

Bouncing back, blogging knack: A general overview of resilience and blogging as a psychological intervention

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Resilience

During adverse life circumstances, it can be hard to stay positive and find our balance; this is a situation that requires resilience. Given that mental health problems are associated with large direct costs for individuals and society, it is pragmatic to explore what constitutes resilience and find resources on how it can be enhanced. When these resources are cultivated, they can improve a person's overall ability to effectively cope with stress and hardship.

Emmy Werner (1971) was one of the first researchers to spearhead the use of the term *resilience*, while the first research on psychological resilience was published by Norman Garmerzy (1973). In the succeeding years, many researchers have contributed to a collective understanding of resilience, which has made its definition rich and varied.

One of the most widely cited – more than 6,200 citations, as of September 2020 – definitions of resilience is by Walker et al., (2004, p.4) who described it as 'the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks'. While other researchers propose that resilience encompasses positive adaptation to stressful situations (e.g., Kidd & Davidson, 2007; Martin & Njoroge, 2005; Masten & Reed, 2002). Meanwhile, the American Psychological Association (APA, n.d.) defines resilience as 'the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands.' APA's definition also identifies a 'number of factors contribute to how well people adapt to adversities, predominant among them (1) the ways in which individuals view and engage with the world, (2) the availability and quality of social resources, and (3) specific coping strategies.'

However, to date, it has remained elusive as to what constitutes resilience and what is the most appropriate measure to capture its conceptualisation. Since resilience is a multifaceted construct, it has inevitably led to training programmes that focus on reducing mental health symptoms, while others focus on improving psychological resilience.

The history of blogs

A blog is an online journal where an individual, group,

or corporation presents a record of activities, thoughts, or beliefs. Some blogs operate mainly as news filters, collecting various online sources and adding short comments and website links. Other blogs concentrate on presenting original material. In addition, many blogs provide a forum to allow visitors to leave comments and interact with the publisher. Blogging is the act of composing material for a blog. Materials are largely written, but pictures, audio, and videos are important elements of many blogs. The 'blogosphere' is the online universe of blogs (Dennis, n.d.).

It is generally recognised that the first blog was Links.net, created by Justin Hall in 1994, while he was a student at Swarthmore College. Of course, at that time they were not called *blogs*; Hall simply referred to the platform as his 'personal homepage' (Gunn, 2020).

Blogs as digital mental health intervention

There have been a number of studies which explored the dimensions of blogging as a means to marshal mental health support (e.g., Rains & Keating, 2011), and blogs have been known to confer psychological benefits associated with supportive communication (Park & Cameron, 2014).

Due to the ability of blogs in providing supportive communication, and their popularity among adolescents (Mazur, 2005), they have been widely used as an intervention for adolescents – mainly to improve literacy (McGrail & Davis, 2011) and critical thinking (Chamberlain, 2015). More importantly, blogs have also been used to address social-emotional difficulties among adolescents (Boniel-Nissim & Barak, 2013).

As blogs continue to proliferate, over the years, a small number of blog-based interventions have been developed – such as those that are intended to address social-emotional difficulties among adolescents (Boniel-Nissim & Barak, 2013); to promote mental health among adolescents (Clarke et al., 2015); or to foster empowerment among women (Stavrositu & Sundar, 2012).

Owing to blogging being a relatively recent phenomenon, there are varied ways on how it is implemented as a psychological intervention.

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Future directions

My research aims to design a psychological intervention that will be trialled on a different cohort of university students. It will explore how effective it is in promoting resilience to address anxiety and depressive symptoms among Filipino adolescents, with the ultimate goal of addressing suicidal behaviour.

With suicidal behaviour being a global public health dilemma, the implications of my research project are threefold: First, this will be the first empirical study which will investigate the efficacy of a blog-based psychoeducation intervention for suicide prevention among adolescents. Second, it will build upon previous works on ways to promote resilience among adolescents. Finally, it will form a comparative framework for future research on blog-based intervention.

With the ever-increasing popularity of blogs, it makes sense that they should be adapted in order to improve the way people think and act about mental health. The good news is that across the world, people use blogs as a platform to share experiences, to increase awareness and understanding, and to offer comfort and support.

It might sound surprising to most people but there is a psychology behind blogging. An emerging subfield in psychology that focuses on the application of psychological principles and research in order to optimise the benefits that readers can derive from consuming blogs is known as 'blog psychology' (Relajo, 2017).

Conversations about mental health, psychology, and well-being play a crucial role in helping people feel better about themselves. Blogging gives people a chance to create these conversations.

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