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Strengthening of victims' human rights in case of forced displacement through research on resilience in the post-conflict situation in Colombia

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The waves mark the way (Jorge Bucay)

THE RESEARCH SUBJECT: CORRESPONDS TO PANEL

I: SECURITY AS A BASIC HUMAN NEED IN THE POSTMODERN ERA.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explain and analyse the research relationship between the University Jaume I from Castellón, Spain, and the University of Antioquia, Colombia. Several research activities have been carried out, of which the project aimed at empowering psychosocial intervention with the most vulnerable Colombian population should be highlighted. This research action has contributed to the implementation in Colombia of the model that promotes resilience as an innovative methodology for cases of forced displacement of population and its consequences, which has, in turn, contributed to the construction of peace.

The research therefore identifies itself with what is called the “Human Rights-based Approach” method, as the promotion of resilience focuses on

human development and, as a consequence, on strengthening the affected population's human rights which were affected for years by the armed conflict in Colombia. This particularly concerns situations suffered by the child and youth population, which is the most vulnerable to the consequences of forced displacement.

To summarize, the research aims to offer promotion, dissemination and training in Human Rights, which means contributing to the improvement and optimization of the quality of life and mental health of the population and its environment.

Keywords: human rights, promoting resilience, post-conflict in Colombia, peace-building.

1. Introduction

Childhood is part of the primary process of structuring the personal and social identity of human beings. It shapes a particular form of future relationship with their surroundings and makes children active subjects in the transformation of societies.

In their development processes, children are socialized through the discourses of the subjects around them. For them, society is a mirror: it is the symbolic and active reference framework of their culture. The situation in which children interact represents, for them, their sole reality and they imitate what they receive from their environment.

This means interventions in response to the demands of children in contexts of generalized violence, like that in Colombia, cannot be delayed, because young people can either become subjects propitiating social change to achieve peace or perpetrators of the chains of terror, hate, revenge and war perceived in the continuing contexts.

In contexts of war, children are deprived of dreams, spaces for play and hope. Bombs, shootings, disappearances and displacement unexpectedly invade their everyday lives, forcing them to experience adult situations, such as survival in a generalized situation of instability. As Bello points out (2007):

When the socialization processes of boys, girls and young people take place in contexts of internal armed conflict, as in Colombia, death, fear and terror become established as everyday references moulding their relationships

with their families, neighbours and communities. When war is established in the historical reality shaping boys, girls and young people, the imprint and the situations generated by this process have a particular impact on the way they conceive and relate to their environment. They therefore organize a way of being and acting that considerably influences the projections of the future found in children and young people, who are undergoing a process of construction and consolidation and forming dynamic bonds with the present and the future forged by society. (p.1).

The everyday references in childhood plans for life in contexts of war, as in Colombia, are death, fear and terror and, with these, children consolidate their future. The armed conflict in Colombia has existed for six decades. It is now hoped to move into a post-war scenario which will bring with it many conflicts that must be dealt with so that the right to peace can be restored.

In this scenario of multiple forms of violence, various kinds of anti-social and criminal conduct arise. This type of action is among the behaviours with the greatest effect on human beings, particularly if such conduct is demonstrated by teenagers and children. It results in negative consequences for children and for the surroundings in which they develop.

Without ignoring the deficit approach predominant in psychology until the nineties, it is also important to point out that even people surrounded by a situation as traumatic as violence, and despite their experience of the pain it brings, are capable of making a meaningful life for themselves if they are surrounded by people who have supported them, believed in their possibilities and encouraged them.

However, if the psychological damage caused by the prolonged violence in the country is not dealt with, peace will not have a solid structure to make it sustainable. Studies are therefore required to identify the psychosocial risks associated with problematic behavior, making it possible to intervene and generate processes that can be replicated.

2. Background to the project

In the current context in Colombia, urgent actions are required to prevent all kinds of violence. The country is moving towards a post-conflict scenario following the signing of the peace between the FARC

and the government. This does not mean social conflict in the country will disappear, but rather that the confrontations between two agents will be reduced, probably bringing countless social conflicts that could eventually destabilize the peace process. The country's social agenda and the peace agenda appear to be particularly important issues, but their scope and limits must be recognized.

