

EDUCATIONAL RESILIENCE AND THE RISK OF MENTAL DISORDERS*

Oprea-Valentin BUŞU¹, Elena-Cristina ANDREI²

DOI: 10.52846/AUCPP.2022.1.4

Abstract

Educational resilience is a complex subject, insufficiently addressed. The concept of educational resilience refers to the student's ability to overcome stressful events in an optimal way. We often observe how students with very good academic results end up developing depressive or anxious states as a result of a stressful event or as a result of a situation with a high degree of difficulty. Our study aims to highlight the following aspects: the frequency of difficult situations faced by first year students from the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova and the University of Craiova, the degree of resilience approached in terms of time needed to overcome a stressful event, students' ability to recover, the level of stress perceived by students during the exam session, the possibility of the idea of interrupting studies, the degree of motivation for the chosen field of study, the availability of students to participate to a course of emotion management in stressful periods.

The study was conducted using a questionnaire covering 15 questions with a simple complement on a sample of 89 students. We believe that the results obtained from this study will contribute significantly to the awareness of the importance of the phenomenon of educational resilience. The causes that often lead to academic failure or dropping out of school are directly proportional to the student's degree of resilience.

Key words: Educational resilience; Mental disorders; Depression; Anxiety; Stressful events.

1. Introduction

The concept of school resilience refers to the way in which a student manages his internal resources in order to adapt effectively to the educational environment after a negative event (Howard, 2000). The student should not be seen strictly as an individual who just goes to school, does his homework and accumulates information,

*This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. Authors retain the copyright of this article.

¹ Senior Lecturer, PhD, Teacher Training Department, University of Craiova, Romania, e-mail address: valentin_busu@yahoo.com

² PhD, Faculty of Dentistry, University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Craiova, Romania, e-mail address: andreicristina2201@gmail.com, corresponding author.

but should be seen as a complex being who in addition to educational activities has a personal life at home with parents, extended family of grandparents, friends.

School resilience is influenced by a number of factors:

- relation between teacher and student;
- relationship between parents and child;
- the child's social relations with other colleagues or friends.

The teacher's relationship with the students is extremely important and is what lays the foundations for the future harmonious development of the student in academic, psychological and social terms. A teacher-student relationship based on trust results in an increase in the student's motivation and self-esteem. Motivation is a key element in achieving school performance and is often difficult to maintain for a long time (Gherasim, 20013).

The relationship between parent and child is often problematic, especially during adolescence. From the moment the child enters the school environment, the student's desire for independence from his parents, family and a closeness to his colleagues and group of friends can be observed (Pânișoară, 2016). In the situation where the student's reference group is represented by the group of friends and not by family, a series of conflicts can occur, but also the development of inappropriate conceptions of life if the group of friends has a harmful influence, vicious habits.

The child's social relations with classmates and the group of friends should not be neglected, because their lack leads to a self-isolation of the student. Isolation has devastating effects on good mental and cognitive development. Relationships with colleagues help to improve school resilience. If a student has gone through an unfortunate event, he tends to find support in his colleagues, and if his colleagues help him to overcome this obstacle, a lasting friendship will be established based on trust and mutual respect (Pânișoară, 2016).

2. The Concept of school resilience

According to David Elkind (1998), children of the 21st century, also known as the century of speed, can be labeled 'children of dawn' because of increasingly aggressive social pressures. The stressors that today's children are subjected to are much more numerous compared to previous generations. Thus the child is forced to give up early childhood and mature at an accelerated pace. This hasty process is not beneficial as it seems at first sight, but it produces a series of psychological disorders such as the installation of anxiety or depression (Rizeanu, 2014).

In the early 1970s, the issue of children and adolescents who suffered various traumas began to be addressed by several authors with vital contributions in the field of psycho-pedagogy. In studies conducted by Owens and Shaw in 2003, the problem of children from financially affected families was highlighted and it was shown that in their case there is a school resilience of about 40%.

