

Envisioning the Future: Ten Keys to Enhance Resilience Predictors Among Inmates

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of the program Envisioning the Future (EF) by Patrizio Paoletti Foundation on the predictors of resilience among male inmates. EF offers ten keys encompassing the main neuroscientific findings and daily practices for resilience. With the collaboration of the University of Padua, EF was implemented in Padua prison during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, it presented 9 online sessions, led by trainers in Pedagogy for the Third Millennium (PTM), targeted at the inmates' group. Inmates completed scientific questionnaires on resilience, coping strategies, and self-efficacy in managing positive and negative emotions. Two linear regression models were computed to identify the resilience predictors: (i) at the beginning of EF (n=24, mean age=42.89, mean of years in prison=5.81), only low avoidance predicted inmates' resilience ($\beta = -.64, p < .05$); (ii) at the end of EF (n=24, mean age=42.79, mean of years in prison=5.89), the constellation of factors predicting resilience enriched, including low avoidance ($\beta = -.34, p < .05$), self-efficacy in regulating positive emotions ($\beta = .51, p < .05$), cognitive flexibility ($\beta = .56, p < .05$), and social support ($\beta = .56, p < .05$). Results highlight that providing inmates with notions and practical suggestions about resilience, transmitted through EF, strengthens the constellation of predictors of resilience in a challenging context like the prison.

Keywords: Inmates, Prison, Resilience

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Introduction

The multiplicity of definitions in literature makes resilience difficult to define (White & McCallum, 2021). Although for many years psychologists defined resilience as the capacity to bend without breaking, a metaphor inspired by metal physics, to date it is recognized that traumas hinder humans to return to the same biopsychosocial states they were before the adverse event (Allen, 2011). Thus, resilience can be described as the individual capacity to adaptively handle adversities (Luthar et al., 2006), exhibiting emotional stamina (Wagnild & Young, 1990) and being strengthened by the negative event (Grotberg, 1995; Cyrulnik, 2001). A resilient individual can ameliorate from a traumatic experience, discovering her/his true potential and reprogramming the future (Connor and Davidson, 2003). Noticeably, resilience is a dynamic and ever-evolving variable (Herrman et al., 2011) in human lives: it results from the interaction of genes, coping skills, environmental factors, innate individual resources that can change during the life cycle (Masten, 2001; Grych et al., 2015). In the light of these premises, it is possible to hypothesize that resilience can enhance the whole society's wellbeing since people can be trained to be more resilient (O'Dougherty, 2012), even in the most complex and challenging conditions, like incarceration.

The context of prison is complex (Ferreccio & Vianello, 2014) and it fosters psychological distress (Syker, 1958) in terms of depression, psychotic symptoms, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorders (Fazel et al., 2016; Baranyi et al., 2018; Fovet et al., 2022). Inmates' conditions were worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic: in multiple countries (e.g., UK and Italy) the rate of self-harm, psychiatric symptoms, aggressions, and suicide attempts by prisoners peaked in the last two years (Hewson et al., 2020; Associazione Antigone, 2011). Three main pandemic-related problems aggravated inmates' situation: (i) an increased perception of isolations from family and friends (Vignali, 2021), (ii) a major difficulty in accessing psychological support (Johnson et al., 2021; Ronco, 2020), (iii) a delay in trials caused by the emergency, postponing the release dates of many inmates (Hewson et al., 2020). In this framework, training inmates in resilience can help them to adaptively handle the contextual adversities, aggravated by the health emergency, indirectly facilitating the reintegration in the social community after-release (Lorenzon, 2020).

The main predictors of inmates' resilience and intervention to improve them

In the normative population one of the main factors to promote resilience is coping. Coping can be described as the personal way or "style" a person manages stressful events (Cramer, 1998). It has been shown that a problem-oriented coping (De la Fuente et al., 2017) significantly predicts resilience because it allows to actively counteract the stressors and their consequences. Flexibility is also a coping modality associated with resilience because it enables individuals to adjust their values and goals accordingly with the events (Hayes et al., 2006). Finally, seeking for social support predicts resilience because, counting on a network of personal and significative relationships increases individuals' capacity to deal with difficulties and trauma (Ozbay et al., 2007; Sippel et al., 2015).