The imprint of war has generated behavioural change in people and the future expectations of children are marked by violence. Alongside the points being negotiated in the peace agreement process, mental health must therefore be made a priority in the country. Along these lines, Bello (2002) suggests that:

Boys and girls have tremendous capacity for transforming social realities when they are allowed to act as people and subjects. The imprint they leave on society is shown, above all, in spaces, music, art and language. Although the complex, intense situation of violence and degradation suffered by the country offers little hope for the proper development of children, families, communities and institutions need to deploy all resources available to them to radically change the direction of these events (p. 62).

The construction of meaning in life, the search for happiness, the acceptance of certain adverse situations and demands for rights to be respected become the starting points for promoting the personal and group development of children who have been born in a country at war.

In this way, although resilience is not a new concept in social and health care, it takes on a new, important connotation in contemporary contexts marked by inequity, the violation of human rights, interpersonal violence and social exclusion. The resilient approach demonstrates that the damage or risks to which a child or a person is subjected do not necessarily have permanent or damaging consequences. By contrast, it considers and describes the existence of real protective shields that prevent these forces – risk, damage – acting linearly, attenuating their negative effects, overcoming adversity and even transforming them into something positive (Pan American Health Organization, 2008). Among concepts that have been related with resilience and the welfare of young people are positive development, self-sufficiency, planning and decision-making.

In Antioquia, and particularly in Medellín, this type of action has been strengthened based on positive approaches to understanding mental health situations and intervening in them. For example, the National Faculty of Public Health (FNSP) has been working for some decades on actions based on research, teaching and outreach to provide a response to these psychosocial and health problems. The Programme for the Prevention of Life-Threatening Conduct (PREVIVA), attached to the faculty, has been developing knowledge and practice in the management of public policy and evidence-based projects for the prevention of violence and the promotion of coexistence in the Aburrá Valley (Duque, Montoya and Restrepo, 2007)

International cooperation and NGOs have also played an important role in the development of mental health promotion strategies. The specific case of “Strengthening an integrated system for promoting resilience in the Colombian post-conflict at the University of Antioch”, which is the focus of interest of this study, is part of the cooperation between the Universitat Jaume I in Spain and the Universidad de Antioquia based on the establishment of the Psychosocial Observatory of Resources in Disaster Situations – OPDIDE-UdeA. This initiative is technically and financially supported by the Spanish university and the aim is to generate an Ibero-American psychosocial study network for disaster prevention in accordance with the priorities shown in each region. This type of project therefore benefits the commitment to peace being made by Colombia.

3. Resilience promotion project

To carry out the project, a resilience promotion model is used based on upholding rights, seeking to reduce the risk factors found to be associated with the antisocial and criminal behaviour of the child and teenage population as a commitment to sustainable peace with social justice.

General objective

The general objective of the project is: To assess the effectiveness of the human-rights-based resilience promotion model in order to prevent risk behaviour in boys and girls aged between seven and 12 in the rural area of the municipality of Santo Domingo Antioquia.

Specific objectives

1. To psychologically assess the recognition of emotions in boys and girls using a cognitive device.
2. To implement a resilience promotion model to improve emotion management, frustration tolerance, self-esteem, aggression reduction, coping skills and positive stress management.
3. To assess the intervention based on identifying the effects caused by the psychosocial intervention model based on resilience promotion.
4. To publish the results to refute or validate the resilience promotion model.

Methodology

Longitudinal-observational study with children going to school in the rural area of the municipality of Santo Domingo Antioquia. The universe for the study will consist of two primary schools in the rural area. The study will be carried out with a total of 60 boys and girls (aged between seven and 12). 30 of them will be a control group, who, after the procedure, will also benefit from the intervention process for 2017. The children are from the Santa Gertrudis and El Rayo districts.

Sample

The sample will consist of 60 children at school in the municipality of Santo Domingo: 32 females and 28 males. They are aged between seven and 12 and are invited to take part in this study with the authorization of their respective legal guardians. The participants will be divided into two groups: group 1 will consist of the cases and group 2 of the controls.

Initial assessment

All the participants will be initially assessed using the following series of psychological tests.