Another study, conducted by Ionescu in 2006, showed that a percentage of over 50% of children who were abused until the age of 6, managed during adolescence to obtain a diploma to complete their high school studies or conducts a series of courses of an accredited educational institution.

The evaluation of resilience is done by using an evaluation scale. Wagnild Young developed in 1993 the first resilience assessment scale that is based on 5 components: calm, perseverance, self-confidence, the ability to make sense and loneliness. In conclusion, it can be stated that a resilient student is the one who engages his internal motivational and emotional resources in order to overcome the obstacle in order to maintain calm and concentration (Rizeanu, 2014).

3. Methods of preventing school failure

The notion of school failure is an important element in the Romanian educational environment, because in certain conditions (disadvantaged backgrounds, rural areas, ethnic groups) it persists in a chronic form. The 'chronicling' of school failure eventually leads to dropping out of school. The causes of school dropout are multiple and can be classified into causes related to the student and external causes: school, family, entourage (Cosmovici, 2008).

The causes related to the student can be endogenous psychological nature when the student has a series of psycho-somatic disorders that prevent him from carrying out his school activity in optimal parameters (we remember certain malformations, hearing or vision impairment, different degrees of mental retardation, autism, hyperexcitability).

As methods to prevent the installation of school failure we emphasize:

1. Awareness of the importance of preschool education; A number of studies over the years have shown that students who did not receive a preschool education had poorer results when they started school. Preschool education has a role not only in the acquisition of knowledge and skills appropriate to the child's age, but also streamlines the socialization process. Another important feature of this type of education is that the future student is familiar with the rules and conduct of the school environment.

2. Permanent contact between the school and parents; because in the case of many students it has been noticed that the academic failure has its origin in the family. It is recommended that parents keep in touch with the school, pay attention to any changes in the child's behavior, know the child's abilities and references for certain areas of study. Parents also have the role of encouraging the child's cultural development through their own example.

3. Schools and faculties must ensure optimal learning conditions, the endowment of laboratories in which practical activities are carried out, as well as the development of technological and digital infrastructure. Digitization of education has proven to be a complex process that requires time for proper implementation, as both teachers and students require training by qualified staff. With the help of technology can be accessed many current sources of information that arouse the interest of pupils and students. At the same time, there is the possibility to use interactive applications that simulate various processes in order to maintain the attention of the pupils / students during the classes (Cucoş, 2006).

4. The role of the teacher; teacher, represents the basic unit of the educational system and requires besides a good training in the field and a thorough knowledge of school psychology and pedagogical techniques. In the situation where a teacher

has a poor training in the psycho-pedagogical field, he does not have the ability to properly manage an academic failure.

5. The educational system must give an increased importance for the career orientation of the student who is going to integrate on the labor market at the end of his / her studies. A study conducted in our country showed that most young people (pupils / students) choose their field of study according to their personal interests. This choice is not entirely wrong, but we emphasize that personal interests change throughout life and that is why it is important for young people to be guided in choosing their future careers according to their personality.

At the age of 18 there are certain personal interests, but if we analyze a young adult of 30 years, we notice that the interests at the age of 18 have undergone major changes, often changing their careers. At the same time, we notice that many young adults admit that they were wrong when they chose their future career according to their personal interests, but they state that they did not benefit from a career guidance counselor (Copăceanu, 2021).

4. The Relationship between the student's personality of the risk of abandoning studies

Personality formation is a complex process, being a topic approached by many famous psychologists who have defined and classified it according to certain intrinsic or extrinsic factors (Sevilla, 2022). This subject of personality development has aroused interest since antiquity, recalling Hippocrates, who developed the theory of temperament in which he argued that temperament is directly proportional to the physical component of the human being, being the result of the four humors in the body. Thanks to Hippocrates, the four types of temperament, sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic, are known internationally and guide most medical and psychological experts in determining the temperamental type of the individual (Sevilla, 2022).

