



From Poly-Victimization to Poly-Strengths: Understanding the Web of Violence Can Transform Research on Youth Violence and Illuminate the Path to Prevention and Resilience

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Abstract

For many years, an overly “siloed” approach has hampered efforts to understand violence and minimize the societal burden of violence and victimization. This article discusses the limitations of an overly specialized approach to youth violence research, which has focused too much on violence in particular contexts, such as the family or the school. Instead, a child-centered approach is needed that comprehensively assesses all exposures to violence. This concept of the total cumulative burden of violence is known as poly-victimization. The poly-victimization framework reveals that many youth are

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entangled in a web of violence, experiencing victimization in multiple settings by multiple perpetrators. This more accurate view of children's exposure to violence has many advantages for advancing our scientific understanding of violence. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, this more comprehensive view also points to new insights for resilience and prevention. This includes recognizing a parallel concept, "poly-strengths," which captures the number of resources and assets children and their families can use to help insulate youth from violence (prevention) or assist in coping and promoting well-being after victimization (intervention). Reconceptualizing how resilience is defined and understood among youth populations can help alleviate the true societal burden of youth victimization.

Keywords

child abuse, violence exposure, prevention of child abuse, treatment/intervention, resilience

Bullying, child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence, dating violence, hate crime, online victimization, gang violence—these are just a few of the ways that children are victimized. It is not widely appreciated, but people are most vulnerable to victimization during childhood and adolescence (Finkelhor & Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1994). This is partly because some forms of victimization, such as neglect and statutory rape, are unique to childhood (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2000). It also stems from age-related vulnerabilities, including dependence on others for protection and limited ability to get away from dangerous environments, which unfortunately for some children include their family-of-origin, schools, and other places that should be safe havens. Some classes of perpetrators also target youth, such as pedophiles and gangs. Other vulnerabilities are not unique to childhood, such as poverty, community disorder, and family members with mental health or substance abuse problems, but these vulnerabilities add to youths' risks as well as those of adults (Turner et al., 2012; Turner, Shattuck, Hamby, & Finkelhor, 2013).

Despite the widespread recognition of these vulnerabilities and their impact across multiple forms of victimization, violence scholars and providers have been slow to recognize the interconnections among different forms of violence (Hamby & Grych, 2013). This article discusses the advantages of a more integrated approach to the understanding of children's exposure to violence, using the poly-victimization framework. Poly-victimization focuses on the effects of the cumulative burden of all types of violence. We also use the

phrase “web of violence” to describe the ways that different forms of violence are interconnected (Hamby & Grych, 2013). The poly-victimization concept has helped to define a research agenda that has influenced our understanding of victimization and has begun to transform prevention and intervention. This article identifies some promising next steps for the poly-victimization approach.

In addition, this article highlights the perhaps surprising ways in which the poly-victimization framework can contribute to advances in understanding and promoting resilience among victimized youth. Many of our assumptions regarding resilience are also based on approaches that are overly narrow. The concept of “poly-strengths” can better capture the portfolio of strengths and resources that most youth and families have (often even despite high levels of adversity). A more comprehensive approach to resilience holds promise to enhance approaches to intervention and prevention. These key points are summarized in Table 1 and expanded in the text below.

Disciplinary Siloes Delay Progress

Due to numerous historical reasons, professional efforts to understand and reduce youth victimization have split into multiple specialized areas. Although historical and literary references to violence against children are found in our oldest surviving writing and oral histories, most efforts to reduce and ameliorate the impact of violence are relatively recent. Violence in many settings was considered normative behavior for centuries. Although community advocates had been raising awareness about child abuse since the late 19th century, it was only after physicians identified child abuse as a major issue (Kempe, Silverman, Steele, Droegemuller, & Silver, 1962) that significant public funds were invested in addressing the problem—remarkably recent from an historical perspective. Unfortunately, when Child Protective Services (CPS) were created, they treated youth victimization as a separate problem from other family violence, inadvertently contributing to the fragmentation of services, advocacy, and research. There are other institutional peculiarities too, such as the inclusion of sexual abuse by strangers within the domain of CPS, while the physical assault of children by strangers is not considered a CPS matter in many states. Similarly, domestic violence shelters focus on the victimization of women and have been slow to provide comparable services to children, in some cases even restricting older male children’s access to services (see Hamby, 2014; Hamby & Finkelhor, 2000, for further discussion). Law enforcement, health care agencies, and CPS all tend to take an incident-specific approach to assessment and intervention, rather than consistently assessing children’s safety in all contexts.

