Parsing and Sussing Vulnerabilities and Resilience: Lessons from Research on Military Families

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The Complexity of Intersections
Intersections and Overlays
Layers and Levels of Human Development and Contexts (Lerner)
Places, Texts, and Meaning

• “It is appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning. Every place has an excess of meaning beyond what can be seen or understood at any one time” (p. 17).


• From squalor to soap and back again
  – Habits of the heart and mind, and seeking comfort in ways we often do not understand
• Hopelessness and Hopefulness bundled together
• From social exclusion to social inclusion, to renewal and redemption
• “And when I went to meet him........he never showed.”
• Development diverted but on the mend
Resilience and Vulnerabilities

Resilience Markers

• Positive memories of childhood
• Positive family connections now; sense of legacy
• History of occupational success
• Independent living track
• Management of mental illness and alcohol use
• Active friendships
• Connections with formal support systems

Vulnerabilities Markers

• Family disruptions, past and present
• Alcoholism in family of origin and in own life
• Violence in family and community
• Unresolved interpersonal conflicts
• Social isolation/exclusion
• Vague sense of future
Resilience and Vulnerability

- **Resilience**
  - Process by which families are able to adapt and function competently following exposure to significant adversity or crises

- **Vulnerability**
  - Experiences, situations, or characteristics that expose a person to additional negative experiences and results
Military Families and Resilience

- Resilient families are those that successfully adapt over time in the face of significant adversities and continue to get the day-to-day tasks of life done.
- Military families are a type of “organization family”----families where the needs of the employing organization usually take priority over the needs of the family.
- Challenges of war-time service, including lengthy, repeated combat deployments and the associated family separations, represent unprecedented threats to the integrity and well-being of service members and their families.
- Many men and women overcome war-related trauma and disabling physical and psychological wounds and return to productive roles in both the military and the larger society. They demonstrate resilience.
- Most studies of military family resilience have given insufficient attention to the community context in which families are embedded.
- Source: Bowen, Martin, & Mancini (2013).
Parsing and Sussing

In general

• Since everything can’t be part of resilience, being clear about its essential elements.
• Recognizing that all vulnerabilities are not created equal.
• Determining if prevention and intervention are better served by resilience being seen as antecedent, process, or consequence.

Re: Military Families

• Differentiating “life” experiences from military-centered experiences.
• Ceasing to view military families as needy units.
• In the case of children and youth, teasing military family related effects from usual developmental angst.
• Elevating context as significant for explaining family functioning.
  - Military contexts, in particular
  - Community contexts, more generally
ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES, FAMILY FUNCTIONING, AND RESILIENCE IN MILITARY FAMILIES: A PATTERN-BASED APPROACH

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Definition:

- **Resilience**: the ability to withstand and rebound from adversity (Walsh, 2002), are attained when robust protective factors are available to alter or disrupt the connection between early life adversity and current functioning (Larkin, Beckos, & Shields, 2012). Drawing from the paradigm of developmental and family sciences, the process of resilience involves dynamic interactions encompassing positive adaptation generally within the context of significant adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Walsh, 2002).
Adverse childhood experiences

• Long-term consequences: including physical health, mental health, and parenting.
• Significant family-levels of maladaptation across the lifespan such as poor family functioning (Chapman et al., 2004; Dube, Felitti, Dong, Giles, & Anda, 2003).
• Not only a variety of domains but also: intergenerational transmission of adverse parenting (Felitti et al., 1998; Luecken, Kraft, & Hagan, 2009; Luecken, Roubinov, & Tanaka, 2013; Shapiro & Levendosky, 1999; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991).
Family Stress perspective to resilience

- Family Stress (Patterson & Garwick, 1994; Walsh et al., 2002; Masten & Shaffer, 2006) model of resilience: families have the capability to promote successful adaptation or “bonadaptation,” seen as the process of restoring balance between capabilities (e.g., solid family functioning) and demands (individual psychopathology), of their individual members particularly when faced with challenges (Patterson, 2002).
Family Stress perspective to resilience

Demands and Risk Factors

Capabilities (Assets)

Adverse childhood experiences

Family functioning and support
The family and resilience: A system perspective

- Shifting the unit of analysis (Patterson, 2002; Masten & Shaffer, 2006; Walsh, 2002). Studying family dynamic processes that lead to resilience, while maintaining the family as the primary unit of analysis.
- Families are rarely identified solely by a single dimension
- Pattern-centered approach and nonlinear outcomes
- Multifinality derived from system perspectives (von Bertalanffy, 1969; Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996)
The circumplex model to evaluate family functioning. Olson et al.’s typology: *Rigidly Cohesive, Mid-range, Flexibly Unbalanced, Chaotically Disengaged, Unbalanced*
• The circumplex model vis a vis meta functioning domains: Communication and Family Satisfaction
• Delineation of important family functional processes that may underpin resilient outcomes among individual members (husband, wife, and children).
• Family functioning are theorized to serve as key protective factors for family members when faced with challenges
The focus on military families is particularly important because of the normative stressors (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003):

- Frequent relocations
- Family separations
- Reorganizations of family life at reunion
- May shed light vulnerable populations experiencing change and transitions (e.g., immigrant families and families with an incarcerated family member).
Evaluating successful adaptations among adult family members exposed to varying degrees of childhood adversity enables researchers to better understand the family functioning processes that promote family and individual resilience (Patterson, 2002).