- a) BASC-TSR-C (García-Barrera et al, 2011)

Based on the version of the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) in Spanish for Colombia, a scale of 24 items was derived to measure four executive functions: problem-solving, control of attention, behavioural control and emotional control. This questionnaire will be applied to the teacher in charge of each child.

b) Coping scale for children (EAN) (Morales-Rodríguez et al, 2012)

This scale consists of 35 items assessing coping strategies for problems related to the family context, health, schoolwork and social relationships. Differentiating between problem-focused coping: active solutions – communicating the problem to others, seeking information and guidance and a positive attitude – and non-productive coping: indifference, aggressive behaviour, bottling the problem up, cognitive avoidance and behavioural avoidance.

c) Computerized task (emotional Go-NoGo)

Go-NoGo tasks involve the execution or inhibition of the motor response: the demand to respond rapidly creates an overbearing tone of response which must be inhibited when the NoGo stimulus appears. Although behavioural performance is apparently simple, the task involves many sub-processes, which include discriminating between stimuli, response selection, motor preparation, response inhibition and error monitoring (Goldstein et al, 2007). The Go-NoGo emotional task allows the performance analysis of responses to signals with different emotional valences (for example threatening as against neutral). The task therefore not only provides a measure of the inhibition of behaviour, but also the emotional modulation of that inhibition (Schultz et al, 2007).

4. Application of the resilience promotion model

Resilience in the area of public health could be seen as a set of social and endopsychic processes making it possible to have a healthy life. People and communities therefore need support to develop their capability to create or possess resources (personal, inter-relational, institutional, etc.) that lead to wellbeing.

With this idea in mind, this project applies following resilience promotion model put forward focusing on the human rights of the child, taking into account the models of Grotberg (1995), Vanistendael (2005), and Wolin and Wolin (1993).

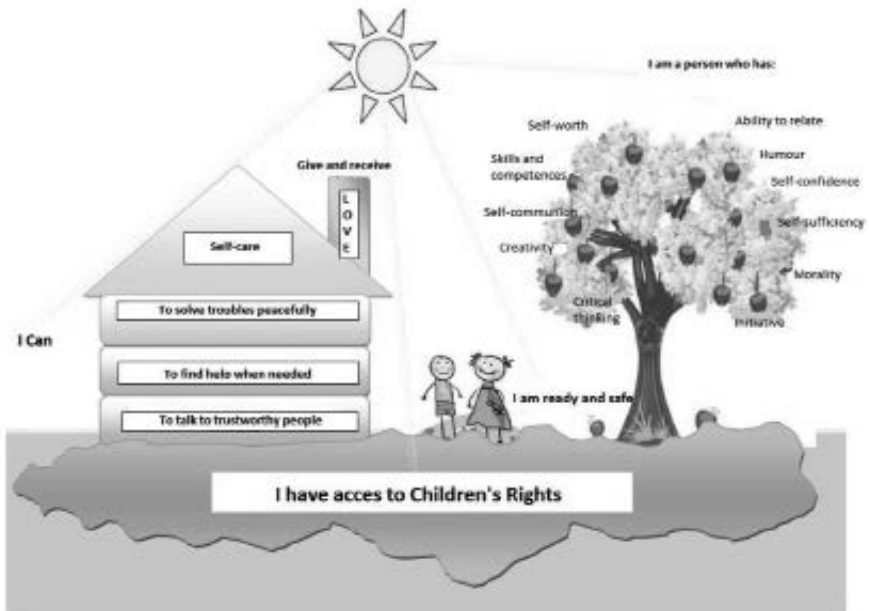


Figure 1. Proposed resilience model based on a human rights approach. Alvarán-López, Gil-Bletrán, García-Renedo, Caballer-Miedes and Flores-Buils. (2012)

It is based on recognizing that human rights stake claims for primary goods considered to be vitally important for all human beings, taking the form of demands for liberty and dignity in each historical period.

In this sense, the proposed resilience model for the prevention of problematic conduct in the rural surroundings of the municipality of Santo Domingo Antioquia, Colombia, 2016-7, is based on the enforceability of human rights as a basis for promoting resilience conceived as a process in which subjects overcome the damaging effects of adversity, helped by having their rights guaranteed. We present all the proposed points below:

a) I have access to the rights of the child and I enjoy them

Many definitions of what human rights mean have been constructed throughout history. However, for the proposal that will be developed in the intervention process, the definition of human rights put forward by Vanistendael (2010) will be used:

A right, ultimately, which is the expression of society's loyalty to the dignity of each of its members. Society recognizes that some of human needs are so important that chance, in the sense of whether or not the goodwill of others is present, cannot be relied upon in order to meet them. To put it another way, people may demand what is acknowledged as a right for them (p. 15).