Another predictor of resilience, commonly studied in the normal population, is self-efficacy because it allows goal-attainment (Judge & Bono, 2001). More specifically, self-efficacy in managing emotions, in terms of intensity and frequency of negative and positive effects (Caprara et al., 2008; Perasso & Velotti, 2020) crucially enhances resilience in both clinical and subclinical populations (Baghjari et al., 2017; Mestre et al., 2017; Arici-Özcan et al., 2019).

When it comes to investigate resilience in prison, it is often investigated as a predictor itself in association with: (i) higher mental health (Sygit-Kowalkowska et al., 2017) (ii) lower distress (Wolff & Caravaca Sánchez, 2019). The predictors of resilience among inmates have not been investigated much yet in quantitative research. However, literature on war prisoners' profiles optimism, social support, and capacity to re-narrate one's experience as the determinants of long-term resilience (Segovia et al., 2012; Maercker et al., 2013). Plus, longitudinal qualitative evidence on the juvenile penal circuit profiles the following characteristics as the ones necessary for reintegration into society and fully recover from the previous experiences: optimism, determination, future orientation, clear life goals (Todis et al., 2001). As mentioned, only a few studies investigated the predictors of resilience among adult inmates. The main findings show that the capacity of making sense of past traumatic experiences (e.g., sexual abuse) determines the prisoners' resilience because it enables to contextualize memories and engage in significant and supportive relationships with others (Bradley & Davino, 2007). Religiosity also can predict inmates' resilience levels because trusting in God can help adaptation to prison's difficulties (Hanik et al., 2021).

Focusing on the interventions aimed at promoting a resilient response in this population is equally relevant to comprehend resilience predictors in prison. In the normative population, individual and group psychotherapy (e.g., mindfulness-based therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, acceptance commitment therapy) can promote resilience significantly (Helmreich et al., 2017). For prisoners, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and integrated forms of therapy based on spirituality seem to be the more effective approaches in improving resilience levels (Rezaei & Mousavi, 2019; Budiyo & Sugiharto, 2020; Valizadeh et al., 2020). Beyond psychotherapy, evidence in favor of other strategies (e.g., such as neuropsychopedagogical intervention) to enhance inmates' resilience is not known yet.

Envisioning the Future: A neuropsychopedagogical intervention to promote resilience

Envisioning the Future (EF) is one of the rare study-experiences (Augelli et al., 2017; Busetti et al., 2018; Galli et al., 2018) to promote prisoners' well-being through education and, to date, it is the first Italian neuro-psycho-pedagogical intervention working on inmates' resilience. EF was ideated by Patrizio Paoletti Foundation basing on the interdisciplinary background of Pedagogy for the Third Millennium (PTM) (Paoletti, 2008) and in the framework of the Sphere Model of Consciousness (SMC) (Paoletti, 2020; Paoletti & Dotan Ben Soussan, 2019). EF aims at restoring persons' hope in the future, increasing physical, psycho-emotional, relational, spiritual, and work resources of individuals (Snyder, 2000; Paoletti, 2008; Maculan et al., 2022; Di Giuseppe et al., 2023). The main aim of the intervention is triggering the transition from the reactive mind to the conscious mind (Paoletti, 2008). It's possible to promote such transition, through theoretical and practical notions on (i) how the brain works and reacts to stress, (ii) how individuals can transform emotions (iii) training with practical tools for self-improvement and self-education. While the reactive mind automatically responds towards environmental stimuli, triggering stress and anxiety, the conscious mind, based on prefrontal cortex activities, favours awareness, emotion regulation and the capacity to reprogram the individual's future.

