

Resiliency and Self-Sufficiency

Objective: To recognize, promote, and measure resiliency and self-sufficiency in working with traumatized refugees and torture survivors.

Resilience Defined:

1. Positive adaptation by individuals despite experiences of extreme adversity (Schoon, 2003)
2. The process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Masten, 2008)
3. A construct connoting the maintenance of positive adaptation by individuals despite experiences of significant adversity (Luthar, 2000)

Overview: We can see examples of resiliency in each survivor we work with. But how can we reinforce that resiliency through self-sufficiency focused case management tasks? Resiliency involves independent characteristics or resources as well as a community perspective.

What does resiliency look like?

Resilience is made up of a series of protective factors that allow a person to adapt or change. Protective factors that promote resiliency are: intelligence, a sense of belonging, optimism; ability to problem solve; ability to find meaning in adverse situations; spiritual belief system; physical exercise; and social support. In comparing the following tools: Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale-25; Child-Youth Resiliency Measure-28; Impact of Events Trauma Scale- 22, each look at one's ability to overcome adversity, there are several items that are most commonly included:

1. **Ability to adapt**
 - a. measured by looking at one's history of adapting to adverse situations
2. **Sense of belonging: connection to family or friends**
 - a. An area that agencies serving refugees and torture survivors can foster
3. **Sense of security**
 - a. An area that agencies serving refugees and torture survivors can foster
4. **Ability to cope**
 - a. Measured by looking at one's ability to cope with past challenges
5. **Sense of hope**
6. **Sense of life meaning**

This information sheet is based on an NPCT webinar on this topic, presented by Kristen Guskovict, MS., Director of the Florida Center for Survivors of Torture (FCST). The webinar was originally aired on August 8, 2012 and is archived on our website, www.gcjfc.org/refugee under [Webinars](#).

"This information guide is adapted from Kristen Guskovict's presentation at the NPCT national conference in New Orleans, LA. Special thanks to the note taker from that workshop, Tulane University student Shannon O'Neil."

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Therapy vs. Therapeutic

In Maslow's hierarchy of need, the items that are measured on a resiliency scale happen within the upper levels of the pyramid. The challenge for a case management program and the survivor is to foster those upper levels of the pyramid while continuing to work on ensuring that a survivor has their basic needs met and can continue to meet those needs and feels safe within their new environment. Therefore, it may be more useful for the provider to consider the ecological perspective, when working with a torture survivor.

The ecological perspective illustrates that each area of an individual's life is equally important. Implementing services through the ecological perspective:

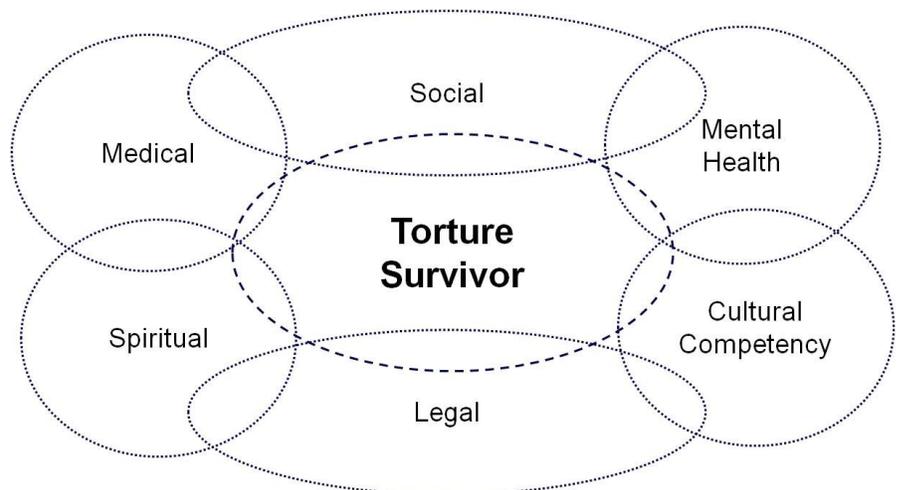
- Explains our role as a service provider in the community
 - Helps to place 'us' as providers in context
- Establishes trust and a connection to the greater community
 - Community connection is essential in promoting and supporting resiliency factors
- Identifies partnerships with schools, churches, and community groups
 - Provides opportunities for survivors to build their individual communities
- Assists in developing or enhancing a sense of belonging
- Assists in developing or enhancing sense of belonging

Contextual

Traumatic events impact every person in a family unit, individual family members react differently to the trauma and each other afterwards. Since relationships are a key element to resilience, it is beneficial to assist an individual to put their traumatic experience into context. Contextualizing an experience involves reassessing individual roles within the family unit and community before and after the traumatic experience facilitates family members to reconnect with one another.