The study of adverse childhood experiences, therefore, permits empirical evaluation of family-level processes underlying the emergence of resilience. Delineating processes in family systems that can buffer the effect of childhood experiences on adult maladaptive outcomes.
Aims and hypotheses:

- The circumplex model
- Adversities on the identified family functioning configurations
- Family types as protective and/or risk factors to resilience.
Participants and Procedure

• Data were collected from participants ($N=273$ military families) in the continental United States. Research criterion included: (1) families have at least one adolescent between the ages of 11 and 18, and (2) all eligible family members come to the youth center on the installation to take the survey at the same time (e.g., in two-parent families, both parents and the adolescent were required to come).
Measures

- **Adverse childhood experiences.** This measure is part of a battery of measures in the Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory (King, King, & Vogt, 2003).

- **Family functioning.** The six scales of FACES IV (Olson, Gorall, & Tiesel, 2006): cohesion, flexibility, disengagement, enmeshment, rigidity, and chaos.

- **Outcomes:** Physical health (physical difficulties, sleep, balanced meals), Depressive symptoms, Wellbeing, Supportive Parenting reported by adults and their children.

- All had adequate to excellent internal consistencies.
In the present investigation we have employed an innovative 3-step latent profile analysis (LPA; Asparouhov & Muthén, 2013; see next slide) that was developed following recommendations in the latent class analysis (LCA) literature (Lanza, Tan, & Bray, 2013; Vermunt, 2010).
Cohesive Flexible Disengaged
Enmeshed Chaotic

Family Functioning Profiles

Adverse Childhood Experiences (Partner)
Adverse Childhood Experiences (Actor)

Wellbeing
Positive Parenting (Active Duty & Spouse)
Health Quality
Depression (Active Duty & Spouse)

Cohesive Flexible Disengaged Enmeshed Rigid Chaotic

LPA Model
Characteristics of the identified four family pattern

- Balanced
- Unbalanced
- Mid-Range
- Rigidly Balanced

- Cohesion
- Flexibility
- Disengaged
- Enmeshed
- Rigid
- Chaotic

(1-5)
Adversity per family profile

Balanced Unbalanced Mid-Range Rigidly Balanced

Group Membership Percentages

Family Functioning Patterns

- Low adversity (P1)
- High adversity (P1)
- Low adversity (P2)
- High adversity (P2)
Active Duty

Profile’s Outcomes

Outcome Level (1-5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile Typology</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Well-being</th>
<th>Parenting A</th>
<th>Parenting C</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BALANCED</td>
<td>1.422</td>
<td>3.332</td>
<td>3.577</td>
<td>3.814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNBALANCED</td>
<td>1.846</td>
<td>3.345</td>
<td>3.319</td>
<td>2.675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MID-RANGE</td>
<td>1.551</td>
<td>3.006</td>
<td>3.329</td>
<td>3.543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RIGIDLY</td>
<td>1.952</td>
<td>2.875</td>
<td>2.625</td>
<td>3.778</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Profile Typology: BALANCED, UNBALANCED, MID-RANGE, RIGIDLY

Outcome Level: Depression, Well-being, Parenting A, Parenting C
Partner

Profile's Outcomes

Outcome Level (1-5)

Profile typology

Outcome

BALANCED

UNBALANCED

MID-RANGE

RIGIDLY

Depression

Well-being

Parenting A

Parenting C

1.422

1.846

1.551

2.675

3.332

3.345

3.006

2.875

3.814

3.319

3.329

3.345

3.778

2.625

2.875

3.543

3.778

Department of Human Development and Family Science
Health Outcomes

Health Outcome: by Active Duty and Partner

- Active Duty Health
- Partner Health

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• Validation to the circumplex model in relation to Resilience (Olson, 2010).
• As expected from Resilience theory: adversity → maladaptation and family profiles as risk versus asset factors.
• Empirical demarcation of the family dynamics that promote the most optimal paths for successful adaptation among individual family members
• Multifinality and nonlinear patterns; Self-Organization and Agency?
• Communication and family satisfaction as demonstrated by the balanced families in this study. Vital family interactions?
• The focus on the intersection between family relations and resilience, in particular, elucidates vulnerability and strength for practitioners, including family life educators and interventionists.
• Specific family dynamics can mitigate negative outcomes?
In line with the circumplex model conceptualization, the dimension of flexibility and cohesion are key family-level factors for successfully coping with the challenges faced by family members.

The strong presence of rigidity, as a protective factor in military families who are at risk?
Acknowledgments

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