

REFORMULATING OBSTACLES:

The Role of Child Development in the Construction of the Resilient Person

Joana Proença Becker

Trauma Centre of the Centre for Social Studies (CES)
University of Coimbra, Portugal

In the face of growing concern about violence, this study takes interest in exploring the factors that lead to greater or lesser vulnerability to trauma, in order to identify alternatives that may help the process of overcoming it. Considering that when encountering psychic suffering various possibilities arise, some questions come to the fore:

How do some people seem to have more strength to fight than others? How do we see war refugees overcome trauma and become healthy and successful people? In contrast, why do we see people surrender to the slightest suffering?

Based on these questions, the trauma and resilience concepts are approached with the objective to think about the development of people who have undergone an ordeal of some kind. We are confronted with cases of violence on a daily basis, which lead us to question the future of the survivors – to what extent they are physically and psychologically affected, and mainly, how they resume their life after considerable suffering.

Regarding this, from the literature review, children's relationships are presented as factors that may facilitate the process of overcoming the traumatic situation, since the acquisition of affective and behavioural internal resources influences the way people deal with adversities. We agree that the first years of life help to develop resilience, because it is in this period that the child defines his temperament, learns how to relate and how to interpret the world. However, not everyone was able to enjoy a secure attachment in early childhood, or even those who had resources suitable for such, can be disorganised by a violent event. In this sense, even though the deprivation of affection and security in early childhood leads to developmental difficulties, it is not considered determinant.

At the moment of the aggression, the child is paralyzed, but then seeks solutions. Consequently, if the child is surrounded by an affective environment where he feels welcome and accompanied, the resilience process will be easier.

Likewise, De Antoni and Koller (2000) discuss, in a study with adolescents who lived in public shelters, that the provision of emotional support, group activities and disciplinary practices can act as tutors of resilience. To be resilient is to be able to question what to do with the wound, it is to transform the traumatic event, it is to morph the feeling.



Resilience has been studied in cases of people who have managed to recover, even after they have suffered a great loss or violence. It is important to highlight that resilience is not something static that is given, an ability or skill that people have or do not have. It is a process, something that can be developed, enhanced or reduced.

This understanding of the concept serves to destroy the idea that there are lost cases and strengthen the need for projects that invest not only in the service of the needy population, but that promote cultural spaces for the development of children and adolescents in situations of vulnerability. Providing space for a child to develop means promoting conditions for interaction, learning and expression, necessary for the prevention of mental illness. Learning to communicate, interact and learn about the world allows the child to gain internal resources of resilience, becoming able to interpret the events and to seek solutions to their problems. As Cyrulnik (2009: 37) states:

Trauma destroys, it is its definition. And resilience, which allows us to begin living, associates the suffering to the pleasure of overcoming it. Curious couple!

References:

Becker, Joana Proença (2011), *Trauma e resiliência na concepção de Boris Cyrulnik*. [End of course paper], Psychology course. São Leopoldo: Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos.

Cyrulnik, Boris (2009), *Autobiografia de um Espantalho: Histórias de Resiliência: o retorno à vida*. Translation by Claudia Berliner. [1ª ed.] São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Cyrulnik, Boris (2004) *Os Patinhos Feios*. Translation by Monica Stahel. 1st edition. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2004.

De Antoni, Clarissa & Koller, Sílvia Helena (2000), Vulnerabilidade e resiliência familiar: um estudo com adolescentes que sofreram maus tratos intrafamiliares. *Psico* 1 (31), 39-66.

Freud (2010) Além do princípio do prazer. In. *Obras completas volume 14: História de uma neurose infantil ("O Homem dos Lobos")*, Além do princípio do prazer e outros trabalhos. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras. Translation by Paulo César de Souza [orig. 1920].

