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Resiliency and Social Support in the Group of Socially Maladjusted Youths*

Abstract: The objective of the report is to answer the question of whether the level of mental resilience is linked with a sense of support received in the group of subjects. The research was conducted on a group of 174 teenagers of both sexes, aged 14–18 years old. Two groups of respondents participated in the presented study: 112 people were classified as social misfits, and 62 people were in the control group. The research was conducted in attendance centers. The Polish Ogińska-Bulik and Juczyński's SPP-18 scale and the author's Support Factors Questionnaire were used to study the mental resilience. The following results were obtained: the overall level of the resilience of mental coherence and factors 1, 3, 4 did not differ significantly in the groups compared. The socially maladjusted youth is significantly different from the youth in the control group in persistence and determination when taking action and their sense of school support. Mental resilience and the sense of (family, school, peer) support are correlated in the maladjusted youth group.

Key words: Resilience, youth, attendance centers, social maladjustment.

Resilience is a key factor in protecting and promoting mental health. It is the quality through which the individual is able to cope with various ups and downs

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in life. One can distinguish many different factors affecting its level, i.a. in the family, local community, school, peer group, and in the individual itself. Finding them in these circles is one of the main themes of research that can in the future allow for the development of effective ways to help vulnerable children and adolescents through the practical application of the idea of resilience in early intervention and prevention measures.

The factors that increase the resilience level in the family sphere include: close and lasting relationship with at least one of the guardians and pro-social support of a significant person who is a role model, attachment and good relationship with siblings, positive family atmosphere, low level of conflict between family members, organized home environment (joint dinners, sharing responsibilities, clear communication, monitoring of children's behavior), attachment to significant persons (NCH 2007). Protective factors may also include the various assets of social communities, such as schools, societies, and sports clubs, giving a sense of belonging and forming bonds with the broadly understood local community. (Dean, Stain 2007). Factors that increase the resilience level in school and community settings include: pro-social activity, opportunities to develop talents and potential, sense of support received from the closest people in schools or colleague and peer groups (Meichenbaum 2012).

Although most of the definitions concerning resilience are related to positive adaptation and proper functioning of the individual, it can not occur without the presence of adversarial and risk factors. Therefore a positively functioning child who is not exposed to high levels of risk, adversity and life difficulties may not be considered immune (Vanderbilt-Adriance, Shaw 2008). Furthermore, it is worth noting that some children may exhibit high levels of resilience in their behavior and, on the other hand, they may experience inner anxiety. They can function positively in one area (e.g. emotional) and show significant deficits in another (e.g. learning achievements) (Luthar 2006). Children with a high level of resilience levels can be described as "indestructible", "invulnerable" despite genetic, psychological adversity and difficult environmental circumstances. They are able to function constructively and competently perform life's tasks (Garmezy 1974). Despite all the stressful experiences, some people function "unscathed" and their personality develops in the most correct manner possible (Werner, Smith 1989). On the other hand, it is worth noting that in recent years some researchers have come to the conclusion that there are no "indestructible" children who are not susceptible to various life adversities (Masten, Obradovic 2006).

The term *resilience* comes from the Latin word *salire*, meaning *to spring*, *to spring up*, and *resilire* – *to spring back*). The literature uses two terms: *resilience* and *resiliency*. The first is associated with the process of effectively overcoming negative phenomena and life events, the second means a personality trait or the relatively long-term resource of the individual, and is referred to as mental resilience (Ogińska-Bulik, Zadworna-Cieślak 2014). Resilience plays an important role

in the functioning of children and adolescents. Children characterized by a high level of resilience show a higher sense of meaningfulness in their actions, a positive attitude to life, a higher level of autonomy and self-confidence, and a higher level of efficiency in day to day activities. Furthermore, they exhibit greater insight and higher interpersonal skills to facilitate warm and affectionate relationships with other children. Nina Ogińska-Bulik and Zygryd Juczyński (2008) treat resilience as a mechanism of self-regulation, encompassing both cognitive elements, characteristic of beliefs and expectations, and pertaining to i.a. the perception of reality in terms of a challenge, as well as their own competencies and also emotional ones, including positive affect and emotional and behavioral stability, manifesting themselves in the search for new experiences and undertaking diverse and effective problem coping strategies. In this study, we treat mental resilience as an individual characteristic, which is significant in the processes of coping both with everyday stress and traumatic events.

