

THE MANY FACES OF YOUTH

Effective resocialization of young individuals requires holistic, interdisciplinary strategies that foster personal competencies and build resilience against stress factors.



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The psychological and social development of adolescents is a multifaceted topic that draws interest from scholars across a range of scientific disciplines. Adolescence, a pivotal stage in life, is marked by significant physiological changes and a shift in self-perception and worldview. During this transition from childhood to adulthood, young people deepen and expand their understanding of themselves and their surroundings. Researchers highlight that this period involves the development of interpersonal relationships, emotional maturity, differentiated worldviews, and increased social activity. It is also a crucial time for *identity formation*, a concept prominently explored in Erik Erikson's model of personality development. Successfully navigating adolescence with a sense of autonomy can help prevent crises and reduce the confusion between child and adult roles.

However, young people who are deprived of support from their family or other close individuals cannot face difficulties and existential crises alone. Consequently, they seek out peers with similar experiences to collectively find meaning in life, a process known as *adopting a mirrored identity*. In Erikson's view, this fifth stage of human development is crucial due to its potential impact on the "career paths" of juvenile offenders. Nevertheless, identity crisis can be positively resolved if adolescents are given time without the pressure of having to make lifelong commitments, enabling them to experiment and prepare for making their own life choices.

Models for working with individuals in problematic situations are continually subject to rigorous research to evaluate their effectiveness and efficiency. In seeking to identify which supportive actions do actually yield results, theorists and practitioners focus on evidence-based practice. Among the numerous proposals for working with young people, the concepts of *resilience*, *positive youth development*, and the *good lives model* are particularly noteworthy. I will begin, however, by outlining the idea of *empowerment*, which addresses contemporary challenges and provides a coherent framework for designing specific solutions.

A sense of agency

In the broadest sense, empowerment means giving people a sense of their own agency, enabling them to

gain the strength and competence to make decisions about important matters with a feeling of dignity and fairness. The goal is to help activate the appropriate skills and abilities needed for personal change. This involves restoring individuals' and social groups' capacity to fully participate in social life. Empowerment is closely linked to building human capital, which involves developing the knowledge and skills that lead to increased participation, greater decision-making power, and transformative actions. Thus, the research literature highlights that the most effective way to assist people in crisis or those who are socially marginalized involves striving to activate them through individualized services. Research further indicates that supportive interventions are most effective when they address an individual's specific problems, considering both their resources (both personal and familial) and their socio-cultural context.

Social workers, educators, and psychologists have the task of discovering and activating the personal and social resources of those seeking help and identifying and developing methods for managing these resources. Researchers have proposed various resource typologies, including *objective* resources (external assessments of a situation or person) and

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subjective resources (an individual's own assessments and interpretations of their context and capabilities). For pursuing specific educational tasks, subjective resources are crucial, as they guide how an individual defines their goals and takes specific actions.

Resilience

The concept of resilience is widely discussed in the literature on social prevention and resocialization. Resilience theory emphasizes positive adaptation to the environment, characterized by resistance to negative external factors that could lead to developmental dysfunctions. It involves using an individual's protective resources to survive stressful situations, maintain healthy relationships within their environment, and ensure proper functioning in the future. This also includes a form of transcendence, the ability to sur-



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pass personal limitations, where someone in need of support transforms into a person who, despite their own challenges, provides support to others. The concept of resilience should be applied when working with youth exhibiting behavioral disorders and should serve as the foundation for developing prevention programs and promoting mental health among young people.

Interdisciplinary approaches

The principles of empowerment and resilience, along with many other positive orientations in social sciences (especially psychology), have laid the foundation for an interdisciplinary approach known as *positive youth development* (PYD). PYD emphasizes cultivating a person's individual strengths and providing contextual support within the family, educational institutions, and social settings to facilitate a successful transition into adulthood. The role of the family is particularly highlighted, including close contact, support, parental authority and control, and modeling healthy behaviors. Engagement, utilizing competencies and potential, and developing soft skills are fundamental to establishing healthy social relationships, laying the groundwork for a positive future.

For individuals struggling in life, the principles of the *good lives model* (GLM) can be applied. GLM recognizes that a person is a multifaceted being, existing at the intersection of numerous interdependent systems: biological, psychological, social, and cultural. A key feature of the GLM approach is its combination of risk management with the improvement of individual well-being. Working with young people in this model focuses on their strengths, knowledge, positive

experiences, and personal values. Educators strive to activate internal and external resources to help individuals achieve personal goals – in essence, educating them about values. Protective factors include positive relationships with family, a sense of belonging at school, and active engagement with peer groups that exhibit socially accepted behaviors.

When applying this approach to preventive or at-risk interventions, individuals should be encouraged to meet their basic needs in a prosocial manner. Rather than instructing on specific behaviors, it is more effective to demonstrate how to avoid risks and reduce the likelihood of reverting to dysfunctional behaviors. The goal of resocialization is to identify obstacles preventing socially maladjusted individuals from functioning adequately in their environment and to equip them with the skills, beliefs, and values that help them recognize barriers while minimizing the influence of counter-socializing or criminogenic factors. This also involves assisting young people in constructing a life plan based on fundamental values and basic goods.

All these concepts can be applied in striving to design optimal methods of intervention for young people experiencing disturbed social adaptation. Notably, both the positive youth development concept and the good lives model share many common elements with the principles that have been put forward in Polish research on resocialization pedagogy. In the resocialization process, the focus should not be limited to reducing developmental disorders and dysfunctional behaviors but should also include strengthening the individual's competencies to enable positive adaptation to the social environment, thereby designing a good and successful life for themselves. ■

Further reading:

Ward T., Mann R.E., *The good lives model of offender rehabilitation: Clinical implications, Aggression and Violent Behavior* 2007.

Ward T., Maruna S., *Rehabilitation: Beyond the Risk Paradigm*, 2007.

www.youthpower.org

www.youthpower.org/positiveyouth-development

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