Table 1. Key Points Regarding Poly-Victimization, Poly-Strengths, and the Future of Research on Violence and Resilience.

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1. People are most vulnerable to victimization during childhood and adolescence, partly because some forms of victimization are unique to childhood but also because of age-related vulnerabilities, such as dependence on others for protection and limited ability to get away from dangerous situations.
 2. Professional efforts to understand and reduce violence have split into multiple specialized areas, leading to duplication of efforts and lack of appreciation of interconnections among forms of violence.
 3. Professionals have recognized links between some phenomena, such as exposure to domestic violence and dating violence or child physical abuse. However, virtually all forms of violence are interconnected, even such seemingly dissimilar events as sexual victimization and property crime. Interconnections are not just due to similarities in the act or the relationship.
 4. The concept of *poly-victimization* refers to the cumulative burden across all types of victimization. Poly-victimization more adequately captures the effects of victimization than a focus on single types of youth victimization.
 5. Most people are *resilient* as virtually everyone has been exposed to some form of victimization or other adversity during their lives. However, victimizations are more likely to trigger significant symptomatology as they accumulate, which can lead to experiencing posttraumatic distress or other clinically significant distress. Some youth may not respond well to intervention because their poly-victimization burden may be higher than others.
 6. There are several pathways that contribute to resilience, two of which are impacted by poly-victimization.
 - a. Vulnerabilities (e.g., the safety of the child's broader environment) that led to the event need to be identified or the child will continue to be at risk for further victimization. Poly-victimization complicates this because victimization itself can create vulnerabilities that can be carried into new situations and also create heightened risk, such as youth with mental health problems can be targeted for bullying.
 - b. Coping that specifically addresses victimization can also contribute to positive outcomes. Most conventional psychotherapy and other interventions fall into this category. Poly-victimization can call for a broader lens and a willingness to address the entire burden of victimization a child has experienced.
 - c. Well-being can be addressed directly with interventions such as mindfulness, relaxation, and social engagement that can directly improve a person's well-being.
 7. A parallel to the concept of poly-victimization is *poly-strengths*. Research shows that there are significant relationships between strengths and outcomes. More strengths is likely to be associated with better outcomes, although the limited existing evidence suggests that some strengths may be more advantageous than others in terms of insulating youth from violence and promoting well-being when violence does occur. The Resilience Portfolio Model suggests that the most important strengths fall into the domains of self-regulation, interpersonal strengths, and meaning making.
 8. Resilience is a readily attainable skill that almost everyone has to some degree. A framework incorporating poly-victimization and poly-strengths has the potential to advance our understanding and ability to promote youth resilience.
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Note. These key points are further elaborated in the text.

In addition, bullying is largely institutionally bound to the school system, even though a great deal of peer victimization happens outside of the school

setting (Turner, Shattuck, Finkelhor, & Hamby, 2016). Although peer victimization prevention programs are starting to expand into other areas, such as homophobic name calling and sexual harassment (Espelage, Low, Van Ryzin, & Polanin, 2015; B. G. Taylor, Stein, Mumford, & Woods, 2013), few directly address family violence. Child abuse, exposure to domestic (intimate partner) violence, and bullying are three of the largest subdisciplines in violence research, but there are numerous other siloes, not only in the research world but also based in other specialized institutional units, such as police forces that focus entirely on Internet victimization, gang violence, or child pornography.

All of this hyper-specialization has been unfortunate because it has moved us away from the realities of children's lives. Many different forms of youth victimization are significantly interconnected with each other (e.g., Finkelhor, Turner, Ormrod, & Hamby, 2009). For example, the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence (NatSCEV) shows that children experiencing one form of victimization are at least 2 to 3 times more likely to experience many other forms. Some associations are even stronger. For example, the risk of sexual victimization is 62% higher for youth who have experienced physical assault in comparison with other youth (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Furthermore, and most importantly, the reasons for these interconnections have to do with persistent vulnerabilities that affect children in many settings and many relationships. Our current level of scientific knowledge suggests that there are relatively few risk factors that are unique to a specific form of violence (Hamby & Grych, 2013). For some forms of violence, there may be no unique risk factors.