In view of the above, it is important to note that there are not many research reports describing this variable among socially maladjusted youth. That is why the research included the issues of the resilience concept. In this theoretical context it was assumed that within the group of minors, resilience would be associated with the sense of the support received from family, school and peers. We included the sense of communal support in these areas as protective factors in accordance with the assumptions of the described concept of resilience. The sense of community and growing roots is related to an individual having specific support groups in the community, ranging from family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, teachers, clergymen, doctors, to formal and informal organizations. Each of these spheres provides the individual with support in various forms. For example, emotional help consists in giving messages like: we like you, we love you, you have a nice personality. Instrumental help is associated with particular aid, for example, material: lending money, finding an apartment. Mental support occurs when an individual, despite other forms of help, remains in a difficult situation (Kawula 2012). That is why one assumed that young people do not function in isolation from various social groups. They are part of the family, members of the school community, peer groups. Thus, the diversity of protective factors existing in each of these areas can help in designing programs supporting the development of maladjusted youth, and in particular the development of mental resilience. It is worth noting that the resilience has so far been studied most frequently among the adult populations (Ogińska-Bulik et al., 2015) or among youths having no problems with moral and legal norms (Ogińska-Bulik, Zadworna-Cieślak 2014). The analysis of this construct in a group of youths who cause educational problems (committing crimes, demoralized) is a potential field for exploration. Taking the phenomenon of social maladjustment into account in the study, we included minors who had been sent to probation centers.

The functioning of minors in many formative environments gives them the opportunity to use them for social rehabilitation work as a natural link to the probation officer's influence. A significant change from 2001 in the Act on Juvenile Delinquency Proceedings is the provision in art. 6, which was given the following wording: "6) refer to a probation center (former name "curatorial youth work centers", functioning since 1971), as well as to social organizations or institutions working with minors of educational, therapeutic or training nature, after previous consultation with said organization or institution". The ordinance of the Minister of Justice on probation centers that has been in force for 15 years and the Act on proceedings in juvenile cases introduced a major change after 2001. Accordingly, we now have a different characteristic of the people under supervision at probation centers (only juveniles sentenced by the court). Since the beginning, the concept of probation centers coincided with two basic postulates in the approach to dealing with minors. The first of these is related to the critical assessment of social reintegration institutions previously organized according to an isolation and disciplinary system that was not conducive to rearing outside the natural social environment. The second one appeared in juvenile court case law and was related to the use of non-isolating measures on an increasing scale. However, in order not to base the effects on a minor but on the individual work method, there was potential recognized in teamwork with charges. At the same time, the literature indicated the model that would link the individual case method with the group effect approach as the most appropriate. The ideal was the supervision of a probation officer and work in a family or a local environment, with the use of a group and classes in a probation center. The Ordinance of the Minister of Justice dated October 5, 2001, introduced a number of significant organizational changes, but first and foremost it expanded the functions of probation centers that they should perform in the system of prophylaxis and social rehabilitation institutions for socially maladjusted youth or youth at risk of maladjustment. At the same time it should be pointed out that from the very beginning, the probation center was supposed to provide a more effective influence than just the supervision of the probation officer over the minor through institutionalizing the conditions enabling a wider scope of using social rehabilitation methods and techniques in group work.

In dealing with minors, this measure is considered as effectively creating conditions for the broadly understood prophylaxis, especially in terms of prevention of the demoralization of children and youths as well as juvenile delinquency, mainly through increased control over minors in the facility. The facility becomes an early response and support institution in local communities. The conditions of rearing influence in the probation center make it possible to conduct more intensive work with minors, as well as a more individual approach to the charge than in the case of probation officer or parent supervision. In particular, the principle of subjective treatment of charges, and possible indications of science in the field of creative social rehabilitation are implemented there.

Aim of the research

The objective of the report is to answer the question of whether the level of mental resilience is linked with a sense of support received in the group of subjects. The results of the research allow us to formulate research hypotheses indicating that the development and occurrence of resilience are influenced by many factors, including: individual attributes, a friendly family environment and contextual factors (communal support) (Kilmer, Tedeshi 2005). Therefore, in the maladjusted youth group, the level of resilience will be positively correlated with the feeling of support received from parents, the school community and peers (the three primary rearing environments). The study also discussed the issue of whether the level of mental resilience and the feeling of support received differ between the maladjusted youth and the control group.

