

The Lived Experience Of Resilience: Promoting Valuable Social Practices

By Melanie Nguyen

Supervisor: Dr. Nancy Johnston

Introduction And Overview

Phenomenon of interest

Why is it that some individuals are resilient in the face of adversity, while others are defeated? What strengthens the capacity of individuals to persevere amid the ravages of adversity? What can be understood about the process of resilience in individuals? More importantly, what can we, as health care professionals, learn about the experiences, connections, resources, and social practices that buffer hardship or trauma and instead engender perseverance and hope?

Statement of purpose

The aim of this qualitative interpretive pilot study is to contribute to a body of applied knowledge related to strengthening resilience among vulnerable populations. The study has the following objective: to generate knowledge of the resources that individuals draw upon in order to persevere and become resilient amid overwhelming life circumstances. Thus, this major research paper will analyze and draw conclusions from six interview transcripts of participants who endorse having an experience in which they were resilient and persevered in the face of adversity. As well, these findings and the knowledge generated by the study in relation to patterns of resilience will be discussed.

Significance of the phenomenon to nursing

The individuals for whom we care as nurses are often challenged with seemingly incredible odds being arrayed against them. As nursing continues its increasing involvement in the delivery of primary health care to individuals (Canadian Nurses Association, 2006), it is necessary for this profession to ask relevant questions and determine whether health care approaches are congruent with patients' understanding (Johnson, 2000) and worldview. Recently, the Canadian national and professional voice of Registered Nurses advocated for quality practice as sustaining positive client outcomes: "The demand for collaborative, innovative clinical

practitioners to act as leaders in health care has never been stronger.... advanced nursing practice plays a key role in meeting the health needs of Canadians, by building nursing knowledge, advancing the nursing profession and contributing to a sustainable and effective health-care system" (Canadian Nurses Association, 2008, p. 2).

Learning about the social practices in which people engage to become resilient is significant to nursing praxis, since nurses frequently engage with vulnerable populations. Understanding and promoting resilience can support practices in a manner relevant to the realities and challenges faced by patients (Felten, 2000) by enlightening nurses to provide increasingly skilful and meaningful support to their patients. Nursing theorist Margaret Newman (1999) emphasizes the importance of the nurse-client relationship as the essence of nursing practice. I propose that this partnership is particularly relevant for nurses who come in contact with clients during a disruptive time in a client's life, characterized by uncertainty and unpredictability (Newman). By listening attentively (Bernick, 2004) and practicing the art of engaging with others, nurses invite, hear, and honour personal stories that unfold new meanings and possibilities (Watson, 1999). The work of nursing theorist Jean Watson (1999) is also grounded in the human sciences framework: she coined the concept of "caring consciousness" as the awareness, the skills, and the willingness to connect with self and others to attain subjective understanding and meaning. Benner (1994) previously argued that much of existing nursing knowledge remains embedded in everyday skills and practices that need to be articulated to enrich nursing practice (Benner; Carpenter, 2007). When these taken-for-granted practices and meanings fade and become unarticulated, we lose what they can enable us to see (Benner). Nursing is an engaged activity (Johnson, 2000); shedding light on this implicit expertise can benefit the health care population. Thus, identifying and exploring subjective phenomena such as resilience is particularly relevant to the nursing domain and an extremely important contribution to the expanding body of nursing knowledge (Carpenter).

One advantage of studying resilience with a hermeneutical phenomenological approach is that we are able to reveal the commonalities in meanings and experiences among participants while respecting and honouring the lived experiences of each research participant. This is particularly meaningful for nursing practice that envisions and nurtures individualized (Registered Nurses Association of Ontario,

2006) and high-quality patient care (College of Nurses of Ontario, 2008). Through interpretation and determination of what is comprehensible in a phenomenological study, a web of significance emerges that resists premature generalizations of a specific phenomenon (Ungar, 2003). Hence, narrative phenomenology provides an appropriate avenue for stories of hardship and the practical wisdom associated with learning to become resilient (Johnston, 2007). Several studies have demonstrated that qualitative research is indeed a valuable tool for understanding the meaning people give to events (Felten, 2000; Ungar; Johnston), while others have underscored the power of understanding as an opportunity to become more skilfully or humanely engaged in our practice (Benner, 1994).

Copyrights: Melanie Nguyen