This transition is crucial among prisoners because it is in line with their need to rethink their lives from the past to the present, to the future. EF is a thematic pathway including ten keys to resilience (see Table 1) that are based on interdisciplinary studies on resilience (Korb, 2015; Tabibnia & Radecki, 2018; Paoletti, 2019; Tabibnia, 2020) to examine how it is

possible to cover and learn from stress and uncertainty and, training in daily life through specific exercises. The Ten-Keys were used in emergency and challenging context like earthquake survivors (Di Giuseppe, in Press), juvenile penal justice educators during Covid-19 pandemic (Paoletti et al., 2022), and inmates (Maculan et al., 2022).

Key	Content	Neuropsychopedagogical Principle
(1) Take cover in front of what you can control and make small decisions.	Body-scan and relaxation, guided visualizations, listening to the silence and to one's own breath, bringing one's attention back to the here and now, decision-making.	Observation and Self-observation (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2011).
(2) Identify an attainable, exciting, measurable goal.		
(3) Several times a day become aware of your posture.		
(4) Be inspired by stories.	Training in self-motivation, listening to one's most intimate preferences, learning to cultivate positive emotions and to manage negative emotions (e.g., gratitude), following resilience role-models, being an active agent.	Mediation (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2012).
(5) Ask yourself what is important.		
(6) Cultivate gratitude.		
(7) Live the other as a resource, cultivate and expand your social network.	Listening, sharing experiences, enhancing the resources of the group to cope together with events, constant learning from everything and from every experience.	Translation (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2013).
(8) Cultivate curiosity.		
(9) Practice a few minutes of silence.	Exercise to improve the quality of sleep, daily and constant practice of intentional silence, meditation, proactive storytelling of daily life, self-programming, and foreshadowing of the future.	Normalization (Paoletti & Selvaggio, 2013).
(10) Embrace and transform: before bedtime, generate your tomorrow today.		

Table 1: The Ten Keys for Resilience by Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti

Noticeably, EF is innovatively bringing meditation practices (Paoletti, 2018) into an Italian prison, accordingly with an extended body of research attesting the benefits of meditation among inmates in terms of emotion regulation, prevention of recidivism, and biopsychosocial wellbeing (Vannoy et al., 2004; Rucker, 2005; Samuelson et al., 2007; Sumter et al., 2009; Perelman et al., 2012; Dafoe & Stermac, 2013; Kristofersson & Kaas, 2013; Griera & Clot-Garrell, 2015).

Study Aim

In the light of these premises, the present research is targeted at the exploration of the predictors of inmates' resilience. Changes in the constellation of predictors of resilience from before EF to after EF will be measured and discussed.

Method

Participants

The study sample is constituted by the inmates of the Padua prison willing to take part in EF sessions and the related survey. Twenty-four inmates (M=100%; average age = 42.89, SD = 9.53; average years of imprisonment already served = 5.81, SD = 5.07) completed the survey before the EF programme (Group PRE-EF). Twenty-four inmates (M=100%; average age = 42.79, SD = 10.34; average years of imprisonment already served = 5.89, SD = 4.18) completed the same survey after the EF programme (Group POST-EF).

Measures

The survey encompassed four scientific questionnaires: i. The Resilience Scale-14 (RS14; Wagnild & Young, 1993; Callegari et al., 2016): measuring individuals' emotional stamina through 14 items on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree), assessing different dimensions of resilience such as personal purpose, perseverance, self-confidence, equanimity and existential loneliness. ii. The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale-10 (CD-RISC-10; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2012; Ehrich, Mornane & Povern, 2017): measuring the level of resilience as the ability to cope with stress, investigating subdimensions such as flexibility, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, optimism, cognitive focus, through 10 items on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1=not at all true, 5=almost always true). iii. The Scales of Personal Self-efficacy in the Management of Negative and Positive Emotions (APEN/A - APEP/A; Caprara & Gerbino, 2001) measuring the level of personal self-efficacy in the management of both negative and positive emotions,): through 15 items on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1=not at all capable, 5=fully capable). iii. The COPE-NVI questionnaire (Coping Orientation to the Problems Experienced-New Italian Version) (Sica et al., 2008) investigating 5 dimensions of coping (e.g., social support; avoidance; positive attitude; problem orientation; transcendental orientation), through 60 items on a Likert scale from 1 to 4 (1=I usually don't do it, 4=I almost always do it).