Research subjects

The research was conducted on a group of 174 teenagers of both sexes, aged 14–18 years old. The research subjects were divided into two groups of respondents: 112 people were classified as social misfits, and 62 people were in the control group. The research was conducted in deliberately selected facilities for socially maladjusted youth (minors sent to probation centers) and in junior high school (implicitly youth without emotional problems and not breaking the legal norms). The selection of the facilities was deliberate due to their nature and specificity, and because of the students who were placed in these institutions by the family court (due to behavioral disorders – offenses, demoralization). The study was a pilot project

Research tools

1. The Polish SPP-18 scale by Ogińska-Bulik and Juczyński – intended for the measurement of resilience in children and youths. It is a self-description tool and it consists of 18 statements and four factors: factor 1 – optimistic attitude and energy, factor 2 – persistence and determination in action, factor 3 – sense of humor and openness to new experiences, factor 4 – personal competencies and tolerance of negative affect. The research subject is supposed to indicate on a five-level scale to what extent they agree with the presented statement. Resilience is higher as the score increases.
2. The Support Factors Questionnaire (Kwestionariusz Czynników Wsparcia – KCW) is the author's own tool. It is constructed using 3 factors: family sup-

port (WRDZ), peer support (WRÓW), school support (WSZKL), and it is used to measure the sense of communal support received from these social groups. It consists of 17 diagnostic statements. The research subject is supposed to indicate on a five-level scale how much they agree with each of these statements. The reliability of the resulting scales is from 0.779 to 0.873.

Differences in the level of resilience and sense of social support in the examined groups

The results of maladjusted youths in the resilience level scale were between 23–90 pts, with an average of 65.6, including the average obtained in the optimistic attitude and energy scale – 18.1, persistence and determination in action – 18.1, sense of humor and openness to new experiences – 15.6, personal competencies and tolerance of negative affect – 13.8. The scores obtained by the youth in the control group ranged between 48–90 points. The average of the general level of resilience amounted to 68.2 pts; factor 1 – optimistic attitude and energy – 18.4, factor 2 – persistence and determination in action – 19.5, factor 3 – sense of humor and openness to new experiences – 15.7, factor 4 – personal competencies and tolerance of negative affect – 14.5.

In the KSW scale, the average of the results for the sense of family support in the maladjusted youth group is 17.4 pts, school support – 12.0 pts, peer support – 18.3 pts. In the control group, the results for the sense of family support is 17.1 pts, school support – 49.9 pts, peer support – 17.7 pts.

Table 1. Results of the Mental Resilience Scale (SPP-18) and the Support Factors Questionnaire (KCW) in the maladjusted youth group and in the control group

Variables	Maladjusted youth		Control group		Significance of differences	
	mean (M)	SD	mean (M)	SD	t	p
Resilience (in general)	65.66	12.00	68.29	9.18	1.493	n.i.
Factor 1	18.11	3.64	18.45	3.06	0.615	n.i.
Factor 2	18.10	3.91	19.52	2.79	2.747	0.007
Factor 3	15.60	2.91	15.75	2.41	0.347	n.i.
Factor 4	13.83	3.11	14.56	2.73	1.535	n.i.
WRDZ	17.40	4.73	17.14	4.64	-0.344	n.i.
WSZKL	12.03	3.93	15.04	2.99	5.619	0.000
WRÓW	18.29	3.48	17.73	3.07	-1.049	n.i.

The font in bold indicates statistically significant differences at the level $p < 0.05$.

Source: own research.

The t-distribution test for independent samples showed that socially maladjusted youth ($M = 18.10$, $SD = 3.91$) differs significantly from youth in the control group ($M = 19.52$, $SD = 2.79$) in the intensity of the factor of persistence and determination when taking action; $t(172) = 2.74$; $p < 0.05$. The average of the youths from the control group is statistically significantly higher than in the maladjusted youth group. This means that the intensification of this factor is higher in the control group. Moreover, the analysis showed that in the control group, the average ($M = 15.04$, $SD = 2.99$) related to the feeling of support received from school was statistically significantly higher than in the maladjusted youth group ($M = 12.03$, $SD = 3.93$), $t(171) = 5.60$; $p < 0.05$, which means that the youths from the control group have a higher sense of support received from school than the maladjusted youths. There are no statistically significant differences in the overall level of resilience and the contributing factors 1, 3, and 4. There were also no differences found in the sense of support received from parents (WRDZ) and peers (WRÓW).

