The Concept of Resilience in Psychological Research

Margit Schmolke, Ph.D.

German Academy for Psychoanalysis, Munich, Germany
Agenda

- Definition and concepts related to resilience
- General protective factors
- Research approaches
- Specific protective factors
- Implications for psychotherapy
Definition and Concepts (1)

- **Resilience**: Psychic resistance despite of stressors, adversity and challenges
- Main research area of developmental psychopathology
- Danger of mystification
- Related concepts: emotional intelligence, self-regulation, self-organization, salutogenesis
- Determined by dynamic protective factors
No personality trait
No inherited invulnerability
Disposition for action acquired in family
Analogy to biological processes
  - Protection
  - Repair
  - Regeneration
General Protective Factors

- Stable relationship to primary person
- Emotionally supportive educational climate
- Role models for constructive coping
- Social support outside the family
- Responsibilities in the family
- Temperament characteristics (e.g., sociability)
- Cognitive competences (e.g., average intelligence)
- Self-efficacy, positive self-concept
- Active, not just reactive coping behavior
- Meaningfulness and structure in one’s development
- Realistic future planning
- Sense of humor
Studies Documenting General Protective Factors

E.g.,

- Kauai-Study (Werner & Smith, 1982, 1992)
- Children with mentally ill parents (Anthony, 1987; Garmezy & Devine, 1984)
- Children from divorced parents (Hetherington, 1989)
- Families with abuse/neglect (Cicchetti et al., 1993)
- Children in families with social decline (Elder et al., 1986)
- Children in fostering homes (Rutter & Quinton, 1984)
- Families from war areas and migration (Garbarino, 1990)
Specific Protective Development Processes

Reasons:
- Underlying resilience criteria
- Methodological design
- Accumulation of factors
- Ambiguity of characteristics
- Relation to the broader social context
- Biological factors
- Sex differences

(Lösel & Bender, 1999)
Implications for Psychotherapy
(Welter-Enderlin, 2005)

- Focusing on early childhood often one-sided
- Persons are not just product of their socialization
- Influence of broader social factors outside family need to be more considered
- Trauma therapists focus too much on patient’s role as a victim
- Just asking about patients’ strengths is banal
- Being open for listening to their often extremely negative life experiences
- Encouraging patients to be proud of their dealing with them so far