

Facing adversity together by looking beyond ability: An approach to resilience among at-risk children and youth

Ruiz-Román, C. Juárez, J. Molina, L.

University of Málaga

ABSTRACT

Resilience has become a very popular concept in recent years. More and more social intervention models and practices are increasingly being based on this concept. However, far from being a closed and static notion, it is very dynamic and constantly evolving. This paper presents an analysis of how the concept of resilience and the studies about it have developed over time. The literature on resilience shows that the concept has shifted from an approach that identified it as a personal quality towards an approach that understands it as a set of actions activated from different spheres. The latest advances in studies on resilience raise the prospect of some elements that, going beyond the individual's ability, should be taken into account from a social practice perspective. This study will therefore highlight and analyse the potential of these elements in the co-creation of actions and synergies for resilience.

KEYWORDS

resilience; community development; empowerment; educational relationships; at-risk children and youth

Introduction

The term resilience is derived from the Latin 'resiliere'. This concept comes from the field of physics and is used to designate the quality of materials with a high degree of resistance to, and recovery from, a strong impact. This term is also used in other fields such as medicine

and ecology. In medicine, it refers to the procedures used by the body to enable certain organs that have been affected by some trauma or illness to recover (Milne, 2016). In ecology, the concept of resilience is used to refer to the mechanisms of communities to resist changes inherent to nature and to evolve into a new state (Timpane-Padgham, Beechie, & Klinger, 2017).

The concept of resilience was first used in the field of psychology by researchers who began to study various cases of children at social risk who were able to resist, adapt and grow normally, despite living in poverty, neglect and violence. Studies such as those by Garmezy and Rutter (1983) and Dugan and Coles (1989) observed that there were some children who had been deeply affected and harmed by adverse or traumatic events, while there were other children who had experienced the same adversities but had nevertheless overcome them.

Resilience has increasingly become a very influential concept in research and intervention on social hardship. As a result, various frameworks and paradigms for resilience-based social intervention have been developed (Gilligan, 1997, Rutter 1999, Daniel 2010, Ungar, 2004, Hart & Heaver, 2013). However, studies on resilience have shown it to be a complex and dynamic concept that has evolved over time. A body of literature has been growing for decades, and yet there is no consensus on a single definition of resilience (Rutter, 2012). This has meant that, in the midst of a highly topical debate, it is not possible to accurately identify the exact date on which some conceptions of resilience were discarded in favour of others; but it is possible to show how certain approaches to resilience have been gradually abandoned while others have tended to prevail. More specifically, over the last three decades the concept has shifted from a more psychological approach, focused on the individual and the qualities of the resilient person, towards a more social and educational approach that seeks to understand the role of all the cultural and community-based elements present in resilient processes.

In our view, there has been a paradigm shift. This has involved a change from an understanding of resilience as something exclusive to the individual, to a perception of it as being a synergy engendered by a network of various agents and elements. In addition, from the point of view of ethics and social work, we believe that resilience should not be merely part of the domain of personal ability. If resilience, as it has been claimed for a long time, is only an individual's ability to rise above adversity, the individual becomes solely responsible for overcoming life's obstacles. Facing adversity (an illness, exclusion, etc.) alone is more inhumane and unjust than doing it with support. Therefore, resilience, understood as an exclusively personal ability, runs the risk of being somewhat 'inhumane'. It is our belief that the concept of resilience should be critically revised from the perspective of social work; otherwise, if resilience is relegated to the realm of the individual, there is a risk that values such as solidarity, co-responsibility and social justice may be forgotten. In this vein, it is important for social work to take into account new studies on resilience that see it as a shared process, and as an action, or as a number of combined actions.