Children's realities are much better described as an interconnected "web" of violence (Hamby & Grych, 2013). Professionals have long recognized links between some phenomena, such as exposure to domestic violence and teen dating violence, or exposure to domestic violence and child physical abuse (e.g., Edleson, 1999). However, too much of the focus has been on the search for surface commonalities, such as one dysfunctional romantic relationship leading to another, or a violent father hitting both his wife and his child. Virtually all forms of violence are interconnected, and these interconnections are not just due to formal similarities in the act or the relationship. Dating violence is not only related to interparental domestic violence but also to the risk of peer bullying (Hamby, Finkelhor, & Turner, 2012). Domestic violence is linked not only to child physical abuse but also to child neglect (Hamby, Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2010). The connections even extend across seemingly completely unrelated phenomena, such as sexual victimization and property crime, which are also interconnected (Finkelhor et al., 2009; Finkelhor, Turner, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2015).

The Poly-Victimization Framework

Insight into the connections between seemingly quite different types of violence led to the development of the concept of poly-victimization, or the cumulative burden across all types of victimization (Hamby, Finkelhor, & Turner, 2014; Turner, Finkelhor, & Ormrod, 2010b). Poly-victimization is related to other conceptualizations of the cumulative burden of victimization, such as the concept of “adverse childhood experiences” and “complex trauma” (e.g., Felitti et al., 1998). This recognition of the importance of victimization *dose*, versus the presence or absence of any particular type of violence, is one of the fastest growing trends in violence research (Hamby, McDonald, & Grych, 2014). An internally consistent terminology has been developed to distinguish poly-victimization from other patterns (Hamby & Grych, 2013). Mono-victimization, which does occur, is the experience of a single victimization. Revictimization refers to the repeated experience of one type of victimization. Poly-perpetration, mono-perpetration, and reperpetration are the parallel terms for offending. Finally, perpetration-victimization is the term used for the link between involvement in violence in both roles, which is also common.

Seen through the lens of poly-victimization rather than through the lens of specific forms of victimization, it is clear that victimization is a distressingly common experience. A large community survey in rural Appalachia of adolescents and adults found a lifetime victimization rate of 86% in a sample that had an average age of only 30 years (Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2017). Remarkably, this high rate was found even using an abbreviated version of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; Hamby, Finkelhor, Ormrod, & Turner, 2004), the most commonly used tool to measure the lifetime burden of poly-victimization in youth and adults (e.g., Radford et al., 2011). Several specific forms of victimization, especially bullying and other types of peer victimization, were experienced by over half of the sample. If one expands to consider other nonvictimization adversities (e.g., family substance use problems), almost everyone (98.5%) reported exposure to adversity in that low-income community. Another key insight of the poly-victimization framework is that witnessing violence, especially of family members or other loved ones, has mental health effects that are similar to directly experiencing violence (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Once those sorts of exposures are included, it is clear that most people who survive to adulthood will eventually get exposed to violence, with much of this exposure occurring during childhood. Furthermore, considerable research has shown that the adverse impacts of youth victimization extend even to late adulthood (e.g., Felitti et al., 1998).

The “web of violence” is a rather dark image, and some might find the concept of poly-victimization somewhat distressing. Indeed, we have been told by some of our colleagues that the idea can even be overwhelming. The field—and

the society at large—has been addressing victimization in earnest for decades. There has been some progress—We have shifted norms and reduced rates of some violence since we first started systematically addressing violence in the 1960s and 1970s (Catalano, 2012; Finkelhor & Jones, 2006). However, there has also been some stagnation in recent years. Rates of youth victimization since the first poly-victimization survey in 2003 have remained largely constant or shown only modest declines in a few specific forms (Finkelhor et al., 2015). This parallels findings for other types of violence. For example, homicide, after historic declines, may be increasing slightly in some parts of the United States (Major Cities Chiefs Association, 2016). Many people are struggling to be effective even within their own silo. Now we are suggesting that they take on the work happening in other siloes too. Such an approach can seem quite overwhelming. However, we recommend a different lens. There is good reason to believe that a more comprehensive approach to youth victimization is just what the field needs to move past this period of relatively little progress. We describe some of the better known advantages briefly and then consider the benefits for promoting resilience and the future of youth victimization research.