Procedures

The study is part of the Envisioning the Future intervention which was created and conducted by the Fondazione Patrizio Paoletti at Padua's prison or "house of confinement" (in Italy, a penitentiary facility that hosts prisoners condemned with a final sentence higher than five years), thanks to the partnership of University of Padua and the collaboration of Padua's prison administration. The intervention obtained the approval of the University of Padua ethical committee. It was carried out between May 2021 and July 2021, when the prison was dealing with the pandemic emergency and overcrowding, hosting 500 inmates in a capacity of 440.

EF sessions were conducted by experts in the Pedagogy for the Third Millennium (PTM) (Paoletti, 2008; Paoletti, Selvaggio, 2012). The intervention was administered online, and it

included four live webinars (180 minutes each) and five lessons (60 minutes each), presenting notions and practical exercises about resilience, and illustrating "The Ten Keys to Resilience"(Table 1). Inmates assisted to the intervention from the prison auditorium; the presence of facilitators encouraged group interactions and questions from the participants. The remote modality of EF is in line with the “new normality” imposed by the pandemic (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020), requiring a major digitalization of psychopedagogy (Bozkurt, 2022) not just to schools but also to all the contexts with people in need for educational interventions.

Analytic Plan

Two statistical models of linear regression were computed for the Group PRE-EF and the Group POST-EF. The dependent variable inputted is resilience in terms of “emotional stamina” (Wanglid & Young, 1990) as assessed by RS14. The predictors have been inputted in blocks: (i) block 1: self-efficacy in managing positive and negative emotions assessed with APEN and APEP (Caprara et al., 2008); (ii) block 2: coping in terms of social support, avoidance, problem orientation, transcendental orientation, positive attitude, measured with COPE-NVI; (iii) block 3: flexibility, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, optimism, cognitive focus, the resilience dimensions specifically focused on handling stress, measured by CD-RISC-10.

Results

The two linear regression models indicated a change in the constellation of resilience predictors. In Group PRE-EF, resilience was predicted exclusively by low avoidance ($\beta=-.64$, $p<.05$), with $R^2=.69$ (Table 2). In POST-EF resilience was not only associated with low avoidance ($\beta=-.34$, $p<.05$), but also predicted by self-efficacy in managing positive emotions ($\beta=.51$, $p<.05$) cognitive flexibility ($\beta=.56$, $p<.05$), and perceived social support ($\beta=.56$, $p<.05$), with $R^2=.88$ (Table 3).

	Beta	t	Sig.
Variables			
(Costant)		0,01	0,99
Self Efficacy in managing Negative emotions	0,1	0,41	0,69
Self Efficacy in managing Positive emotions	-0,19	-0,65	0,53
Social Support	0,45	2,03	0,07
Avoidance	-0,64	-2,82	,02*
Problem orientation	0,36	0,85	0,42
Trascendence orientation	-0,4	-1,48	0,17
Positive attitude	0,27	0,95	0,36
Fexibility	0,54	1,61	0,14
Self Efficacy	-0,59	-1,01	0,33
Emotion regulation	-0,13	-0,45	0,66
Optimis	0,84	2,11	0,06
Cognitive Focus	-0,54	-2,09	0,06

*Significancy level at $p<.05$

Table 2. Linear Regression for Group PRE-EF

	Beta	t	Sig.
Variables			
(Costant)		-0,19	0,85
Self Efficacy in managing Negative emotions	0,28	1,16	0,27
Self Efficacy in managing Positive emotions	0,5	3,26	,01*
Social Support	0,56	2,5	,03*
Avoidance	-0,34	-2,3	,04*
Problem orientation	-0,29	-1,6	0,14
Trascendence orientation	0,03	0,19	0,85
Positive attitude	0,01	0,05	0,96
Fexibility	0,57	2,93	,01*
Self Efficacy	0,23	0,65	0,53
Emotion regulation	-0,2	-0,93	0,37
Optimis	-0,45	-2,03	0,07
Cognitive Focus	-0,06	-0,25	0,81