This study has reviewed the research efforts of the most renowned scholars in the field worldwide, particularly those related to children and young people at social risk, in order to provide evidence of the transformation undergone by the concept of resilience. This concept has become so widely discussed that thousands of publications have appeared to date. But it is not our intention to present an *exhaustive review* of all the literature on resilience. Rather, we have sought to conduct a *descriptive review* (Guirao, 2015) aimed at providing an update of a constantly evolving concept. Two selection criteria have been applied to this descriptive review of the concept of resilience. The first one was purely quantitative, and referred to authors whose publications have more than a thousand citations on Google Scholar, as this clearly shows that their work on resilience has had a significant impact on the emergence and evolution of research on the subject. The second criterion was qualitative in nature, since the

studies were selected specifically because they dealt with the topic of resilience among at-risk children and youth. In order to investigate the most innovative and emerging research trends on resilience, this descriptive review has also included some studies from the present decade which, in addition to containing evidence of the individual's ability, have reported on elements or agents that are present in resilience processes in social work with at-risk children and youth.

This study discusses both the role of social workers as agents who promote resilience among at-risk children and youth and the role of social educators.

In Spain, child and family social work are carried out by two types of professionals, social educators and social workers, as happens in countries such as Italy, Germany and Denmark. While 'social educator' does not exist as a profession in the English-speaking world, it is used in this study, as it can be considered to be equivalent to social worker for readers from English-speaking countries. The task of the social worker in Spain is to identify the needs of at-risk children and youth and to diagnose and manage the resources available to support them, as well as finding solutions from within the community. For its part, the role of the social educator is to implement the actions and programmes, and to provide personalised educational support to children and young people.

Different approaches to resilience among at-risk children and youth

Initial studies on resilience: A focus on children and youth's abilities

In the early studies on resilience, authors such as Werner and Smith (1982) focused on the character of certain children who were capable of surviving in the face of adversity. These researchers conducted a longitudinal and prospective study of the children of a given

community over 30 years. This study began in 1955 in the Hawaiian island of Kauai, with children experiencing social vulnerability. It was based on an observation of the qualities that these children had to use in order to overcome the handicaps of experiencing social exclusion, including tolerance, an ability to interact with other people, high self-esteem, hope, and a sense of social responsibility. The work on resilience conducted by Michael Rutter (1979, 1985) investigated the characteristics of self-control and self-efficacy, and the ability of children who had been victims of trauma and abuse to interact with other people. For their part, Garmezy, Masten and Tellegen (1984) analysed 261 children considered at risk of childhood psychopathology due to maternal diagnosis (schizophrenia, or affective or personality disorders). They identified several qualities of resilient children, which included self-control, a sense of humour, a critical ability, introspection and self-knowledge, conflict resolution ability, self-esteem and effectiveness. The line of research followed by Wolin and Wolin (1993) deserves a special mention, as it describes, what they believed to be the main pillars of resilience. In a theoretical essay aimed at professionals, but also aimed at anyone who has experienced trauma (as stated by the authors themselves), they described a series of important characteristics that resilient people possess: introspection, independence, morality, an ability to interact with other people, a sense of humour, creativity and initiative.

It can be seen that there were interesting coincidences between those initial investigations. Some interesting similarities can be found between the longitudinal studies by Werner and Smith (1982) and those by Garmezy, Masten and Tellegen's (1984) studies, which considered self-esteem and the ability to interact with other people, whether merely communicating or with an ability for conflict resolution to be important. The theoretical study by Wolin and Wolin (1993) also highlighted the importance of conflict resolution abilities in their study. Other studies, such as those by Rutter (1979, 1985) and Garmezy, Masten, and

Tellegen (1984) stressed the ability to control oneself in times of stress as a defining feature of the resilient subject.

In short, the first studies on the concept of resilience were linked to a common denominator: identifying or defining the qualities of resilient children.

The influence of context: a second approach to resilience

In the late 1990s and the early 21st century, resilience studies entered a new phase in which they began to attach as much importance to the identification of personal qualities and characteristics as to the understanding of how and where these resilient features were obtained. The contributions by Rutter (1999) and Masten (2001) continued to be of interest during the 1990s, as they continued to develop that new focus in their studies. These authors' contributions were aimed at analysing the interactions between risk factors and protective factors and their effects on the individual development of children. In this vein, the compilation study by Luthar (2003) is particularly interesting, especially the second part, which gathered different studies that analysed resilience from the exosystem of at-risk children and young people. All these researchers were concerned with one idea: to find out what influence the environment has on whether resilience can be achieved by at-risk children and young people—defined as people under 18 who are exposed to social disadvantage due to economic, cultural, social, ethnic, family, or any other circumstances. In general terms, this approach to resilience was closely linked to the ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1987), who emphasised the impact that the surroundings and the environment have on the development of the subject. From this approach, resilience would be the result of the processes of interaction of the individual with the different ecological levels. Unlike the approach described in the previous section, resilience was not studied in isolation, but rather