These rights are recognized based on declarations of principle, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), this is the most widely ratified human rights treaty (with legal force) of all time. The Convention states that all children aged under 18, regardless of their gender, origin, religion or any disabilities they may have, need special care and protection.

Children must enjoy minimum development guarantees so they can overcome adverse situations they have had to experience due to war. Along these lines, Figure 2 develops the set of rights that must accompany the resilience process with children.

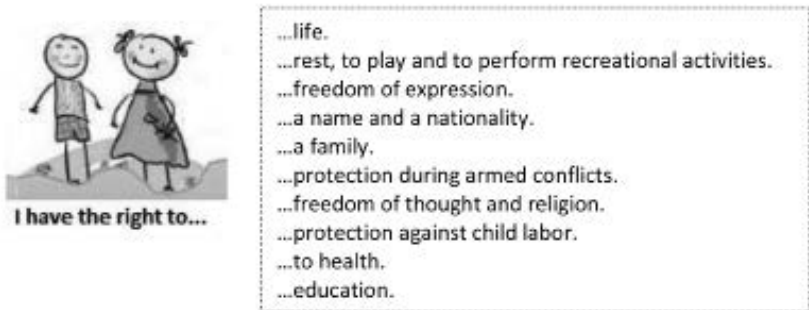


Figure 2. Rights of the Child. Proposed resilience model based on a human rights approach. Alvarán-López, Gil-Beltrán, García-Renedo, Caballer-Miedes and Flores-Buils (2012)

It is important to point out that responsibility for guaranteeing the rights of the child largely falls on States. However, in the resilience process, professionals must oversee that these rights are respected based on actions aimed ensuring the rights of the child are known and can be enforced.

b) I can (capabilities acquired in a protective environment)

This point corresponds to the individual capabilities that will be acquired in the protective environment surrounding the children. For

example, the promotion of resilience with children must focus on creating links of trust, contact networks, training in peaceful conflict resolution, self-care techniques and surroundings in which children can give and receive love. These capabilities will be acquired by children through the continuous, specialized training of mental health professionals. Figure 3 describes the capabilities forming part of the resilience process with children.

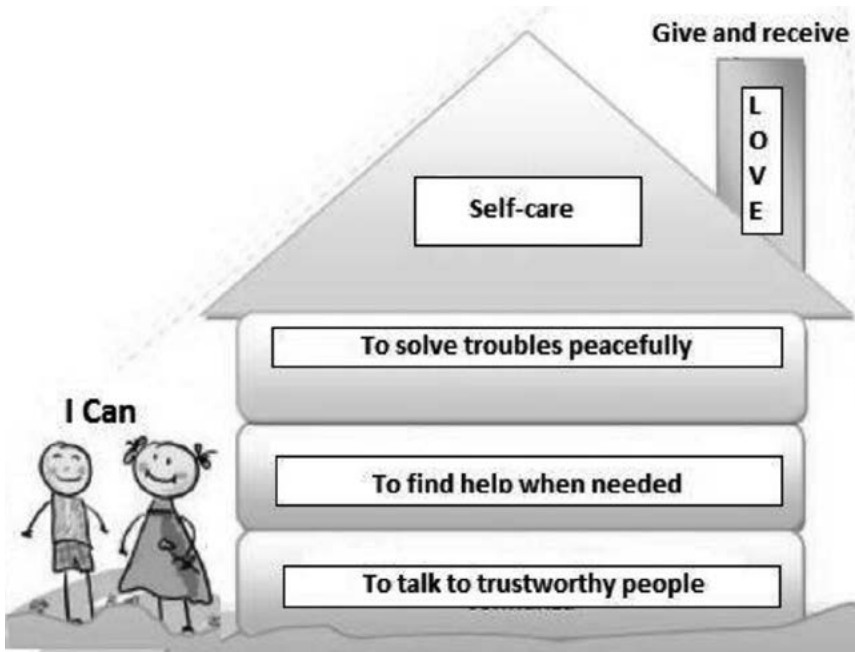


Figure 3. Resilience process capabilities. Proposed resilience model based on a human rights approach. Alvarán-López, Gil-Beltrán, García-Renedo, Caballer-Miedes and Flores-Buils (2012)

c) I am a person with resilient qualities

This point focuses the qualities of a resilient person; individual qualities that will protect children from the adversities they face every day. Figure 4 describes these qualities that can be acquired as part of a resilience process.