We remind that personality is both an endogenous process, in which different genes are involved, and an exogenous process, represented by environmental factors, educational system. Modeling the child's personality by family members is a major contribution to the development of the future adult's personality. From an early age, we emphasize the importance of Bowlby's theory of attachment, which argues that a child with a secure attachment will have harmonious emotional and physical psycho-cognitive development. Otherwise the child will present various deficiencies and mental and emotional disorders that will result in lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem, which will lead to the placement of this type of child, future student / student in the risk group, regarding school dropout (Gordon, 2011).

Personality also plays an important role in educational resilience, because in the case of an individual with a resilient personality type, his ability to manage in a balanced, correct and in an optimal time, his internal resources, with the goal of overcoming the stalemate. However, this type of resistant personality is not perceived as an isolated process, its development being influenced by a number of factors such as family environment, educational system, internal control of emotions, willingness of the individual to compromise (Sevilla, 2022).

5. Risk of psychic disorders in children and adolescents

The educational environment not only has the role of transmitting information from different fields of study, but it is an environment that ensures the development in the optimal parameters of the pupil / student, as a future adult, integrated in the social life. Within the educational units, the concept of socialization, inter-relationship is intensely promoted, which contributes to the increase of quality in terms of emotion management (Cosmovici, 2008). Lack of socialization, often found in students who dropped out early, results in mental disorders.

According to the World Health Organization (1946) mental health is defined as "physical, mental and social well-being, which is not limited to the absence of disease or infirmity", so the absence of one of the three major factors listed leads to mental imbalance. emotional, physical and emotional. The prevention of the onset of mental disorders can be possible only through in-depth knowledge of the types of primary, secondary and tertiary psycho-prophylaxis.

Primary prophylaxis involves knowing all the ways to prevent the onset of mental illness and targets the sector of healthy individuals. Also, primary prevention is imperatively needed for groups of individuals vulnerable to mental illness. Often, these individuals come from disadvantaged backgrounds, poor socio-economic status, lack of adequate education, as well as individuals with a hereditary-collateral background. This type of prophylaxis is achieved by implementing social and educational programs for information purposes (Milea, 2006).

Secondary prophylaxis aims to improve mental illness already installed, but also aims to reduce recurrences and complications. Secondary prevention is done by establishing an early diagnosis and applying a correctly guided therapy, depending on the patient's needs (Milea, 2006).

Tertiary prophylaxis is addressed to patients in advanced stages of psychiatric pathology and aims to apply minimal or moderate recovery and reintegration in social and professional life (Milea, 2006).

There are situations in which students end up developing psychopathies against the background of untreated mental disorders in time. Recognition of psychotic pathology by teachers can be done by careful observation of the following typologies:

- individuals who lie most of the time, not only about the educational situation, but also about other aspects of life (family, friends, vicious habits);
- people with a high degree of narcissism;
- there is an average or above average level of intelligence;
- the presence of an unhealthy lifestyle: chronic alcohol consumption, tobacco use, drug use and recreational substances;
- people who do not take responsibility for their actions;
- individuals without empathy, they are unable to feel the suffering of those around them, do not give help;
- critical situations that lower self-esteem can lead to psychological disorders; a good example is the public humiliation of the student (Constantin, 2004);

- in the case of young schoolchildren, teachers must be careful if the Little Emperor's syndrome occurs, because if it is not corrected, in adolescence it is noisy, reaching social deviations (Garrido, 2022).

Our study was conducted on a sample of 89 students from the Faculty of Dentistry and the University of Craiova. The study was conducted using a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions with simple complement. The questions addressed to the students concern the following aspects: the frequency of difficult situations faced by first year students, the degree of resilience approached in terms of time needed to overcome a stressful event, students' ability to recover, the level of stress perceived by students during the exam session, the possibility of the idea of interrupting studies, the degree of motivation for the chosen field of study, the availability of students to participate to a course of emotion management in stressful periods, the role of the teacher in guiding the student in critical periods.

The distribution by gender and age of students is as follows: 76.4% of all students are female and 23.6% are male. Most students (84.3%) are in the age group between 18 and 25 years.

