

Individual, Community, and National Resiliencies and Age: Are Older People Less Resilient than Younger Individuals?

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Objectives: *The resilience of older and younger Israelis was investigated. Design and Setting:* *A representative sample of the Jewish population in Israel (N = 1,022) was used. Participants:* *The participants were three adult age-groups (18-35, 36-64, and 65+ years). Half of them were women, and they evenly represented left-wing and right-wing political attitudes. Measurements:* *Resilience was measured by the ratio of strength and vulnerability of the individual, the community, and the nation. Results:* *Older participants did not differ from younger people in sense of danger; reported lower level of distress symptoms; and showed higher individual, community, and national resilience scores based on strength to vulnerability ratio, compared with younger individuals. Conclusions:* *These data support the contention that older Israelis are more resilient than younger cohorts. Their long direct or indirect experience with wars and terror attacks has not decreased their resilience, and has perhaps even strengthened it.* (Am J Geriatr Psychiatry 2016; ■■■:■■■-■■■)

Key Words: national resilience, community resilience, individual resilience, old age, terrorism

Resilience of older people is characterized by the two contradictory perspectives of pathogenesis and

inoculation. The first claims that longer life decreases individual resilience, whereas the second contends that richer life experience increases resilience. Data showing that older Israelis displayed more stress reactions and poorer coping than the rest of the population during the Lebanon War and the Gulf War¹ support the pathogenic perspective. The evidence that elderly Americans were less distressed, worried, and despairing than younger adults following natural disasters² supports the inoculation viewpoint. We hypothesize that older Israelis develop higher individual, community, and national resiliencies compared with younger adults.

Individual Resilience

Resilience is generally defined as the capacity to withstand and recover from significant adversities. We submit that resilience should be determined concurrently by both strength and vulnerability. We define resilience as the balance of perceived strength (protective factors) and vulnerability (risk factors) following an adversity or a traumatic event, at the individual, community, or national levels.³ Individual post-adversity strengths that successfully counter risk factors portray resilience. A level of vulnerability that is higher than post-adversity strengths will often result in maladjustment. Individual strength will be assessed in the present study by the My Life Today scale³ and vulnerability will be represented by level of distress symptoms.⁴

Community Resilience

Community resilience is a positive trajectory of adaptation after a disturbance, stress, or adversity, which constitutes a major coping facilitating community asset.⁵ It refers to attitudes and feelings towards community social cohesion, trust in leadership, and readiness for future threats. Community resilience positively correlated with observed quality of community life, and negatively correlated with perceived threat to the community.⁵

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National Resilience

National resilience pertains to perceived society attempts to maintain its strength in the face of extreme adversity. It has been argued that national resilience comprises patriotism, optimism, social integration, and trust in political and public institutions,⁶ which should be retained intact in intractable conflicts, such as the current Israeli–Arab conflict.

Resilience-Promoting Factors*Sense of Coherence*

Sense of coherence is a major resilience-fostering resource in Antonovsky's salutogenic model.⁷ It is a cognitive orientation that presents the world as logical, reasonable, and manageable, and as positively associated with health and well-being.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy reflects people's beliefs in their capacity to exercise control over events that affect their lives. This belief influences the goals people set, the effort they invest in attaining those goals, and their resilience when faced with difficulties.⁸

The following hypotheses were investigated in this study.

1. Older people will report a higher level of resilience compared with younger individuals.
2. Older people will score higher than younger individuals on both self-efficacy⁸ and sense of coherence.⁷

METHODS**Sample**

A representative sample of the adult Jewish Israeli population was used ($N = 1,022$). Participants were contacted by an Israeli online survey research organization. Their ages ranged between 18 and 91 years ($M: 43.56$, $SD: 16.09$). This research was approved by the ethics committee of the Psychology Department of Tel Hai College.

Instruments*Current Quality of Life*

The My Life Today scale is an adaptation of the Recovery from War scale to peace times.³ Its 10 items pertain to work, health, recreation, wider social contacts, achievements, family relations, daily functioning, relations with friends, and general assessment of one's life. The response scale ranged from 1 (not good at all) to 6 (very good). The scale's Cronbach's reliability is $\alpha = 0.91$.

Distress Symptoms

The Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI)⁴ was used. This 18-item inventory is rated on a scale ranging from "not suffering at all" (1), to "suffering very much" (5). The current scale's reliability is $\alpha = 0.92$.

Individual Resilience

The individual strength to vulnerability ratio (IND-SVR) was determined by the standardized My Life Today score divided by the standardized BSI score.

Community Resilience

Perceived community resilience was determined by a short version of the CCRAM scale.⁵ Rating of its 10 items ranged from 1 (does not agree at all) to 5 (totally agrees). The scale's reliability in this sample is $\alpha = 0.92$.

National Resilience

This 24-item instrument pertained to trust in national leadership and institutions.⁹ The 6-point response scale ranged from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 6 (very strongly agree). Its current reliability is $\alpha = 0.92$.

Sense of Danger

The Sense of Danger scale¹⁰ was used. This 6-item instrument was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). The scale's current reliability is $\alpha = 0.83$.

COM-SVR and NAT-SVR scores were determined by dividing standardized community resilience scores

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