Can Your Family Weather the Storm?
Selena Jackson, M. S., Caitlin Anderson, B. A., & Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Ph.D.
University of South Alabama, Mobile, AL

Background

- Family functioning and resilience may work as buffers for potential psychological distress following natural disasters (Walsh, 2006).
- Interestingly, differences in how each family member conceptualizes family functioning may influence the manifestation of individual resilience (Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983).
- However, the perceptions of family functioning held by various family members have rarely been studied in relation to individual’s own resilience.

Purpose

The current study explored the prediction of perceived resilience in families with a student who had been relocated from a local high school that was destroyed by a tornado mid-year.
Family functioning was measured by the McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD, Epstein et al., 1983). Dimensions include:
1. Difficulties with Problem Solving
2. Difficulties with Roles
3. Difficulties with Communication
4. Difficulties with Affective Responsiveness
5. Difficulties with Affective Involvement
6. Difficulties with Behavioral Control
7. Difficulties with General Functioning

Methods

Participants
- Families with a student who was attending a local high school destroyed by a tornado:
  - Adolescents (n=25) mean age 16.4 yrs. (SD=.96)
  - Parents (n= 35) mean age 45.7 yrs. (SD=7.31)
  - Predominantly female (70%)
  - Predominantly African American (62%)

Measures
- McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD) (Epstein et al., 1983) (r’s = .72 - .92)
- Resilience Scale (RS; Wagnild & Young, 1993)
  - Coefficient alpha, r = .91, p <.001

Results

- Adolescent Resilience: The overall model was a good fit for the data with family functioning accounting for 60% of the variance: $R^2 = .602, F (7,14) = 3.03, p = .037$.
- Parent Resilience: The overall model was a good fit for the data with family functioning accounting for 62% of the variance: $R^2 = .619, F (7,19) = 4.40, p = .005$.
- Interestingly, parent perceptions of family functioning did not predict adolescent resilience, or vice versa.

Correlations between Parent and Adolescent Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>r</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resilience</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>.744</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>.387</td>
<td>.024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles</td>
<td>.442**</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.306</td>
<td>.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Responsiveness</td>
<td>.600**</td>
<td>&lt;.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective Involvement</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Control</td>
<td>.349*</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Functioning</td>
<td>.612**</td>
<td>&lt;.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

- Individuals’ own perception of their family functioning strongly predicted perceptions of their own individual resilience.
- Surprisingly, family members who reported difficulties in general family functioning perceived themselves as being more resilient.
- Findings revealed differential predictions of resilience based upon membership status within the family.
- For adolescents, reported difficulties in general family functioning predicted perceived resilience, whereas parents differentiated among several family qualities, which is similar to findings by Walsh (2006).
- It can be postulated that when working with families in clinical settings post natural disaster, it is important to recognize the different perspectives within a family when collaboratively developing effective treatment plans.


The Outreach Program was developed jointly by BP and the Plaintiffs’ Steering Committee as part of the Deepwater Horizon Medical Benefits Class Action Settlement, which was approved by the U.S. District Court in New Orleans on January 11, 2013 and became effective on February 12, 2014. The Outreach Program is supervised by the court, and is funded with $105 million from the Medical Settlement.