

Building Resilience through Supportive School Environments: Towards a Model for Promoting Resilience in Culturally Diverse Students

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Recent World Health Reports note that five of the ten leading causes of disability worldwide relate to mental health problems. These reports refer specifically to the importance of strengthening protective factors as the foundation for positive mental health, namely, fostering resilience. Scant research has addressed determinants of resilience from an organisational or systemic perspective, particularly in settings such as schools or with vulnerable populations such as migrants and refugees. Contemporary interventions predominantly focus on risk factors, both as outcomes and evaluation indicators, rather than shifting to a strengths-based model. Increasing epidemiological evidence confirms that young people who are socially integrated and connected to school, and rate highly on measures of resilience, experience better socioeconomic, educational and health outcomes.

This paper reviews key findings from several research projects conducted in Queensland during the past five years. Multilevel models are being used to investigate personal and systemic determinants of human and social capital related to resilience in children and young people within the school setting, including an investigation of protective factors from a cross-cultural perspective. Our research identifies those characteristics of the Health Promoting School that build supportive structures to foster children's resilience. The empirical results of these key studies will be outlined. A salutogenic model of the pathways by which schools can build their capacity to enhance children's resilience, through fostering human, cultural and social capital as the foundation for a supportive organisational environment, is presented, including discussion of emerging issues within transcultural mental health promotion.
