



EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AMONG YOUTH: THE STRENGTH BASED PARADIGM IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Social work practitioners work with problems of individuals in Micro, Macro and Messo level, where the demands often require finding sustainable and effective solutions. Very often people fail to look within their own resources for solutions. It is at this moment that we need to highlight people's strengths to derive a solution for their persisting problems. Strengths based practice theory emphasizes people's strengths. This theory empower the individual to realizes one's full potential and ability of doing things which will naturally enable them to have a more enriched life to make a better living. The strength based practice of which roots can be found in Indian philosophy can promote emotional resilience among youth.

Key words: Strength Based Approach, Emotional Resilience, Mental Health, Deficit Based Approach

Introduction

This is a reflective essay, based on the experience of working with youth in Delhi and Kerala, especially in DSYM (Delhi Syromalabar Youth Movement) and KCYM (Kerala Catholic Youth Movement). A brief but succinct literature review is provided to support the concepts canvassed. Emotional resilience among youth is very important for the development of positive mental health and this can be enhanced through the approach of strength based practice. This approach will help the individual to have a revelation, revolution and a strong resolution to return to oneself, repair the failures and rejoice in the inner self.

The social work profession has evolved and has reached a threshold when there is high degree of efficacy required for the social work practitioners to achieve as the problems are quite demanding and the expectations with regard to the desired results are, so much more high. When social work practitioners work with individuals, groups or communities and organizations and there are problems galore. The efficiency of the social work practitioner depends on how the problems are addressed in the most effective and sustainable manner. The conventional practiced methodologies of solving problems have encountered their own disadvantages and failed to achieve desirable results quite often. Therefore we need a shift from the conventional approach which was more problem oriented to something that is more solution oriented. Sustainable solutions to the problems encountered by social work practitioners through this strength based practice theory. We begin with a brief discussion on the issues of emotional resilience among youth. The second section deals with the strength based approaches and its characteristics. Finally, we analyze the roots of strength based paradigm in Indian philosophy and its efficacy in dealing with emotional resilience among youth.

EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE AMONG YOUTH IN INDIA

Everyone agrees to the fact that young age is a period of utmost energy and creativity. The use of energy and experience of life of the youth are different from place to place; and it also differs in terms of the economic, social, political and religious diversities. The inverse relation between self-concern and empathy causes emotional disturbances to the adolescents (Ruchismita, 2012). When dealing with adults the youth is demanded to behave like an adult but not too much like an adult. This creates a lot of insecurity in dealing with others. Youth tries to get out of some of the emotional ties with their parents to gain independence (A. P. Froese MD, 1975). This naturally demands certain skills from them to manage their emotions and day-to-day affairs. Feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, boredom and meaningless encroach to their personal selves unless they learn to deal effectively with their own self and others. It is at this juncture that the emotional resilience of the individuals counts much to the full flourished adolescent period.

Emotional resilience is the strength of a person to adapt to the stressful and unfamiliar situations in day-to-day life. It must be viewed in connection with self, person, environment, relationship, etc. Elizabeth defined it as the ability of a person to adapt to the stressful situations in life (Scott, 2020). Emotional resilience is the inner condition of an individual to be in peace with himself and with his surroundings. Interestingly, Fredrickson

(2004) explain the idea of resilience with a suitable example. They compare non-resilience to a cast iron, which is brittle, hard and breaks very soon, whereas resilience is equal to wrought iron, which is flexible and bends to avoid breaking. Emotional resilience of the individuals is so important in their achievements. Emotional resilience helps the individuals to take the responsibility of his own emotions and behaviors. People who lack emotional resilience never take responsibility of their own emotions and behavior. Resilience is not a static state, rather it is a dynamic process; and risks and challenges make this process more result oriented.