*Significancy level at $p < .05$

Table 3. Linear Regression for Group POST-EF

Discussion

In Italy, Envisioning the Future (EF) is one of the few research-intervention experiences focused on inmates' wellbeing (Augelli et al., 2017; Buseti et al., 2018; Galli et al., 2018). Noticeably, EF is the first neuropsychopedagogic intervention to promote prisoners' resilience. The finding of the present research highlights that the basic resilience determinant of Padua's house of confinement inmates is low avoidance. Avoidance is the coping modality consisting in escaping from the problem and the related negative emotions (Cramer, 1998). Resilience cannot be stimulated by avoidance (Rutter, 1993) because this mechanism hinders a proactive search for solutions: in such a challenging context as prison, being capable of facing stressors, instead of escaping from them, predicts higher resilience.

After EF, inmates' constellation of resilience predictors resulted changed and enriched by other factors besides low avoidance. In line with literature attesting the link between social support and inmates' resilience (Jacoby & Kozie-Peak, 1997; Ozbay et al., 2007; Sippel et al., 2015), it is possible to interpret the result considering that EF increased the perceived social support by inmates by counteracting the social isolation, naturally associated with being far away from the family (Wallace et al., 2014), and exacerbated by Covid-19 health emergency (Hewson et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2021). In fact, EF sessions used the group as a catalyst for positive change and self-improvement (Imel, 1999; Guarino & Serantoni, 2008), indirectly strengthening the sense of community and group belonging among prisoners (Wenger, 1999).

Another predictor of resilience emerging after EF is flexibility: the more a person can reframe her/his point of view through cognitive shifting, awareness, and open-mindedness, the more she/he will develop resilience in different life-domains (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; McCracken et al., 2021). While this capacity is scarce in several psychopathological conditions, characterized by cognitive rigidity (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008), flexibility is a protective factor against trauma consequences on mental health (Galatzer et al., 2012; Bryan et al., 2015) such as anxiety, depression, stress, and sleep disorders (Arslan & Allen, 2021;

McCracken et al., 2021). It is possible to speculate that EF, providing inmates with self-administrable exercises and self-training (e.g., meditation, silence), positively impacted on inmates' self-awareness and capacity to re-signify their own experience and prefigure their future (Paoletti, Selvaggio, 2011; 2012; 2013), in a more flexible and resilient way.

Finally, self-efficacy in managing positive emotions resulted a predictor of prisoners' resilience after EF. In a challenging environment like prison, threatening individuals' mental health (Sygit-Kowalkowska et al., 2017), and complicated by Covid-19 pandemic (Hewson et al., 2020; Johnson et al, 2021), having a high self-efficacy in managing emotions serves to modulate frequency and intensity of affects (Perasso & Velotti, 2020). The result can be explained in the light of EF impact in educating the prisoners to adaptively maximize positive emotions in their everyday life, besides the adversities.

Conclusion

Before Envisioning the Future intervention (EF), the only variable determining inmates' resilience was low-avoidance. After EF, low-avoidance, high flexibility, high self-efficacy in managing positive emotions, and perception of social support, reveal an improvement in the constellation of resources associated with prisoners' resilience. The main limitations of the study are: (i) the use of self-report questionnaires that may trigger social biases in respondents (Dicken, 1963); (ii) the lack of paired data of participants from pre to post intervention, that hindered the possibility to conduct longitudinal analysis of the impact of EF; (iii) the lack of a control group not participating to EF to furtherly corroborate the results. Notwithstanding these limitations, this is the first research in Italy deepening the effects of a neuropsychopedagogic intervention on inmates' resilience predictors. Since conducted from remote, EF also met the global needs for educational systems' digitalization related to the pandemic (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Bozkurt, 2022). The study lays the groundwork for future research in the field of the factors that can predict resilience in a population at high risk for mental suffering like inmates, and it encourages the practice of neuropsychopedagogy in the prison's environment.

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