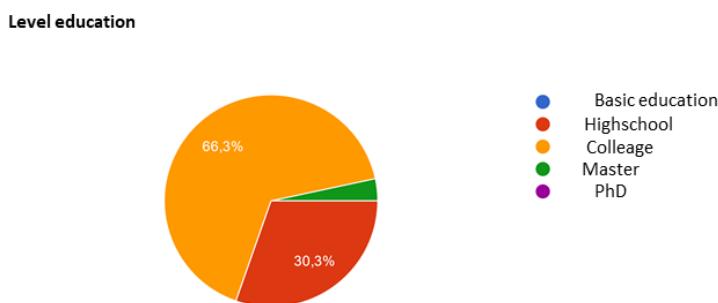


Figure 1. Most students are in their first year of college (66.3%)

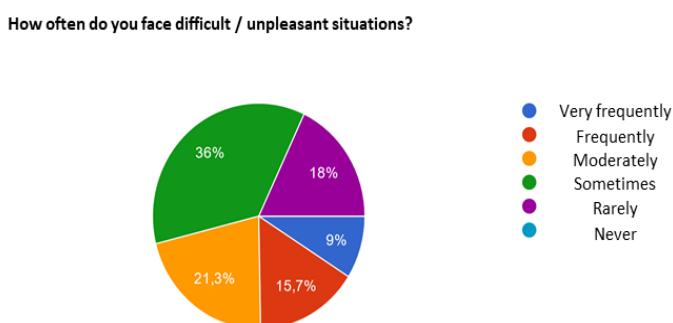


Fig. 2. Respondents' results show that an increased percentage of students (36%) sometimes face difficult / unpleasant situations. However, not to be overlooked is the number of students who frequently face this type of situation 15.7%. We believe that a more in-depth study is needed to show the types of difficult

situations that students face. It is important to know the origin of these situations whether it is educational, family, social or economic.

Do you feel that you are doing well in managing difficult situations?

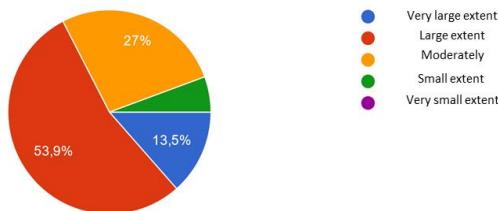


Fig. 3. Based on the answers obtained, it is remarkable that although a significant percentage of students face difficult situations, they succeed to manage them.

How easy is it to overcome difficult situations?

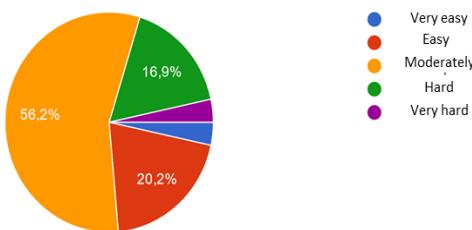


Fig. 4. The majority of participants in the study (56.2%) answered that they manage to overcome difficult situations, but with moderate effort. Also, a percentage of 16.9% states that overcoming these situations requires a great, considerable effort.

Is it difficult for you to recover from a stressful situation?

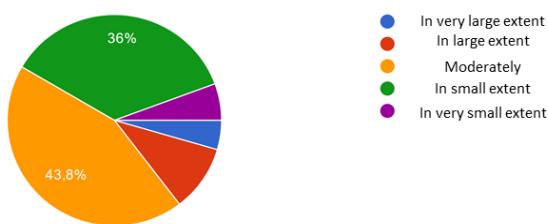


Fig. 5. Physical and mental recovery from a stressful event is moderate for most study respondents. Each student is unique, and engaging all emotional

resources for recovery is a complex process influenced by both internal factors such as motivation and external factors (family, colleagues, school).