Positive emotion is the one of the element of emotional resilience and in most of the circumstances it evidences the emotional resilience in individuals. This element is substantiated by Fredrickson (2004) with the support of many studies that resilience keeps individuals optimistic, open to new experiences, creative, risk taking and exhibits positive emotionality. Knowing the emotions of one's own self is the primary step to emotional resilience. Some of the major traits of emotional resilience are openness, optimism, awareness to emotions, perseverance, support, spirituality and adaptability (Scott. 2012). Positive emotions are necessary tools for establishing enhanced well-being (Fredrickson, 2004). Positive emotions broaden the view points and reaction style of the individual and negative emotions prepare individuals to act in specific ways like attacking, showing anger, etc. (Fredrickson, 2004). The emotional resilience of adolescents is a matter of much significance as they are emotionally sensitive. They react to so many things and reactions are different from place to place and person to person. Emotional sensitivity is mostly depicted as the poor show of resilience. The adolescent is emotionally sensitive and prone to depression; however, he may avoid showing his true feelings (A.P. Froese, MD, 1975 p. 71). Elizabeth Scott presents emotional resilience as an ability that can be developed. Preparing individuals to build upon the emotional resilience traits, ranging from emotional awareness to happiness is the first step to enhance emotional resilience of adolescents. Now let us discuss strength based approach dealing with emotional resilience among youth.

Strength Based Approach

In the social work practice, traditional teaching and professional development models concentrate on deficit based approaches, ignoring the strengths and experiences of the participants. Strength theory operates on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment. This is in simple terms present approaches that promote resilience as opposed to dealing with deficits (Pulla, 2006, p. 3). Strength based theory is practiced presently in diverse fields of human services management, health care, education and training

reminding that all environments have resources and that in every society individuals, and institutions are willing to assist each other to cause human well-being. The principles of nurturing and ensuring, caring and caretaking that members of our society and our organizations in turn become resilient and hopeful is clearly within the scope of strengths approaches.

Strengths based theory enable people to identify and build on their strengths so that they can reach their goals, and retain or regain independence in their daily lives. Why should we work in this way? The studies based on this theory have proven that the approach improves self-care abilities, confidence, and self-esteem of clients allowing them to independently carry out daily living activities. The emphasis is certainly on ‘getting up’ to see opportunities to growth and development. Strengths theory permits the social workers to go beyond the assessment, diagnosis, or profiling and presenting verdicts on people’s lives. Social work enables people to build their hopes, values, aspirations, and visions. In strength based approach we obviously deal with all those possibilities through a collaborative pathway. For this to happen we need to be open to the idea that our clients do have the wisdom, knowledge, and experience that they bring with them. By merging the specialized skills and experience of the facilitator along with the clients’ wisdom, knowledge and experience may have a valuable outcome to be created.

A person-centred, strengths-based approach promotes activities that are home and community based; the entire family and community are viewed as a pool of potential resource and naturally occurring resources are considered before segregated or formally constituted resources are used (Pulla, 2014). Although there are many models of recovery that we can locate in the literature, here we will limit our discussion to the concept of the strengths model of recovery. Campbell discusses six important principles of strength based approach:

“Focus on the person’s strengths, not their weaknesses, problems or deficits. Perceive the community as an oasis of resources, not an obstacle to working with a consumer. Interventions are self-determined by the consumer. Nothing is done without the consumer’s approval. The case manager to client relationship is primary and essential. Assertive outreach is the preferred mode of intervention, *i.e.* seeing the client in their home, park or café rather than a practitioner’s office.

People with serious mental illness can continue to grow, to learn and to change”. (Campbell, 2006, p. 43).

Strength theory demands social workers to shift from a pathology-focused paradigm to a possibility-focused paradigm. This shift is more than theoretical; it demands a deep inner transformation. As Saleebey (2009) insists, “to embrace a resilience/strengths model is not just a matter of acquiring some new techniques or a different vocabulary... it is a matter of changing one’s heart and mind—a personal paradigm shift” (p. 13). The real belief in the client’s capacity for change is what makes the difference. “All must be seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes, however dashed and distorted these may have become through circumstance, oppression, and trauma. The strength practice requires an accounting of what people know and what they can do, however inchoate that may sometimes seem” (Saleebey, 1996, p. 297). Indeed, the strengths perspective demands practitioners to adopt a different way of looking at individuals, families, and communities.

Self awareness is crucial in dealing with emotions and gaining emotional resilience (Stein, 2009). Knowing one’s own strength is the biggest strength of a person. The mind has the strength to look back on the things which have given us happiness, joy and satisfaction. The past proud emotional experiences would further our happiness and recalling those moments would provide energy for the future accomplishments. When one person is unaware of himself especially his emotions, he loses his control over his behavior. Now let us find the roots of this strength based paradigm in Indian philosophy.

