

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Resilience: Promoting the health, safety, and well being of the population, particularly children and youth

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Service Perspective

As the articles in the CEECD Encyclopedia point out, the development of resilience in children is multifactoral, relating to both internal traits and the external environment.^{1,2,3,4} The entire community must be involved in making the changes that support resilience in children. Each Encyclopedia article emphasizes different factors that affect resilience, such as poverty^{1,2}, community violence¹, and parental stability.^{1,2}

As Luthar points out, problems arising in school-aged children are much easier to prevent early on than manage once they “crystallize” later in life.¹ In this sense, it is necessary to nurture resilience in children starting very early in life and continuing throughout childhood.³ We need to ask key questions such as, what compromises child development? How and why do problems arise? How do we make a change in individuals or groups of children?

Sameroff notes that, in order to improve children’s resilience, it is necessary to make improvements in multiple areas of their lives, such as in their families, peer groups, schools, and neighbourhoods.² Meaningful changes can only be made by impacting all levels of aggregation: the individual, the family, the neighbourhood, and the community as a whole. Every level of government should be involved in ensuring that the societal infrastructure is there to support positive human development. While many interventions focus on ‘fixing’ individuals and relationships, there should be more focus on building a strong and healthy community and society that can support positive human development. A strong sense of belonging to a family and a community makes children less likely to resort to gangs and other negative influences for a sense of belonging. The articles on resilience from the CEECD Encyclopaedia provide some of the tools needed for making meaningful changes at all levels of society. These include ensuring young children have good nutrition as well as opportunities for learning³ and strengthening community networks and parental support.^{1,3}

In building resilience in children, we cannot forget the adults who care for them. Parents and caregivers need to know how to foster ongoing, enduring, and reciprocal positive attachments with children¹, and they need the resources to provide a secure home.^{1,3} The city of Prince Albert is in the process of developing early childhood development and parenting centers that focus on supporting the family from day one.

We are also stepping up efforts to address addiction and substance abuse, targeting not only the problem itself but also its early roots.

Gaps between research, policy and practice

One of the biggest hurdles to developing programs that nurture resilience is the lack of communication among professionals in the field, researchers, and policy makers. To help overcome this hurdle, we need professionals who have the skills, knowledge, and mandate to facilitate knowledge exchange among these three domains.

To optimize information exchange, professionals in each domain and across different areas of research must use the same language and become familiar with each others' technical jargon and buzzwords.

Professionals working in the field require scientific evidence that can be presented to policy makers in order to align policy with current needs. Researchers, therefore, must focus on the needs of field workers in their research and make their directives clear. It is also important to provide data demonstrating cost effectiveness of proposed interventions. Policy makers should be presented with research data in informal settings where they feel comfortable asking questions, pointing out constraints that they face, and engaging in meaningful dialogue.

The CEECD Encyclopedia articles are useful for facilitating knowledge exchange and dialogue because they summarize thousands of pages of research from different but related areas into a few salient, data-rich pages. They use language that anyone involved in the field can understand, and they help professionals working in the field to better understand the developmental roots of the problems they face every day. Similarly, CEECD workshops in which leading policy makers meet with researchers and field workers have been very powerful forums for knowledge exchange and dialogue.

It would be helpful if the CEECD Encyclopedia could include more information about the social determinants of health, well-being, and competence. Additional information on epigenetics or how our environment affects genetic expression, as well as recent developments in neuroscience with respect to resilience would also be most welcome.

Comments recorded by Alison Palkhivala

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