Chapter 19
Resilience as a Protective Factor in Children Exposed to Domestic Violence

Sanja Đurđević
Colege of Social Work, Serbia

Marijana Zirojević
Bodyinsight Sport and Recreation Education, Serbia

Srđan Zirojević
Bodyinsight Sport and Recreation Education, Serbia

Žilijeta Krivokapić
Colege of Social Work, Serbia

ABSTRACT

Resilience can be defined as adaptability to change and capacity for successful adaptation, despite challenges and difficult circumstances. Every day a large number of children experience violence, which takes many forms and occurs in different contexts. It is first necessary to distinguish whether the child was directly abused by the parents or the environment or was just present with violence. It is also necessary to pay attention to the age of the child, his level of development, and understanding of violence. These are some of the factors that can affect the consequences in the future. The chapter will explore theoretical and practical aspects on the topic of risks and resilience associated with violence in the family and the environment. The chapter will also present models of resilience, as well as research conducted, which aims to reduce the level of violence against children.

INTRODUCTION

Child abuse occurs influenced by a number of complex factors and it is a problem that burdens all societies and people throughout the world, regardless of the particularities of the victim and the committer.

One of the basic rights of the child is the right to life and development, where child abuse represents a violation of that basic right and a threat to the child's development and life, and the consequences are long-lasting and often fatal for the child.

Every day a large number of children experience violence, which takes many forms and occurs in different contexts — in the intimate family environment, in schools, in institutions where children are placed for protection, in the digital space and in the community.

In this work, we pay special attention to the family, which should represent a safety zone for children, a community that encourages their development, but for many children, it is not. Exposure of children to abuse in the family is widespread, regardless whether children are direct victims of violence or witnesses of a violent act. Exposure to domestic abuse interferes with a child's successful development — psychologically, emotionally, and cognitively. The consequences range from physical (disability, somatic disorders), through emotional disorders, distorted self-perception (depression, anxiety, aggressiveness, anger, hostile attitude, low self-confidence, guilt, shame, post-traumatic stress), cognitive disorders (intellectual difficulties, developmental disharmony, intellectual inhibitions, problems with concentration) and social disorders (anti-social, criminal behavior, abuse of alcohol and drugs...).

Abuse or ill-treatment of a child includes all forms of physical or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglecting or negligent treatment, as well as commercial or other exploitation, which leads to actual or potential impairment on the child's health, endangering the child's development or dignity within a relationship that includes responsibility, trust or power.1 Child abuse appears in different forms, so we can talk about direct, interpersonal, physical, psychological or sexual violence, and about less direct but complex forms, such as structural violence that manifests itself, for example, through child marriage, child labor or other types of exploitation, through multiple social exclusion. Manifestations of abuse also differ in other characteristics: who is the perpetrator, how seriously the child is injured, what are the short-term and long-term consequences, in what context it occurs and how institutions can react to protect the child.

Researchers often use the term protective factor to describe the experiences, opportunities, relationships, and individual characteristics that are present in vulnerable children. In families where violence is a daily occurrence, children are forced to independently develop strategies and styles that will help them suppress intimidation, threats and the feeling of losing personal control. A certain number of children who are exposed to violence become resilient to numerous stressful life situations over time, i.e. such children better tolerate the situations they encounter in life, because the stress tolerance threshold is at a significantly higher level than that of children who have not encountered violence in the family. The resilience that occurs in children living in an environment full of violence is a dynamic process that takes place on several levels.

The Factors of Violence against Children

There are numerous factors that influence and cause violence against children and they occur at different levels of society. At the macro level, they manifest themselves as wider socio-economic, cultural or institutional determinants that create conditions that lead to an increased risk of violence (economic underdevelopment or instability, poverty, social conflicts, non-existent or inadequate legislation, etc.). At the meso level, they manifest as socio-economic, cultural or institutional factors that are specific to a certain local community or region. At the micro level, these are family-related factors. In addition to these factors, there are also certain factors related to individuals that increase the risk of exposure to

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