resilience was seen as an ability constrained by the various contexts in which the individual develops (Masten & Obradovic, 2006). This would make resilience an ability that develops according to what each child experiences. Thus, researchers on resilience have gradually broadened their focus of interest, moving from identifying resilient abilities to also analysing how the constraints of the socio-cultural context influence the ability to be resilient.

A new paradigm for resilience: looking beyond the abilities of at-risk children

The studies gathered under the approach described above agree on their concern about understanding the elements or protective factors (Ungar, 2004) of the environment that help to construct the resilient person. However, such research maintains that the concept of resilience is linked to the abilities of at-risk children. Resilience, although conditioned by the context, is still placed within the person. Yet, the advances made by these researchers, which followed the postulates of Bronfenbrenner's Theory, were the prelude to a new way of exploring resilience - an approach to resilience that goes beyond reducing it to a quality of the individual conditioned by the context. If resilience is jointly constructed by the children and the environment, it is not only located in the person, but also in the relationships between people and the contexts they inhabit.

The third stage in resilience studies refers to research conducted over the past 10 years. The publications by Ungar (2011), Hart and Heaver (2013), Madariaga (2014), and Ruiz-Román, Calderón and Juárez (2017) provide key insights into this third approach. The connection between these studies is that they consider resilience as a process, rather than a quality, as a set of actions rather than a qualifier. It is a process in which the child is an agent, but other elements are also agents, based on which the individual's role in resilient actions can be investigated. In this sense, the study by Madariaga (2014) indicated that resilience is a

process that involves multiple agents and goes beyond the individual, therefore including additional agents and protective factors. This idea of identifying multiple agents that mobilise resilient processes has also been the focus of the most recent studies by Ungar (2011). These argue that resilience is a process that does not only take place within the individual, but is jointly shaped by the individual, the opportunities offered by the environment and the contexts, and the educational relationships that are generated between them. The study by Hart and Heaver (2013) is of great interest within this new approach that identifies other resilient actors beyond the individual, as they explore how schools themselves can be resilient actors. Similarly, the study conducted by Ruiz-Román, Calderón and Juárez (2017) uses a transcultural perspective to explain how the very culture of the communities yields processes of resilience against adversity and the structures that sometimes generate it.

Thus, the concept of process-based resilience, which emerges from these lines of research, transcends the limits of an individualist conception, expands it and makes culture, the community and socio-educational relationships a new focus of attention, not only as constraints, but as co-creators of resilient processes (Costa, Forés & Burguet, 2014).

The main thesis advocated by this third approach is centred on moving from understanding resilience as an ability or a quality to conceiving it as a process or a set of actions. It would be somewhat similar to the concept of education. It can be said that a child has education. Education then becomes a quality. But this idea of education as a result, or as a personal quality, is the result of previous action: education as an educational action (Esteve, 2010). Something similar would happen in the case of resilience. When talking about a resilient child, resilience is understood as an individual's quality; in contrast, a whole series of actions or processes (within and outside the individual) need to have taken place in order for resilience to be ultimately understood as a result or as an adjective (resilient). That is why resilience as a process is more than a result embodied in a *resilient person*, just as education

as a process is much more than an *educated person*. Therefore, while resilience may be understood as a result and one talks about resilient children, as one speaks of educated children, it is particularly interesting to transcend this conception of resilience as a result in a person, and understand resilience as an action.

In this new theory, there is a new conception whereby ‘resilience is a process in constant development (...) resilience is a chapter in link theories’ (Madariaga, 2014, p. 33). In this new approach, there are two major ideas that represent a development of previous approaches and give new perspectives to the term resilience. The first is the concept of *process*, based on the assumption that resilience is not an *ability* or set of abilities, but is a set of *actions* in which children interact with other agents of resilience. The second is the idea of relationships and links based on trust, involving educators, family, teachers, friends who become a team that conjures up a difficult situation (Rubio & Puig, 2015; Walsh, 2016; McSweeney, 2017). This new approach opens up a perspective of the multidimensionality of resilience; it is based on the understanding that the environment (material and cultural conditions), the community, the institutions and the individual’s own links (as spaces of inter-relationships where the resilience is created beyond the person) are active agents in this process.

