

Which Resilience Skills Count Most?

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Summary

Resilience has long been known to involve both innate personality characteristics and learned competencies. In the present study, we measured nine trainable competencies which empirical studies suggest are associated with resilience, and then we rank-ordered those competencies according to how well they predicted a number of desirable, self-reported life outcomes. We did so by analyzing data obtained from a diverse convenience sample of 1,906 English-language speakers from 62 countries (55.6% from the U.S., mean age 26.7) who took a new online test of resilience. Participants were first asked various demographic and criterion questions and then took the 81-item, Likert-scale test. The competencies were: Copes Effectively with Past Traumas, Develops Mental and Physical Toughness, Maintains Advantageous Relationships, Manages Emotions Constructively, Manages Stress Effectively, Manages Thoughts Constructively, Practices Assertiveness, Seeks to Grow and Improve, and Solves Problems Effectively. The test had high internal-consistency reliability, and total scores were good predictors of happiness, personal success, professional success, and self-reported level of resilience. For those who reported having had resilience training, test scores were positively correlated with the number of training hours received. Regression analyses showed that the resilience competency that best predicted desirable outcomes was Manages Thoughts Constructively. Unfortunately, subjects scored relatively poorly on this competency (57.6%), while scoring highest on Maintains Advantageous Relationships (72.3%) and lowest on Develops Mental and Physical Toughness (49.6%). A marginally significant effect was found for gender, with females outscoring males by 0.3%. Small but significant effects were found for sexual orientation, race, country, therapy status (people not currently in therapy outscored people in therapy), and employment status (people who were employed outscored people who were unemployed), and large effects were found for educational level (higher scores were associated with more education), parental status (parents outscored nonparents), and marital status (those who were married or widowed outscored people who were divorced or had never been married). The study supports the value of a competencies approach to understanding resilience and calls special attention to the important role that thought management techniques might play in helping people to recover from trauma.