Resilience, Psychosis and Childhood Trauma

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Abstract

This research investigates resilience. It examines the influence of childhood trauma and/or adversity on resilience in adults diagnosed with a psychotic illness. In the research I grounded resilience in the lived experience of psychosis and childhood trauma and/or adversity and framed these topics within a health, psychological and social perspective.

This research comprises two studies. I utilise quantitative and qualitative research data sets in a mixed-method research design. I drew the quantitative study data from the Survey of High Impact Psychosis research project conducted in the northern region of Adelaide, South Australia in 2010. I combined this quantitative study with a qualitative study based on data from additional interviews involving a smaller participant group sourced from the SHIP research project. I selected interview participants for the qualitative study because they identified as having experienced childhood trauma and/or adversity.

The mixed-method research design provides the capacity to identify the prevalence of childhood trauma and/or adversity within a psychosis cohort. It allows for the examination of the effects of childhood trauma and/or adversity and psychosis on the development and manifestation of resilience. I also consider the influence of a psychotic illness on health, and economic and social functioning. The qualitative phase of the research examined individual interpretations of the experience(s) of childhood trauma and/or adversity, psychosis and resilience. I analysed this qualitative data thematically and identified some of the common understandings of not only the construct of resilience, but also the lived experience of psychosis.

This research establishes that resilience has a crucial role in optimising social and health functioning. It identified how childhood trauma and/or adversity is a contributor to the

development of resilience in people with psychosis. In addition, the research demonstrates that resilience is fundamental to long-term recovery from psychosis. I also consider the implications of the research findings for enhancing the effectiveness of clinical mental health approaches to psychosis treatment. A more intentional focus on the development of resilience in clinical mental health practice emerged as one of the primary recommendations from the research.

Declaration

I, Shaun Sweeney, certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Signed:

Shaun Sweeney

Date: 16th June 2015

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The Survey of High Impact Psychosis

This PhD is based on data collected from the 2010 Australian National Survey of High Impact Psychosis. The members of the Survey of High Impact Psychosis Study Group are: V. Morgan (National Project Director), A. Jablensky (Chief Scientific Advisor), A. Waterreus (National Project Coordinator), R. Bush, V. Carr, D. Castle, M. Cohen, C. Galletly, C. Harvey, B. Hocking, A. Mackinnon, P. McGorry, J. McGrath, A. Neil, S. Saw and H. Stain. I would like to thank these national directors for not only providing me with the opportunity to participate in collecting this data, but also the chance to use this data in a PhD research project. I would also like to acknowledge the hundreds of mental health professionals who participated in the preparation and conduct of the 2010 Australian

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List of Publications and Conference Presentations

Publication List

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List of Conference Presentations Based on this Thesis

- ‘The Survey of High Impact Psychosis: A national research project from a South Australian perspective’.
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- ‘Trauma in childhood and the outcomes for psychosis cohorts’.
  Shaun Sweeney, Prof Cherrie Galletly, Dr Lana Zannettino
  The 7th Annual World Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and Behavioural Disorders. Perth, Western Australia, 17–19 October 2012.

- ‘Resilience, childhood trauma and the outcomes for psychosis populations’.
  Shaun Sweeney
  Statewide Mental Health Workers’ Seminar. Glenside Hospital Campus. Adelaide, South Australia, 6 December 2013.

- ‘Resilience, psychosis and childhood trauma’.
  Shaun Sweeney.
  School of Medicine Research Highlights. Adelaide, South Australia, 9 September 2014.

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Preamble

To the reader,

This is a 'hybrid thesis' comprising a traditional research thesis format including two additional journal articles. An advocacy position for a stronger clinical focus on resilience in mental health practice is evident in this research, a position that emerged through the experience of conducting this research. Furthermore, in my work as a mental health clinician with broad mental health experience I have observed firsthand how psychosis can affect a person's physical and psychological health, employment opportunities, educational outcomes and their participation in community life. Despite these obstacles, many people with a psychotic illness maintain resilience and optimism about their futures. However, there is still much to be done to improve mental health praxis to ensure that people with a psychotic illness can live meaningful and contributing lives as members of their communities.