Joint agents of resilient actions for at-risk children and youth

Having established this conception of resilience as *shared actions*, rather than as the result of *personal qualities*, it seems appropriate to address the protective factors identified in the most recent studies as generating this series of resilient actions in at-risk children and youth. These studies tend to relocate resilience beyond the children and their abilities, and place it within

other elements or agents external to the children that need to be taken into account in order to develop resilient processes.

Personal qualities as agents of resilience

Addressing resilience from a broader point of view, analysing it as a process and not as an individual personal quality of the child, does not preclude saying that there are certain characteristics of the individual that positively influence resilient processes. These characteristics, which were identified in the initial studies on resilience—and described in the previous sections of this paper—are not innate, but can be acquired throughout life; they can be learnt and taught. Characteristics such as introspection and self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-esteem, autonomy, social skills, empathy, initiative, motivation, sense of humour, creativity, critical thinking, the ability to find meaning, and emotional intelligence (Wolin & Wolin, 1993; Vanistendael & Lecomte, 2002; Cyrulnik, 2002; Forés & Grane, 2008; Manciaux, 2010) are all individual characteristics that have been studied ever since research was first conducted on resilience among at-risk children and youth, and may be present in resilient processes. Many of these have been described in previous sections, and will not be reiterated here. The focus at this stage is on the idea that they *may be* present, even though none of these qualities have been shown to be essential.

Each of these abilities may be important for adversity and in a specific context (Gilbert & Van Kemenade, 2006), but they may also be completely absent or unnecessary in a different context.

For example, a qualitative study of Chinese adolescent girls by Ungar (2011) showed that young women in urban contexts were increasingly using violence to cope with a culturally embedded gender bias that threatens to disempower young women when they enter

into intimate relationships. The girls' use of violence in relationships with their boyfriends was functional, and helped them to maintain personal coherence and resist the negative stereotypes imposed on them by the young men.

This type of study reveals that behaviour that is apparently not adaptive and does not tend to be understood as resilient, when situated in a given culture and in a context, acquires meaning and appears to be clearly adaptive (Calderón-Almendros & Ruiz-Román, 2016).

This poses a challenge for social work with at-risk children and young people, as it involves recognising different manifestations of resilience, as in the case of the Chinese adolescents mentioned above. But it will also be necessary to identify those cultural practices that, despite being labelled as being resilient, should not be considered as such. An illustrative case is provided by some religious sects that teach young people to face adversity in a very peculiar way: by attacking their own freedom and personal dignity. For example, sadly there have been some cases in Europe of young people of immigrant parents living in disadvantaged, at-risk areas, and who fell into the hands of religious sects that inculcated in them the belief that a suicide terrorist attack was a good way to react to the exclusion and adversity in their lives (Fajardo, 2003; Rodríguez, 2017). Cultural practices used to deal with adversity cannot be considered to be educational or resilient if they threaten the freedom or dignity of children (Esteve, 2010). Thus, the fact that resilience is linked to the cultural particularities of each community complicates the very idea of resilience. Social educators face the challenge of being able to recognise and stimulate different types of resilient skills in at-risk children that are in accordance with the cultural practices of the communities in which they operate, without justifying any practice or extreme cultural relativism (Ruiz-Román, 2010).

Material elements of resilient processes

There are some material protective factors without which it is difficult for resilient processes to emerge. These become more important in at-risk children and youth, because they are not yet able to cover these basic material needs for themselves. For Vanistendael and Lecomte (2002), these basic needs can be food, sleep, rest and basic healthcare, etc. These can be illustrated by referring to Fiorentino's (2008) study, which described a programme directed at street children, where it was found 'that the need for sleep had to be satisfied before any other, due to the exploitation that was made of them at work' (p. 104). Therefore, the psychological recovery of these children could not be started until their physical recovery (sleep and food) had been taken care of. Hart and Heaver (2013) also reflected that if basic needs were not covered, it would be unlikely for resilience to occur. In order to develop resilient processes among at-risk children and youth, current research focuses on the need to promote basic and material conditions, such as decent housing and food, which make these resilient processes feasible (Vanistendael & Lecomte, 2002; Ruiz-Román & Rascón, 2017).