Advantages of the Poly-Victimization Model

The first and perhaps most obvious and important benefit is that poly-victimization more adequately captures the effects of youth victimization. A study that classifies youth, for example, into “child abuse victims” and “non-victims” is fundamentally mis-specifying those groups. Many of the so-called “non-victims” in the comparison group will have experienced bullying, teen dating violence, property crime, or other offenses. If they seem more similar to the victimized group than hypothesized, it is because many of them are also victims (Hamby & Grych, 2013).

The poly-victimization framework provides new insights into many mental health problems. For example, youth poly-victimization has a stronger association with suicidal ideation than peer victimization, sexual victimization, or maltreatment (Turner, Finkelhor, Shattuck, & Hamby, 2012). Adolescent and preadolescent poly-victims are almost 6 times more likely to experience suicidal ideation than non-poly-victims in the same age range.

Future Directions for Poly-Victimization Research

The Search for Common and Unique Causal Mechanisms

Poly-victimization has drawn attention to the many common causes of victimization, such as the developmental and socioeconomic vulnerabilities mentioned at the beginning of this article. By extension, recognizing

commonalities also prompts the field to look more specifically for unique causes. Understanding both is the only way we can explain why one form of victimization happens versus another—for example, why a physical assault occurs in a school setting on one day and relational aggression on another. Longitudinal research is needed to help identify the causal mechanisms that account for these interconnections. They could be due to direct cascading effects of victimization, such that one form of victimization directly leads to increased vulnerabilities for another (e.g., anxiety or dissociative symptoms could put one at risk for another perpetrator, or being incapacitated by one perpetrator might leave someone vulnerable to another). The connections could also be due to other shared vulnerabilities, such as poverty.

New Interconnections, Such As Online and In-Person Victimization

There is a burgeoning literature on the interconnections between crime in “real life” and crime that occurs online or over cell phone technology (Mitchell, Jones, Turner, Shattuck, & Wolak, 2016). Many perpetrators interact with their victims in both settings. Technology has reduced many of the obstacles and risks of criminal behavior and is adding substantially to the burden of crime. New research on poly-victimization needs to do more to recognize the changing landscape of crime and violence, by better incorporating relatively “new” types of victimization such as identity theft (which, while not unknown in the analog era, was rare, in contrast to today, where a single hacker can steal the personal information of tens of millions at once). Recent data indicates cyber-victimization adds significantly to the burden of poly-victimization (Hamby et al., in press).

Rethinking Prevention and Intervention

On the prevention and intervention side, insights from the poly-victimization model offer opportunities to develop more efficient services that can help reduce the burden of multiple types of violence. The poly-victimization model also provides a new hypothesis about why some youth do not respond as well to intervention: It could be because their poly-victimization burden is higher. The good news is that offers another target for treatments. Treatment approaches tailored to poly-victimization are being developed with increasing frequency as poly-victimization is better understood. For example, the original version of trauma-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy (TF-CBT) focused on a single “trauma,” with the implicit assumption that a single type of victimization would be the focus of therapy. Now, there

are adaptations of TF-CBT for youth who have experienced poly-victimization, for example, by making room in treatment for trauma narratives that incorporate multiple victimizations (Cohen, Mannarino, Kliethermes, & Murray, 2012).

Future prevention and intervention can do even more to incorporate the insights of the poly-victimization framework. For example, children referred for one type of victimization should be routinely assessed for other forms, especially those most closely linked to the presenting problem. The interconnections among forms of victimization also change across childhood. For example, the risks of witnessing assaults and of sexual victimization both increase dramatically with the onset of adolescence, and providers should be aware of these changing patterns of risk. In contrast, bullying peaks in middle school. Addressing safety issues in multiple settings and making safety a more central element of treatment (Cohen et al., 2012) can also improve services.

