Brief Research Proposal: Exploring the role of resilience and positive cognitions in preventing the development of depression in an adult population.

The purpose of this research is to further theoretical understanding of how the concept of resilience can prevent the development of depression in adults by encouraging positive thoughts or cognitions. Specific aims are (1) to provide a replication of evidence for a recently proposed model of resilience in an Irish adult sample (2) to address methodological limitations of this model by including an additional measure of resilience and (3) to potentially improve this model by incorporating a measure of significant life events as a variable which has been evidenced to have a strong relationship with depression. Ultimately, by testing a number of alternative models to explain the relationship between resilience, positive thoughts and depression this research will be able to contribute to resilience theory with implications for prevention and intervention strategies.

The primary objective of this research is to replicate a model of resilience to depression in young Irish adults that has recently been tested in a Chinese undergraduate sample (Mak, Ng, & Wong, 2011). This model shows how positive thoughts about oneself, one’s world and one’s future can facilitate the expression of resilience and its ability to promote life satisfaction over measures of depression. This collection of positive thoughts can be referred to as the positive cognitive triad. Such a model has important implications for prevention and intervention strategies and as it has only been evidenced in a Chinese undergraduate sample, the first aim of this research will see if there is evidence to support this model in an Irish adult population. Additionally, while evidence has been found to support Mak et. al.’s (2011) model there are two main limitations of their research that this study will seek to address.
First of all, resilience is a difficult concept to define. A recent conceptual review has operationalized it as “the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to or managing significant resources of stress or trauma” (p.11, Windle, 2011). The resilience model tested by Mak et al. (2011) uses a measure of “ego resilience” which defines resilience as a stable personality trait. This measure is criticised as an unsuitable reflection of resilience, which is thought to be a more dynamic personal attribute (Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011). Furthermore, ego resiliency does not show consistency across cultures (Alessandri, Vecchione, Caprara, & Letzring, 2012). Bearing this in mind, a second aim of this study will look at testing an alternative model in which the ego resiliency scale will be replaced by the brief resilience scale (Smith et al., 2008). The brief resilience scale assesses the potential for resilience in stressful situations and has been more positively evaluated in the literature (Windle et al., 2011).

Second of all, stressful life events have been found to have strong associations with resilience, life satisfaction and depressive symptoms (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov, 2007; Bonanno, 2004). Significant life events have been evidenced to trigger the onset of depression (Kendler, Karkowski, & Prescott, 1999) and are consistently shown to initiate first episodes of depression in particular (Monroe & Harkness, 2005). Thus, while resilience has been found to correlate positively with life satisfaction measures and negatively with depression (White, Driver, & Warren, 2010), an individual’s experience of stressful life events may confound this relationship if we don’t also take them into account. Therefore, as a third aim, this study seeks to incorporate measures of stressful life events over the last 12 months to see what effect this might have on the strength of the model.

This study will consider an adult population over the age of 18 years. Participants will be recruited from national universities as well as the general public via Internet advertising and emails. These adverts and emails will incorporate a website link that directs participants to the information sheet, consent form and questionnaire. Prior to taking part in the questionnaire, all participants will need to acknowledge that they have read the Information Sheet.
on the first screen and indicate their agreement with the associated consent form on the second screen. Only after obtaining consent will participants will be redirected to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire itself will comprise a total of 6 screens and 100 items. Participants will be complete it in their own time. It will be explained to participants in the information sheet that they can withdraw from the study at any time.

It is expected that approximately 150 participants will be recruited. Participants will be encouraged to contact the researchers with any questions and will be given the opportunity to be included in the dissemination of the findings of the study if they are interested. A demographic questionnaire will assess age, ethnicity, level of education, and employment status of each participant. Prior experience with depression will also be assessed by asking participants to note if they have a) ever felt depressed, b) ever sought medical support for depression and, c) ever received psychological/psychiatric support for any other reason. On this screen, participants will again be reminded that they do not have to answer any item they do not want to.

The following measures will be used for remaining data collection and are divided by their respective purposes and location on the questionnaire:

- **Measures of resilience (total 20 items):**
  - The Ego Resiliency Scale 89 (14 items, Block & Kremen, 1996) provides a measure of resiliency as a stable personality trait.
  - Brief Resiliency Scale (6 items, Smith et al. 2008) provides a measure of resilience as the ability to bounce back from stressful life events.

- **Measures of the positive cognitive triad (total 26 items):**
  - Rosenberg self-esteem scale (10 items, 1965) will measure views of the self.
  - View of the world scale (10 items, Beckham et al., 1986) will measure views of the world.
• State hope scale (6 items, Snyder et al. 1996) will measure views of the future.

➤ Measures of positive and negative outcomes (total 26 items):
  • Satisfaction With Life Scale, (5 items, Diener et al. 1985)
  • Becks Depression Inventory II (21 items, Beck, Brown & Steer, 1996)

➤ A Measure of stressful life events (41 statements):
  • Social readjustment rating scale (Holmes and Rahe, 1967) to measure stressful life events in the previous 12 months.

Screen 8 will contain a thank you message and debriefing statement for participants. This final page will, like the recruitment emails, include contact details for emotional support agencies should they require them.

Ultimately, the outcome of this study has the potential to benefit research and practice in the area of resilience to depression by increasing understanding about how high measures of resilience reduce the likelihood of developing depression. If the model is replicated, it will lend credence to the potential for intervention strategies to focus on developing the positive cognitive triad in order to facilitate the process of resilient behaviour. Additionally, this research looks to further develop the explanatory power of the model by including a second, more behavioral measure of resilience, as well as to incorporate the role of stressful life events. In this way, an understanding of how the experience of stressful life events might shape measures of resilience and their subsequent affect on negative outcomes may be gained. For these reasons, the researchers hold that obtaining this information outweighs the potential risks that participants may be exposed to (e.g. discomfort of recalling stressful life events).
Reference List