The time factor in resilient processes

Studies have also emphasised that time has important implications for resilient processes at different levels. Time plays an important role in the duration of adversity. The duration of an earthquake, which is an event that happens at a single point in time despite its consequences, is not the same as being born and living in a marginal neighbourhood for a lifetime. Therefore, depending on how long adversity lasts, resilient processes will also be forged in one way or another (Madariaga, 2014).

The protective factors and agents that intervene in resilient processes are aspects that need time to be consolidated. Both learning and building social structures or networks around

the individual that promote resilient processes need time to develop. It must be assumed that any educational process whose purpose is understanding and learning, needs time (Domènech, 2012).

The ticking clock is both a value and a habit in life in contemporary societies. The value of productivity and results lead us all to engage in multiple tasks that force us to work at exacting rhythms. At-risk children need to experience time (Kairos) more than being timed against the clock (Chronos). At-risk children need to experience time as Kairos, rather than being timed against the clock (Chronos). Kairos and Chronos are ancient Greek concepts that describe two very different conceptions of time. Kairos refers to an indeterminate, right and appropriate ‘moment’ within time when something important happens. In contrast, Chronos is a linear, specific time, which can be measured in minutes, hours, days, etc. Consequently, while Kairos is qualitative, Chronos is quantitative in nature. It is important that social educators address the time factor, so that neither they nor the children they work with are affected by the pressure demanded by Chronos. It is important that social educators and children are able to build their rapport following the pace, calm and fruitful experience of Kairos.

The value of productivity and results pushes everyone to complete a multitude of tasks that force us to engage in our daily professional work at a manic pace. In this context, it seems almost utopian to think of giving space and value to that other time, Kairos, the time for encounters, those moments and spaces that generate trust (Luhman, 2005). However, these non-chronological times seem more necessary than ever for people if they really want to build sincere relationships and trust (Úcar & Ruiz-Román, 2017).

It is essential to promote quality time. Resilient processes with at-risk children need this quality time to develop and become strengthened, in order to be able to cope with adversity (Hart & Heaver, 2013).

Community culture as a source of resistance to adversity and a driver of resilience

After several decades of studies on resilience, current research is exploring a broader, innovative look at resilience not only as a personal ability, but as a relational and eco-systemic engine that allows for shared opportunities and actions to be found (Gómez & Kotliarenco, 2010). Recent studies have placed the focus of attention on the communities that at-risk children are part of as generators of resilience (Hart & Heaver, 2013; Madariaga, 2014).

It is within the community where at-risk children and youth face adversity and therefore it is the space where the foundation stones of resilient processes are created. The community 'is able to use the resources and abilities necessary to face adversity' (Forés and Grané, 2008, p. 105).

The community possesses some protective factors without which resilient processes would be unfeasible. The culture of human groups is arguably the most significant community element. It is in culture where the possibility of giving meaning to adversity emerges; of transcending them and devising strategies and ways of overcoming them (Geertz, 1990; Bruner, 1997). In this sense, the culture of communities themselves is the germ where group resistance arises in the face of adversity and the solidarity that derives from it. Culture is thus a sphere of support and protection for the members of the community (Ruiz-Román, Calderón & Torres, 2014).

