfulness of the experience. When communication is poor, the result is confusion and misunderstanding (Walsh, 2003).

Emotional exchange is an important subfield of communication processes. In a crisis, a wide range of emotions develops, which often causes conflicts. Suppressing emotions obstructs communication. Communication enables problem-solving in such a way as to express disagreement and define actions to solve the problem openly. Resilience is not "bounce back"; Walsh (2002: 135) points out that a better metaphor is "bounce forward". Walsh (2003) points out that resilience does not mean that the crisis has not left consequences. Family structure and dynamics change, but the resilient process effectively deals with adversity, learns through adversity, and integrates new experiences into family life.

H. Keller Model

Keller (2003), using the concepts of Walsh and McCubbin, proposes a new model. The groups of processes that they use in their resilience models expand somewhat in the Keller model. H. Keller points out that it is generally accepted that the construct of resilience consists of risk and protective factors, the assessment of those factors by an individual or family, and a successful outcome (Picture 3).



Picture 3. Resilience process, according to H. Keller (2003)

The expansion that Keller gives in relation to the mentioned concepts refers to emphasizing a successful outcome. The most common problem and criticism of the concept of resilience were in recognizing and defining a "successful outcome." Most often, it is defined in terms of inner satisfaction or the feeling of effective functioning in the social environment, and in research, it is taken for granted. Keller (2003) proposes the operationalization of a "successful outcome" through the concept of "quality of life".

Conclusion

The concept of family resilience has evolved and has deep roots in various theoretical frameworks and research areas. It emerged as a shift from focusing on the weaknesses and deficits of families to recognizing and harnessing their strengths. Family resilience can be conceptualized as a trait, process, and outcome, highlighting its dynamic nature and the continuous interplay between a family's vulnerabilities and strengths. While there is no consensus on the exact definition of family resilience, and ongoing debates exist, specific central terms and concepts are commonly used to understand and study resilience in families. These include vulnerabilities, strengths/protective factors, stressors/adversity, family processes, family functioning, resilience, and contextual factors. These terms help identify the factors contributing to family resilience, assess its

measurement, and guide interventions and support systems. Various models of family resilience have been proposed, such as the ones presented in this paper (H. McCubbin Model, the F. Walsh Model, and H. Keller), which provide frameworks for understanding the processes and cycles involved in family adjustment, adaptation, and response to stress and crisis. However, challenges persist in the conceptualization of family resilience, including variations in its operationalization and measurement and the need for more empirical evidence to support the theoretical foundations. Researchers continue to explore and refine the understanding of family resilience to develop effective strategies and interventions to enhance families' ability to adapt, cope, and thrive in adversity.

Family resilience is a complex and multifaceted concept that recognizes families' strengths, resources, and adaptive capacities in navigating challenges and achieving positive outcomes. It emphasises the importance of supporting and strengthening families' abilities to overcome adversity, promote well-being, and foster positive relationships within the family and the broader community. Family resilience offers valuable pedagogical implications for children's upbringing. It underscores the significance of nurturing strong family bonds, fostering open and empathetic communication, and promoting emotional coping skills in children. Parents and educators play pivotal roles as positive role models, demonstrating adaptability and stress management. Encouraging children to build supportive networks, appreciate cultural diversity, and develop self-efficacy are essential components. Safety, both physical and emotional, within the family is foundational for resilience. Moreover, educational support, a growth mindset, community engagement, and self-care practices are vital for children's holistic development. Conflict resolution skills and the sharing of resilience narratives further contribute to children's ability to face life's challenges with resilience and adaptability. By integrating these principles, caregivers and educators can create an environment that empowers children to thrive and grow, even in the face of adversity. Adding to this, research on family resilience has important implications for various stakeholders, including families, practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. These implications can inform practice, policy, and research efforts to support families facing adversity. By recognizing and nurturing the strengths of families, it is possible to promote their well-being, foster positive family dynamics, and create supportive environments that facilitate resilience.

KONCEPTUALNI PREGLED PORODIČNE REZILIJENTNOSTI

APSTRAKT

Porodična rezilijentnost je dinamičan proces koji pomaže porodicama da se snađu u kriznim situacijama i da prevaziđu nedaće. Uvođenje opšte teorije sistema i njena primena na porodičnu terapiju dodatno je doprinela razvoju koncepta porodične rezilijentnosti. Ovaj rad ima za cilj da pruži sveobuhvatno razumevanje ovog koncepta uz naglašavanje izazova u njegovoj konceptualizaciji. Polazeći od razumevanja samog koncepta i njegovog razvoja, ovaj rad daje uvid u to kako sagledati ključne konstrukte inkorporirane u koncept porodične rezilijentnosti. Nakon toga, akcent je stavljen na izazove u konceptualizaciji porodične rezilijentnosti. Ovi izazovi uključuju problem definisanja porodične rezilijentnosti, centralnih termina koji se koriste u modelima, kao i varijacije u operacionalizaciji i merenju ključnih konstrukata. Modeli porodične rezilijentnosti predstavljeni u radu jesu oni koji se smatraju uticajnim u savremenim istraživanjima o porodici. Oni pružaju okvire za razumevanje procesa i ciklusa koji su uključeni u prilagođavanje porodice i njen odgovor na stres i krizu. Preispitivanje ovog koncepta moglo biti od šireg značaja u budućim istraživanjima.

Ključne reči: porodična rezilijentnost, teškoće, konceptualizacija, ključni konstrukt, model porodične rezilijentnosti

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