Poly-Victimization, Poly-Strengths, and Resilience

In addition to these advantages, insights from the poly-victimization framework can be extended to inform a more comprehensive model of resilience and well-being. We now turn to a discussion of how recognizing poly-victimization can transform work on youth resilience.

The “Ordinary Magic” of Resilience

Ann Masten (2001) has referred to resilience as “ordinary magic,” and the findings of poly-victimization research further support this premise. Most people are resilient, because virtually everyone has been exposed to some form of victimization or other adversity (Hamby, Smith, Mitchell, & Turner, 2016). Furthermore, most people are resilient not only in the limited sense of not meeting criteria for a psychological disorder but also in the broader sense of having achieved posttraumatic growth and well-being (acknowledging that everyone experiences daily hassles that lead to some variation in well-being from moment to moment).

For years, research has focused on what seemed like something of a mysterious finding: that some victimized people are resilient, while others experience posttraumatic distress. This is even true among people who seem to be exposed to similar traumatic events, such as child abuse or bullying. Terrorism and natural disasters offer other well-known exposures that seemingly lead to diverse outcomes. For example, after 9/11, not everyone in Manhattan developed posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD); on the contrary,

about 10% of people in New York developed PTSD after the attacks (Neria et al., 2010). Often, attempts to solve this mystery have focused on posttraumatic coping and such factors as the availability of social support or counseling after the event. Although these factors certainly play a role, the poly-victimization framework has helped identify what is one of the single biggest determinants of posttraumatic stress: total dose of victimization and adversity. For example, the risk of PTSD after military deployment is associated with prior trauma exposure and early adverse events (Xue et al., 2015). The poly-victimization framework points to the importance of prior traumatic load before the event versus coping responses after the event. This has profound and often underappreciated implications for resilience, because it suggests that we should not think of resilience as something that is tied to a specific incident. Rather, we need a more holistic, person-centered, and comprehensive understanding of resilience, much like the construct of poly-victimization has led to a more holistic and person-centered understanding of victimization.

It is fundamentally wrong, from a scientific point of view, to view most crime as an isolated event in the life of the victim, the perpetrator, or even the community. In the case of the victim, one of the most important questions to know about any single incident is whether this was a rare or even isolated event—"mono-victimization" in the poly-victimization framework (Hamby & Grych, 2013)—or whether it was part of a long cascade of vulnerability and victimization. Victimization is much more likely to trigger significant symptomatology as they accumulate. This is true for children as well as adults. Indeed, in NatSCEV, the patterns in the data are remarkably linear (Finkelhor, Turner, Hamby, & Ormrod, 2011). Two victimizations are worse than one, three victimizations are worse than two, four are worse than three, and so on. In NatSCEV, it is not until youth reach four or more lifetime victimizations that they report above-average trauma symptoms and not until they report 11 or more victimizations that they report symptoms at a level usually taken to denote clinically significant distress (1 *SD* above the mean for the nationally representative sample; Finkelhor et al., 2011). Framing the question about why one victim of bullying is more distressed than another victim of bullying (or victim of assault or sexual abuse or any other specific incident) is the wrong question. It is more important to know the full burden of victimization that a child possessed before the most recent victimization.

How is this helpful for thinking about youth resilience? Resilience should be seen not as coping with a single prior, isolated event, or even prior repeated victimizations of a single type, such as bullying. Resilience involves maintaining or reacquiring well-being over a life span of ups and downs, which will eventually involve dealing with significant adversity for almost

everyone. Elements of the poly-victimization framework can be adapted to the study of resilience and provide new insights about the processes of resilience. Reframing resilience in this way also suggests some recasting of the goals of prevention and intervention.