A community that builds resilience makes it no longer just about the child, but about the composition of the whole community, which creates a series of values and meanings on which resilience rests: responsibility, solidarity, shared stories, the form of interpreting adversity and explaining oneself. All of this is part of the culture of communities and plays an

essential role in resilience. The set of beliefs, values, customs and thoughts that people exchange and come to share when faced with adversity plays a fundamental role in resilience. Communities create 'counter-narratives'; resilient counter-narratives that become a way of reinterpreting and collectively facing adversity (Ruiz-Román, Calderón & Juárez, 2017)

As Manuel Castells argued, these counter-narratives in the face of adversity create a collective identity of resistance that nourishes, enriches and strengthens the group and the individuals that are part of it. The identity of resistance is 'generated by those actors who are in devalued or stigmatised positions / conditions due to the logic of domination, so they build trenches of resistance and survival based on principles different from, or opposed to, those that permeate the institutions of society' (Castells, 1997, p. 30). In this way, strong and resilient alliances are created against adversity, while generating a sense of shared pride resulting from being part of the same group, which helps to confront adversity with a more positive and confident attitude. Cyrulnik (2004) seems to correlate resilience with resistance: 'It is necessary to recover the fighter who lives in each one of us. This happens every time that the truly resistant people present in the culture release truly rebellious messages, messages involving true dignity, true value. Do you want to knock me down? You will not steal my skin' (p. 58).

The study by Ruiz-Román, Calderón and Juárez (2017) indicated that when at-risk children and youth are exposed to situations of risk or to certain adversities, the community can promote solidarity to ensure that the adverse situation disappears, and in so doing, they generate a culture of struggle and cooperation in the face of adversity. In this process, the community itself undergoes a group transformation in the face of adversity. Misfortunes can become a challenge that mobilises the population's abilities to show solidarity and renewal, not only at an infrastructure level but also in the social fabric (Suárez-Ojeda & Autler, 2003).

A community that builds resilience affects not only the individual, but the whole community, which creates a series of values and meanings on which resilience rests: responsibility, resistance to adversity, compassion, mutual support, communication, respect and an atmosphere of trust, as shown in the studies by Walsh (2015) and Hargreaves et al (2017).

The meeting: the connection that drives resilience

The analysis carried out in this paper about the transition of the concept of resilience has covered those elements that contribute to at-risk children and youth recovering from an adverse situation at a particular moment in their life. The individual characteristics of the person facing adversity, material and temporal conditions, communities and culture are the protective factors that constitute the resilient processes mentioned above. This last section will address an aspect which, according to contemporary scholars, is fundamental in generating resilience in at-risk children, namely interpersonal relationships as the place where resilient processes are forged (Cyrulnik, 2004).

When a child who is experiencing an adverse situation is accompanied by a person, a relationship is generated between them. Vanistendael and Lecomte (2002) called these relationships *encounters*, where one individual is accepted by another person. In these resilient encounters, unconditional support must be provided and an atmosphere of trust needs to be created, where children feel safe and respected.

As a study by Melendro (2011) showed, when young people experience social hardship, in their processes of coping with difficulties they valued ‘the relationship established with educators, the good treatment received, the support provided and the interest they had in them’ (2011, p. 102).

Along these lines, Cyrulnik (2004) highlighted the value of a social educator's support: 'suddenly, you have a helping hand, [...] someone sets eyes on you with a look full of compassion and love. A totally delicate presence appears. It seems to be nothing. And yet, it is essential because we see here the first gestures of resilience and social change' (p. 56).

In some cases, this encounter is driven by a certain need, the need to be heard, to feel part of the world, or even the need that, for just one moment, someone (the social educators) creates a specific space, and just the right time for another person (the child) to feel comfortable, respected and above all, not judged. As Cyrulnik said, it seems that this look of recognition does not amount to much, but it is the first gesture of resilience and social change.

That look towards the other is, simply, a more human look, a look of recognition. A non-judgemental look that is not arrogant. 'Only after recognition is participation possible' (Bretons, 2011, 17). And this participation is the basis for the social change that Cyrulnik alluded to. Against the domination and assimilation of professionalism, it seems necessary to return to the ideals of equality and citizenship, in order to fully recognise children and not to infantilise people in front of those who participate in social intervention processes. When one discovers that children have their own lives, their own solutions (Winkler, 2014), they let go of arrogance and assimilation and give rise to respect, dialogue, trust and empathy.

'In fact, it is just about understanding. Understanding the expression of those looks, the gravity of those faces, the simple way to be together, to feel and to think together' (Saramago, 1999, p. 18).

Being recognised by another person increases self-esteem and confidence. The persistent recognition of the other person through a sincere and deep encounter can unleash the confidence necessary for at-risk children to face adversity.

