

Abstract

Topic: Resilience among women widowed due to conflict in Kashmir

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Resilience has generally been understood in terms of a trait or characteristic (of those who grow up successfully despite adversity, or someone who shows competence under stress); a process (of how people deal with adversity); and as an outcome of successful adaptation or positive functioning in adversity. However, identifying ‘resilience’ only in terms of a pre-defined positive outcome or trait at the individual level is now considered narrow and inadequate in the study of resilience. With the evolution of the concept of resilience, focus has shifted to the factors associated with the environment of an individual and on culturally embedded understanding of resilience. Beginning from the interpretive paradigm, this research began with the assumption that there are multiple realities. Hence, instead of trying to assess whether people conform to a set of pre-defined behaviours and outcomes, it is more important to understand meanings that people give to their life experiences. In alignment with this argument, one of the key assumptions of this research was that there must be multiple ways, which would indicate or demonstrate resilience.

This research focused on resilience in the lives of women widowed due to conflict in Kashmir. People in Kashmir have faced the psychosocial impact of ongoing political conflict since 1980's. While the character of conflict and strategies of resistance have probably changed, AFSPA and PSA continue to be in force. Gradually, the role of civil society groups has also grown in order to increase support systems, especially related to health services, livelihoods, environment, children in need of care and protection, persons with disabilities, and women. A context like Kashmir warrants a study to understand what has been happening in the lives of people in the context of an intractable conflict, what patterns of resilience are visible in their life journeys, and how the civil society assists people in the aftermath of conflict. This research hence was conducted with three objectives: to understand the patterns of resilience among women widowed due to the conflict in Kashmir; to understand the factors

which contribute to resilience among women widowed due to conflict; and to document formal and informal mental health and psychosocial support systems utilized by widows in Kashmir. In this research, resilience has been operationally defined as a process that involves navigation and negotiation (with different systems) by individuals to access health-sustaining resources and opportunities, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being. Hence, resilience is viewed to be closely linked with ability of the context to make these resources and opportunities available and accessible in meaningful ways.

Using qualitative methodology, the process and patterns of resilience was studied in lives of 50 women widowed due to conflict. While 25 women were from Kupwara district, the rest were from Srinagar district. Access to these women was facilitated by three local organizations working in Kashmir.

This research concludes with the presentation of a 'Process Model of Resilience' that has emerged from the findings. Process of resilience, as understood from life of participants in this research, involves following five interacting components: the contextual patterns, adversities and how these are/were experienced; the person or the individual and aspects of her life; views of self, resources, problems and context; and cognitive and behavioural patterns of Resilience. Findings related to all these components have been detailed in the chapters presenting findings. These five components are in fact the factors that contribute to resilience in life of women widowed due to conflict. Resilience as a process is not just about individuals but also associated with capacity of their context to provide resources and opportunities for growth and experiencing a sense of well-being. Hence, we are looking at aspects that influence both- the use of cognitive and behavioral patterns at individual level, as well as contextual patterns and responses. Evidently, this research has moved away from resilient/non-resilient dichotomy in description and discussion on resilience. The focus is not on aspects that 'make' people more or less resilient. The focus here is on aspects that are part of the process of resilience and how they influence each other as an individual navigates towards resources, opportunities, and a sense of well-being, and negotiates with systems in context.

Based on this research, implications have been discussed in terms of theoretical aspects for social work domain, aspects for social work practice, as well as areas of further research.

Key words: Resilience, conflict, women, Kashmir, MHPSS