Adapting Poly-Victimization Concepts to Resilience: Poly-Strengths

The idea of “poly-strengths” is the positive parallel to the concept of poly-victimization (Hamby et al., 2017). Strengths are also often studied in isolation, but protective factors seldom, if ever, work alone. Part of the challenge of attaining well-being is putting together a sufficiently dense and diverse set of strengths (Hamby et al., 2017). High poly-strengths offer multiple benefits and can be helpful both for prevention and intervention. First, strengths help insulate children and families from many forms of violence. This is the prevention pathway. For example, someone with good communication skills, good impulse control, and good social support is less likely to find themselves in a risky situation where they are vulnerable to victimization. High poly-strengths also offers advantages for coping with victimization when it does occur, because many of those same resources can be mustered for the purposes of dealing with the impact of victimization. Finally, many strengths directly support well-being and can directly add to well-being and help “balance out” any direct or indirect effects of violence on one’s current state of well-being. These pathways are described in more detail below.

The concept of poly-strengths also highlights that many complex problems, and victimization is certainly one of these, cannot be sufficiently addressed (either for prevention or intervention) by a single strength or resource. We recognize that no one is good at everything and none of us have every possible psychological strength or environmental resource at our disposal, but many of us have multiple resources. The concept of poly-strengths can help place the focus on the range of positive elements in children’s lives.

Underappreciated Similarities Between Prevention and Resilience

Recognizing poly-victimization changes the lens with which we understand resilience, and thus how we approach youth prevention and intervention. Indeed, one of the first implications of the pervasiveness of victimization is that the lines between prevention and intervention are blurred. Although Caplan’s (1964) early prevention framework incorporated intervention as

“tertiary” prevention, which is typically aimed at ameliorating the effects of violence that has already occurred, in practice most violence prevention uses a primary prevention framework that has the goal of preventing violence before it occurs. The poly-victimization framework shows that this is not a realistic target in most settings where youth violence prevention is offered. When a teen dating violence prevention program, for example, is delivered to a group of high school students, it is essential that it be understood that many—if not most—of those youth will have already experienced some form of victimization and more than a few will have a history of offending. In NatSCEV, every single youth who reported teen dating violence also reported at least one other form of victimization (Hamby et al., 2012). So to speak of “prevention” in this context is somewhat misleading. Rather, even at this young age, it would be more accurate to say that the goal is to interrupt the cycle of violence and to halt patterns of poly-victimization and revictimization. Indeed, NatSCEV has shown that even by age 2, almost one in three (32%) children have been exposed to personal, witnessed, or indirect victimization (Turner et al., 2010a). Any programming that is offered to school-aged children is being offered, knowingly or not, to many youth who have already been exposed to violence. Rather than incorporate intervention into prevention, as Caplan did, we should consider incorporating prevention into resilience.

What would incorporating prevention into resilience look like? That would involve recognizing two key commonalities. One, that the ultimate, true goal of both prevention and intervention for resilience is the same: to promote well-being. We want to prevent violence because of the harm it causes, and reducing harms facilitates well-being. Two, we should recognize, as described in more detail below, that much of prevention and intervention are accomplished the same way: by bolstering the strengths and resources of individuals, families, and communities. Or, one could say from the lens of the more traditional deficits-based models, that the goal is reducing or eliminating risk factors, but again these are similar for prevention and intervention. For example, improving emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships are common approaches to many prevention and intervention programs, and we should understand that any time we are improving regulation or interpersonal relationships, we are probably engaging in the prevention of some adversities and the amelioration of others, regardless of which presenting problem is our focus.

The Challenges of Resilience Involve Insulating From Violence and Promoting Well-Being

Following this reasoning produces three pathways to positive outcomes, two of which are affected by the interconnections among violence. In one

pathway, well-being is promoted by addressing the vulnerabilities that led to the identifying incident, or the child will continue to be at risk for further victimization. This essentially works the same to prevent either a particular type of victimization or to intervene against the risk of revictimization. Vulnerabilities are not limited to the perpetrator; the safety of a child's broader environment should also be assessed and addressed. In this pathway, interconnections among violence play a role because prior victimization, unfortunately and so unfairly, can itself create new vulnerabilities that are carried forward into new situations and place children at heightened risk. For example, peers are more likely to target youth with mental health problems (Turner et al., 2010a; Turner, Vanderminden, Finkelhor, Hamby, & Shattuck, 2011). Common posttraumatic stress symptoms, such as dissociation, can make someone a more attractive target for other crimes, such as robbery. Prior victimization can also impact a person's financial resources. For example, family violence can affect employment and housing stability (e.g., Tolman & Wang, 2005), and if this leads to relocation to higher crime neighborhoods, prior family violence can place victims at higher risk for future violence of other types.