When educational support can show that it is unconditional, a climate of trust is created for resilience to emerge. Dickson and Gilson (2015) noted the important role that trust

plays in forging interpersonal relationships that are capable of sustaining an individual in the face of adversity. Cyrulnik (2004) argued a similar point, namely that children can feel safe and motivated to face difficulties thanks to the role played by an educator or resilience tutor.

When people feel vulnerable in times of hardship, being accompanied is of vital importance. As one young man pointed out in a recent study, in the face of adversity, being supported is not the same as being alone: 'Humane support is shown when others tell you that they are there for you, for whatever you need' (Ruiz-Román, Calderón & Juárez, 2017, p. 137). One cannot fight alone against the world. And this becomes even more true when referring to particularly vulnerable groups, such as at-risk children. Therefore, it is essential that children are not left alone to face social and educational difficulties. There lies one of the main *raison d'être* of providing support, ensuring that the child is not alone in the unbalanced fight against the adversity of exclusion.

Conclusion

This paper analyses how the concept of resilience has evolved over time. The initial studies on resilience focused mainly on discovering the abilities of those at-risk children who showed that they had resilient qualities. Subsequently, research into this controversial concept was no longer only concerned with studying resilient children, but with understanding the influence that specific contexts have on them. Beyond understanding resilience as a conditioned quality, the latest research on resilience shows that resilience exceeds the scope of a quality, and is a set of actions driven by various protective factors. This dynamism and constant evolution in the approaches towards resilience speaks of a highly complex concept, but at the same time of great potential for social and educational intervention with at-risk children and young people.

As Bronfenbrenner (1987) explained from a systemic-ecological perspective, all the environments and agents that surround us have a great educational potential and therefore have to be taken into account. You cannot change the world on your own. It is very hard to fight adversity alone. Our complex and interconnected societies demand that resilient processes also become complex and interconnected.

The complexity of the concept of resilience could be metaphorically described by using the network concept. Resilient processes are complex and at-risk children are in the midst of that network. This network is composed of a large number of elements that this study has classified into five: personal attitudes, material conditions, time, communities and their cultures, and relationships and encounters. All of them could become protective factors that generate resilient actions in one way or another.

Although the intervention of the social educators in the development of resilience is woven daily between two people (the professional and the child), the social educators must take into account the educational potential of the protective factors and other agents from the settings where the children are (Hill & Hart, 2017). This demands that the social educators explore the potential of such factors and agents to develop resilient processes. At the same time, it will be necessary to build synergies between different agents to overcome the limitations of having a single educational link. Given the complexity of exclusionary situations, it is necessary to recognise and involve all agents (schools, students, families, social educators, politicians, local government officers ...) in dealing with socio-educational adversities experienced by children (Mujis, Ainscow & Chapman, 2011, Melendro, Montserrat, Iglesias, & Cruz, 2016). In this way, all the environments and agents that surround these children weave resilience networks. This entails allowing space for the different agents to operate within the resilience network, building cross-cutting actions and generating communication and trust (Ruiz-Román, Molina and Alcaide, 2018). By generating

these synergies, not only will it be possible to create a network that offers greater support, but the risks of generating dependency relations between the child and the social educators will be reduced.

Resilience cannot be the result simply of an individual's ability, but must emerge from a complex network of protective factors and synergies between them (Aranda & Hart, 2014). These synergies act as knots within the network and become fertile weavers of resilience. Therefore, it would seem necessary to take into account the synergies and actions that can be developed from within these five elements with a view of developing an intervention framework that seeks to generate resilience among at-risk children.

At the same time, resilience studies face a new challenge: analysing and understanding how resilient processes are generated; how the complex network of resilience is forged on the basis of these protective factors; and how to strengthen their nodes and synergies in order to expand their action. Analysing the functioning of this complex network that is built around a resilient process is clearly essential to have better and more certain key concepts for socio-educational work with at-risk children; a socio-educational work that goes beyond the individual and generates the synergies in shared elements in order to strengthen resilient processes.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by the Department of Economy, Science and Employment of the Regional Government of Andalusia, Spain, under Grant (SEJXXXX).

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