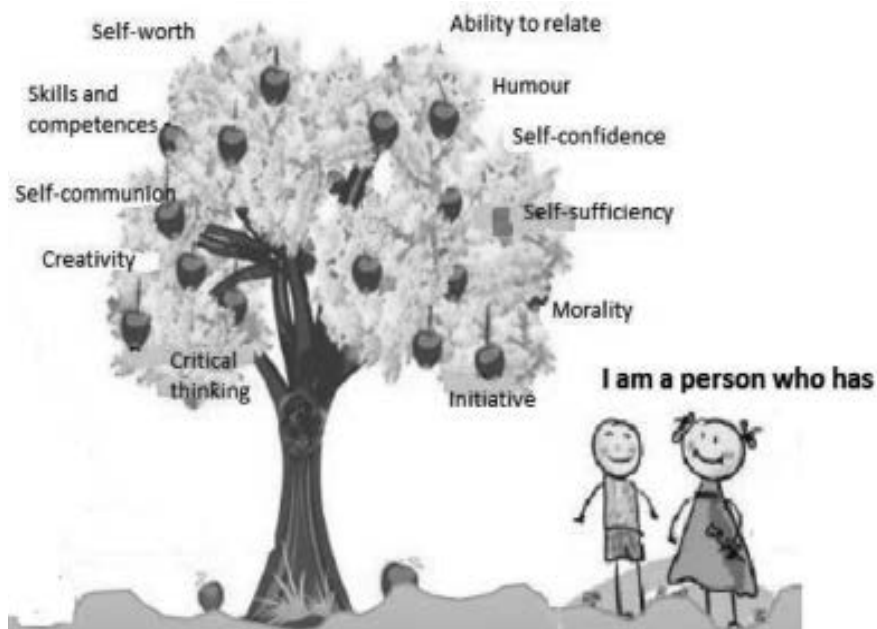


Figure 4. Resilience process qualities. Proposed resilience model based on a human rights approach. Alvarán-López, Gil-Beltrán, García-Renedo, Caballer-Miedes and Flores-Buils (2012)

These qualities will be developed, encouraged and practised based on teaching exercises making it possible to take the resilience process forward.

d) I am ready

The aim of this point lies in getting children to be ready to take responsibility for their actions during the process and to participate actively in it. Although this point could be considered as a personal quality of the child, it is important to stress that the methods and activities used during the resilience promotion process must be approached in pedagogical, creative and attractive terms so that the children remain motivated throughout.

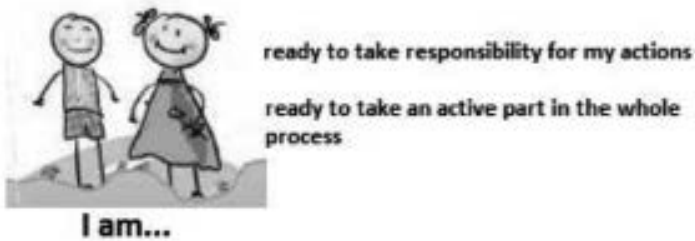


Figure 5. Objectives of the resilience process. Proposed resilience model based on a human rights approach. Alvarán-López, Gil-Beltrán, García-Renedo, Caballer-Miedes and Flores-Buils (2012)

Figure 5 shows the two objectives that must be sought during the process, interacting holistically with all the fields described above.

It is important to stress that each of the points developed operates holistically throughout the progress and application of the project. The resilience process with children conjugates the “I have”, “I can” and “I am” in a creative, educational and fun space.

Final assessment

All the assessments already described for the initial phase are applied once again at this stage.

Summary

Various methods will be used in the project, converging on the same objective: “to provide elements in order to achieve peace in the country”. Although it is extremely important to develop the study methodologically, it is considered to be even more important to intervene in problematic conduct associated with antisocial and criminal behaviour.

With this research and the application of the resilience model, it is hoped that a process will be generated that can be replicated in other schools, creating a common project that becomes a plan incentivizing the creation of public policies at local, national and international level.

It is also intended to show the importance of psychosocial intervention, as well as confirming that social processes generate change in populations.

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