In a second pathway, promoting well-being is accomplished through better coping with victimization after it occurs. Better coping can mean "more" coping—more help-seeking, more processing of the incident—or it can mean new or different forms of coping, such as replacing self-medication with alcohol or drugs with more beneficial coping strategies. For example, narrative writing about adverse events can offer the chance for reflection and healing (E. Taylor, Jouriles, Brown, Goforth, & Banyard, 2016). Poly-victimization influences coping too. Too many services, ranging from law enforcement to CPS to psychotherapy, tend to focus on the most recent (or referring) incident, but coping for a single mono-victimization is not the same as coping with victimization that occurs across settings and perpetrators. For example, as mentioned earlier, a recent innovation in trauma-focused CBT for youth has been to expand the trauma narrative beyond the reason for referral and allow youth to include other victimizations that have occurred (Cohen et al., 2012). This would be an example of a coping response, because the intervention is specifically geared toward the experience of poly-victimization. Research on coping with poly-victimization is still in its infancy. We will note one challenge we have encountered with research on coping with victimization, which is that reports of "more" coping are often tied to the extent of victimization, so high scores on coping indices can indicate that someone is dealing with a lot of problems as well as (or even instead of) that they are coping well with a problem. More research is needed to explore optimal coping for poly-victimization.

In a third pathway, well-being can be addressed directly. Interventions such as mindfulness, yoga, relaxation, and social engagement can directly improve a child's well-being. These are not the same as coping, because they are not specifically focused on the victimization or other adversity. People do not do yoga about adversity, they simply do yoga. Social networks can be strengthened by all sorts of interactions that need not be processing of victimization. Considerable scientific evidence suggests that this "additive" model of increasing positives, regardless of whether they are directly related to victimization, is a powerful approach for improving outcomes (Hamby et al., 2017).

Using Poly-Victimization to Evaluate Which Strengths Make the Best Targets for Intervention

The poly-strength approach, and the broader resilience portfolio framework of which it is a part, also calls for a better understanding of the most effective combinations of strengths or at least broad strength domains. Much like victimization research, research on strengths has proceeded in a largely piecemeal fashion. Presumably, all strengths are good. There have been several efforts to describe the full range of psychological strengths, such as Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action framework. Many studies show that, as one would expect, there are significant bivariate relationships between many strengths and outcomes (e.g., Peterson, Park, Pole, D'Andrea, & Seligman, 2008). This line of research is analogous to the first wave of research on violence, where a great deal of energy was spent documenting that numerous forms of violence caused harm. However, for the most part, the poly-victimization framework has shown that the total burden of violence has more impact than the specific form of violence. Although all forms of violence are bad and all have adverse impact, the total burden is more strongly associated with adverse outcomes (Turner et al., 2010b).

The status of various strengths with regard to this same question is not clear. In the fully analogous situation to the findings on youth victimization, poly-strengths would not only be significantly (inversely) associated with trauma symptoms but also the contributions of all individual strengths would fall to zero (statistically) when poly-strengths is included. This first scenario would suggest that all strengths are good and it does not much matter which ones you have, as long as you have a sufficient number. In a partially parallel circumstance, poly-strengths would be significantly associated with trauma symptoms and other outcomes. This would provide evidence that one's cumulative assets are an important predictor of well-being. However, in this

second scenario, there would still be specific strengths that would be more advantageous relative to others. Existing evidence, although still limited, suggests that this is the most likely scenario. For example, a few studies that have examined multiple strengths have found that some are more important for well-being (Day & Kearney, 2016; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). This is also the pattern that was found in the first empirical study of poly-strengths and the Resilience Portfolio Model, which incorporated a measure of other adverse life experiences in addition to poly-victimization and still found unique contributions for poly-strengths and some individual strengths, such as psychological endurance (Hamby et al., 2017). In the third, completely unparallel scenario, incorporating poly-strengths into the model would not provide any more information about a person's outcomes. This is the null finding. Evidence to date best supports the second scenario that possessing multiple strengths is more beneficial than possessing one or only a few, but some combinations of strengths are better than others.