Analysis of the relationship between mental resilience and sense of communal support

The purpose of the correlation analysis is to answer the question of whether the level of the sense of resiliency is linked to the sense of support received from parents, peers, and the school community in the maladjusted youth group. Table 2 presents the correlation pairs between the general level of resilience and the factors, and the sense of communal support.

Table 2. Correlation factors between the sense of social support and resilience and its factors

		Maladjusted youth N = 112				
		Resilience (in general)	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
WRDZ	rho	0.348**	0.346**	0.330**	0.274**	0.268**
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.003	0.004
WRÓW	rho	0.242*	0.177	0.200*	0.349**	0.150
	p	0.010	0.063	0.035	0.000	0.114
WSZKL	rho	0.209*	0.177	0.257**	0.157	0.127
	p	0.027	0.061	0.006	0.099	0.180

* – correlation is significant at the level of 0.05 (two-sided); ** – correlation is significant at the level of 0.01 (two-sided).

Source: own research.

In the maladjusted youth group, the correlation coefficients indicate a moderate, positive relationship between resilience and the sense of support received from family, school and peers – together with an increased sense of family, school and peer support the overall intensity of resilience grows as well. Significant correlation coefficients were also obtained between factor 2 and the sense of support received from family, peers and school. This means that the increase of support from these groups brought about an increase in persistence and determination in action. There was also a positive correlation between the sense of support received from family and factors 1, 3 and 4, which shows that optimistic attitude and energy, sense of humor and openness to new experiences and personal competencies, and tolerance for negative affect all grow as the family support grows. In addition, there is a correlation between peer support and factor 3. The obtained data indicates that the higher the peer support, the higher the level of sense of humor and openness to new experiences. In analyzing their value, it is important to note that none of the coefficients exceeded 0.40, which indicates a moderate strength of the relationship between the variables. The analysis of other relationships did not show statistical significance between the variables.

Discussion of the results

Analyzing the data presented in the tables, it can be observed that the comparison of groups using the t-distribution test showed no statistically significant differences between maladjusted youth and the control group in relation to the general intensity of resilience and factors 1,3 and 4. The socially maladjusted youth is significantly different from the youth in the control group in persistence and determination when taking action and their sense of school support. The sense of receiving support from school in the group of minors is lower than in the control group. That is why appropriate educational activities should rely on the activation of resources toward the socially desirable, which may cause the phenomenon of resilience, i.e. to give young people the power to strengthen and launch processes that counteract social maladjustment. If we want the measures to be effective, we should efficiently provide positive support in the broader social context associated with the support of the individual characteristics of a person, their personal and social competencies (Masten, Obradovic 2006). In view of the results obtained in subsequent studies, it would be legitimate to include a wider perspective of socio-ecological factors as variables that may affect the development of resilience. Throughout the entire process, a significant role is played by instrumental emotional support, obtained through communal relationships, and the provided proposals of ideas and behaviors aimed at coping with crisis situations.

The presented research aimed to show the relationship between the sense of support and the intensity of resilience in the maladjusted youth group. In view of

the results obtained, resilience can thus be considered as an essential characteristic of a given individual, which can be considered as a resource helping to deal with difficult situations and traumatic events. In the case of maladjusted youth, attention should be paid to the functions that the school fulfills and its tasks in the context of building the resilience of this group of young people. It can be assumed that the building of resilience in children and adolescents will allow them to effectively deal with internal (for example developmental disparities) and external (such as family disintegration) stress. Furthermore, attention should be paid to the relationship between resilience and the sense of family support. The development of positive family relationships and good family interactions are conducive to shaping the mental resilience characteristic. The research proves to some extent that proper influences, both on the part of the environment and the person experiencing the difficult situation, can help in building resiliency and restore mental functioning in individuals, and even help to further their development. First and foremost, what proved to be significant were social interactions (sense of the family support received) related to all factors and the overall level of resilience.

Conclusions

1. The overall level of mental resilience and factors 1, 3, 4 does not differ significantly in the groups compared.
2. The socially maladjusted youth is significantly different from the youth in the control group in persistence and determination when taking action and their sense of school support.
3. Mental resilience and the sense of (family, school, peer) support are correlated in the maladjusted youth group:
 - mental resilience and its factors combine positively with the sense of family support;
 - mental resilience and factors 2 and 3 turned out to be significantly positively correlated with the sense of peer support;
 - mental resilience and factor 2 have a positive correlation with the sense of school support.

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