Support and reinforce resilience through case management- the practical application of resiliency in every day practice.

Maslow, A. *Motivation and Personality* (2nd ed.)
Harper & Row, 1970.



How does housing impact resiliency?

Housing can foster a sense of belonging, a sense of community and a sense of safety

Challenges and barriers discussed included: fear and housing availability. When considering the need for community to increase resiliency we also must increase the feeling of safety. Case managers are encouraged to provide a neighborhood orientation to the survivor. Consider introducing the refugee survivor to their landlord and providing a cultural orientation to the landlord, and information about using interpreters. Housing availability can be increased by again considering the need for community, and focusing on how relationships are being built with local landlords. Educate the landlord on the refugee experience and try to increase empathy by helping the landlord understand the importance of the work from your personal perspective.

How does education impact resiliency?

Education can foster a sense of community and belonging as well as a sense of life purpose.

Challenges and barriers to education include: prior educational experience and expectations of parents and teachers. Teachers may not be aware of the prior educational experience of many refugees, by providing a cultural orientation, and where possible, including some traditional methods of learning, teachers may be more prepared to provide assistance to refugee students. In addition, creating a relationship between the parent and teacher can be helpful. Many refugees and torture survivors come from communities wherein they are not comfortable talking with their child's teacher, encouraging them to take part in their child's education can assist in creating a larger community for the parent and the child, by including the school community. Education offers a lot of opportunity, afterschool programs and clubs for children to develop a sense of belonging. It can also create sense of community for parents through PTAs, and a learning opportunity for parents through vocational programs, adult educational programs and even early childhood development programs.

How does employment impact resiliency?

Employment can foster a sense of life meaning, a sense of hope and a sense of community.

Barriers to employment include: transferrable skills, expectations, acculturation, and health concerns. Survivors who have previous work experience are often uncertain as to how to translate that experience onto a resume or job application. Providing survivors with an orientation to working in the U.S. including: resume writing workshops, mock interviewing opportunities and education on cultural norms at work can increase self-sufficiency in future job searches. Many of our survivors have additional health barriers, which can create problems with attendance if untreated. For example, symptoms of PTSD such as nightmares can negatively impact sleep and side effects of blunt force trauma can impede one's ability to learn. However, once a job is obtained, it can increase a survivor's sense of community of that survivor and provide them with opportunities for continued self-sufficiency in the future, by providing them with new skills and can increase self-sufficiency by reinforcing a sense of purpose and meaning.

How do community resources impact resiliency?

Barriers to community resources can include: Fear of the unknown, fear that information requested by a community resource may be used against the individual. Fear that their use of the resources may have a negative impact on their immigration status. Lack of knowledge about the existence of community resources that may be of benefit to them. Promoting resilience provides survivors with resources that will help them to remain self-sufficient during future crises and challenges. Connecting survivors with community resources is a large part of that. One example of a community resource is a food pantry. A food pantry is often run by a community or church organization which may be an organization that the survivor would like to participate in. The organization may also be a place wherein the survivor can volunteer to increase job skills. Finally, the food pantry is a reliable resource to meet a basic need, and can provide the survivor with additional assistance in navigating the social service systems within the U.S. even after they are discharged from resettlement programs.

Self Sufficiency and Resiliency

Housing, employment and education are all roads to self-sufficiency, but they are also ways to re-enforce resiliency. Each individual we work with enters the room with personal resources. With each step they take towards self-sufficiency, they increase their knowledge about their new environment, they increase their connections within the community AND they increase the personal resources that make them resilient.

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Scales

Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale 25 Resiliency scale (CD-RISC 25). Retrieved at: <http://www.connordavidson-resiliencescale.com/>

Child-Youth Resiliency Measure (CYRM 28). Retrieved at: <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/content/library/documents/child-and-youth-resilience-measure-cyrm-28>

Impact of Events Trauma Scale (IES-R 22). Retrieved at: http://consultgerim.org/uploads/File/trythis/try_this_19.pdf

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For more than 10 years, Kristen has worked with social service programs serving people both within the U.S and in Africa with agencies from Peace Corps to Save the Children. Most recently, she came to Gulf Coast Jewish Family & Community Services from the Baltimore, MD headquarters of Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service where she worked as an Assistant Director in the Children's Services Unit, in a program that provided social workers to undocumented, unaccompanied minors in ORR custody. Kristen holds an M.S. in Global Affairs and Humanitarian Relief from New York University.