A Model for More Comprehensive Assessment

One obstacle to a more comprehensive, holistic approach to research on youth resilience has been a lack of accessible, brief, validated measurement tools. Many existing measures of strengths focus on just a single strength, are cumbersome, and sometimes expensive to administer. Research on poly-victimization was enhanced with the creation of the JVQ (Hamby et al., 2004), which provided an easy-to-use tool that allows researchers to assess violence across settings. Older tools, which generally focused on a single type of victimization, were inadvertently contributing to the siloed approach. The JVQ is also made available on an open-access basis to support its use in a range of settings. Research on poly-strengths and resilience could similarly be advanced by the creation of freely available tools designed to briefly yet comprehensively assess strengths. There is a particular need for measures that have been developed to be cognitively appropriate for self-report by youth and validated in youth samples.

Poly-Victimization Points to the Importance of All Relationships and Settings in a Child's Life

The social ecological model has been prominent for some time but still could be applied more consistently in violence scholarship (Sabina & Banyard, 2015; Shaw, McLean, Taylor, Swartout, & Querna, 2016). Much resilience research is still focused on the individual level (Chan, Hollingsworth,

Espelage, & Mitchell, 2016; Shaw et al., 2016), but relationships and settings are critical elements of both vulnerability and resilience. This issue needs much more attention in future research on youth violence and resilience. Children are not truly safe until they are safe in all of the important settings of their lives—homes, schools, and communities. A siloed approach to violence research or intervention can lead to “band-aids” on the most recent victimization, when it is an environment that is dangerous and perhaps placing many children at risk. Regarding resilience research, this points to the need to further explore the many aspects of relationships and communities that might be important for resilience. We spend too much time using global measures of social support and collective efficacy, without unpacking exactly what it is about these factors that are helpful to children and how we might best promote such social factors. Is social support beneficial because of the assistance during times of distress, or are the most important elements the way that emotional bonds can inspire and create meaning?

Beyond a few frequently studied constructs such as these, the evidence base regarding adversity and resilience is limited. We know almost nothing about the impact of elements of communities other than collective efficacy and little about the role of relationships beyond social support. There are many such aspects that might be studied and included in a poly-strength framework, including some that are widely studied in other disciplines, such as the focus in education research on teacher engagement, school climate, and the presence of mentors or natural helpers. There are other aspects to communities other than interpersonal trust, such as community-level tolerance and the availability of appropriate activities for youth. These could potentially be important strengths in the resilience portfolios of youth for coping with adversity in general and victimization in particular.

Conclusion

Resilience is a readily attainable skill that almost everyone has to some degree. The poly-victimization framework has transformed our understanding of youth victimization and its impact. A similar, integrated and comprehensive framework, using “poly-strengths” (Hamby et al., 2017) has the potential to advance our understanding and ability to promote resilience as well. In terms of research, the most urgent priority is for head-to-head comparisons of strengths, so that we will know which strengths are the best targets for prevention and intervention. There is also a need to “unpack” many protective factors, so that we have a better understanding of which elements of broad protective factors such as “social support” or “sense of purpose” are actually helping youth. Future research also needs to pay more attention to

systemic and community issues and move beyond the focus on individuals. Finally, future research would benefit from consideration of other adversities, such as parental unemployment or frequent moves, as well as victimization, and ensure that we understand the protective factors that are most helpful for other adversities as well as victimization.

In terms of practice, an assessment of strengths should become routine in clinical settings. The Resilience Portfolio Questionnaire, a tool that is being developed at the time of writing, will offer one comprehensive approach, but in the meantime even an informal assessment of strengths would be helpful. Existing strengths can be used as a foundation for a treatment plan, and interventions can target areas that most need help. For example, narrative can help with creating a sense of purpose and perspective, and promote emotional regulation around memories of a victimization (Banyard, Hamby, & Grych, 2016; E. Taylor et al., 2016). Social and emotional learning classes can improve interpersonal skills (Espelage et al., 2015). Given that, in many settings, treatment contact hours are limited, a more comprehensive approach to the assessment of strengths can help target interventions to the strengths that most need reinforcement. Hopefully, eventually this will reduce the total burden of victimization on youth.


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