STRENGTH BASED PARADIGM IN INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

Strength based paradigm which is an effective alternative to deficit based approach is not a western product. The roots of this approach can be traced in the Indian literature, philosophy and religious teachings. This essay find roots of the strength based paradigm in the Vedic teachings, Buddhist literature and in Gandhian philosophy.

Vedic Teaching

Vedas speak of a variety of matters; and its one of the most important teachings is the concept of Self-realization. The teaching of it tells you about the conduct of sacrifices, different ways of worship, and methods of meditation. How is the body inspired by the Self? What happens to it (the body) in the end? And how does the self-imbue the body again? An individual have an answer to such questions in these sacred texts. In the teachings of Veda, the Upanisads proclaim that all the Vedas together point to a single Truth. What is that absolute Truth? According to

the teachings of Veda, the Supreme Entity revealing itself as the meaning of 'Omkara' (Balgopal, 2014). The strength theory is seen in Vedic teaching is self-realization.

Buddhism

Strength based elements can be traced in Buddhism and mind is the major element of strength (Sundaram, 2014). "The mind, the Buddha said, is like gold. An impure mind is like gold adulterated with various minerals that will make it hard and unmalleable" (Bhikkhu, 1958, p. 1). Only after the purification of adulterated mind will be genuine gold, soft and malleable. This pure mind is the supreme strength and usefulness, like genuine gold malleable enough to be melted and poured into anything at all. A pure mind can pour around the world without getting snagged and can roll all around itself, like a bead of water on a lotus leaf, which will roll around without seeping into the leaf (Bhikkhu, 1958). For Buddha, Meditation is the best way to achieve this inner strength. The purpose of sitting and meditating is to cut away the various thoughts that preoccupy our minds (Bhikkhu, 1957). The more preoccupations we can cut away, the lighter we'll feel. All of the various burdens that weigh down our hearts all the stresses and strains we feel will lessen and disappear.

Gandhian Philosophy

Strength based practice in India, the core values of Gandhian way of development have been being fair and respectful to all, focusing on strengths, assisting a self-directed transformation to bring forward changes that are meaningful and significant to people and to reflect on how they want their situation to be (Pulla, 2006, p. 11). Gandhian mantra may sound a shade simplistic description of what is being canvassed as strengths approach today is nonviolence. According Gandhi, focus of nonviolence is inner strength of the person. This is a policy of using peaceful methods, as opposed to forceful methods, to bring about political or social change and self-directed transformation.

Though Gandhi gives prime importance for self-directed transformation for inner strength, he suggests how it is practiced. Self- directed transformation is practiced by following a clean heart, a clear conscience, a cool head, a regular communion with God, abstain from carnal food and pleasure, no alcohol, smoking and condiment, a strict vegetarian diet and love for all fellow men, It is a new life and new concept for every day (Narayanasamy, 2000) .

Conclusion

It is not realistic to expect that an individual will have no problems, no negative emotions and will never need to face a crisis situation. The most important is to have a technique and a philosophy that will help weather a storm when it arises. Strength based practice fulfills this necessity. It helps us see disrupting patterns and work out healthy ways of coming to terms with limitations and aspirations. It helps us to make contact with the goal of the inner spirit—which of being authentically human rather than deceive ourselves with false images of being supermen and superwomen. Eventually the role of the Individual is one filled with the struggle of inner exploration, which is rewarded by the discovery of the fulfilled whole person—body, mind and spirit. This is the promise of Indian philosophical paradigm.

Evidently, it is established that every person has potential and it is their unique strengths and capabilities that will determine their evolving story as well as define who they are - not their limitations. Strength theory, focus, not on labels, rather it promote strength with in the person, and thus creating hope and optimism. Strengths Based Approach in Social Work has a great sense of relevance in the changing times. It could be strongly stated that the evolution of this approach is in synthesis with the existing practices but a step forward towards effective problem solving on a case to case basis. When an individual realizes one's full potential and ability of doing things, it naturally enables to have a more enriched life.

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