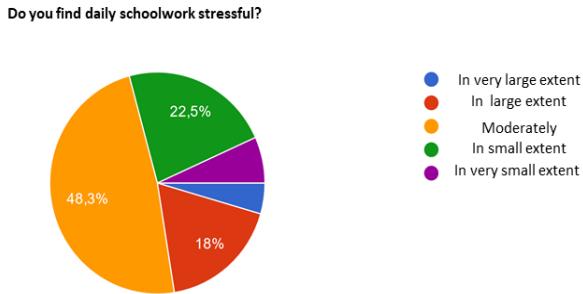


Fig. 6. The majority of students, 48.3%, said that daily schoolwork produces a moderate level of stress. It is important to find a balance in the tasks to be performed by students. Psychic overload of students can result in burnout. Mental and emotional exhaustion decreases academic results.

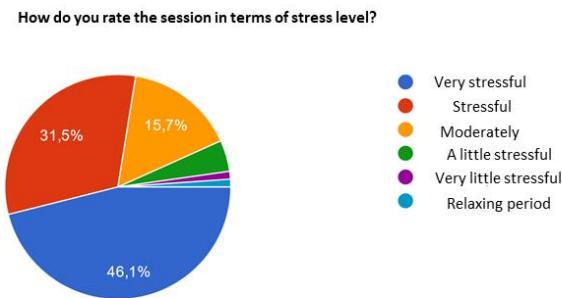


Fig. 7. The exam session is a very stressful period (46.1%). Reducing the stress level during this period can be achieved through preventive methods. A good example is the familiarity and knowledge of the basics for different disciplines studied during the semester. It is also very important that the theoretical notions be correlated and their applicability for a better understanding of the field of study.

Have you ever had the intention to interrupt your studies?

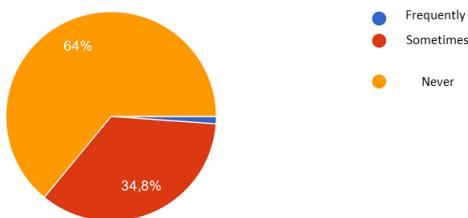


Fig. 8. The results of this item are quite worrying, as a significant percentage of 34.8% of students stated that there were times when they thought of interrupting their studies. Interruption of studies is a serious problem and requires special attention. The causes that triggered the idea of this decision must be identified. It is often the case that high school graduates make the wrong choice in their field of study. It is necessary to increase counseling and guidance and career programs.

Do you think that you are getting enough help from teachers to deal with stressful situations?

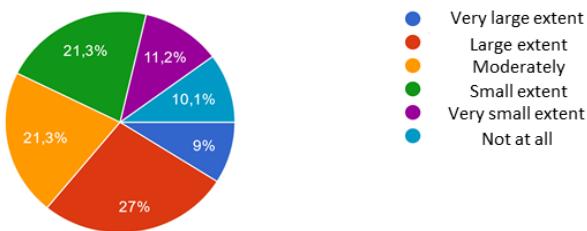


Fig. 9. We notice that the results of this item showed that students consider themselves neglected by teachers in case of a stressful event. We believe that the attitude of teachers is essential in managing the difficult situations that students go through during their years of study. A student does not have the necessary experience to optimize his resources in order to overcome the critical situation in an optimal time. The role of the teacher is to guide the student in order to streamline emotional management in order to achieve the proposed results.

Do you find useful a course dedicated to students who deal with the subject of managing emotions in stressful situations?

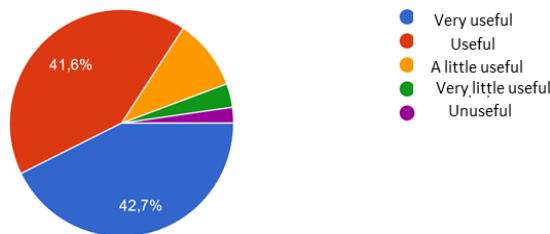


Fig. 10. A positive reaction from students is that most find a course in managing emotions in stressful situations very useful (42.7%). We believe that these courses can be organized within the faculties by vocational counselors and psychologists. The active involvement of students and teachers is especially important.

Did you feel that you were losing interest / motivation in your chosen field of study?

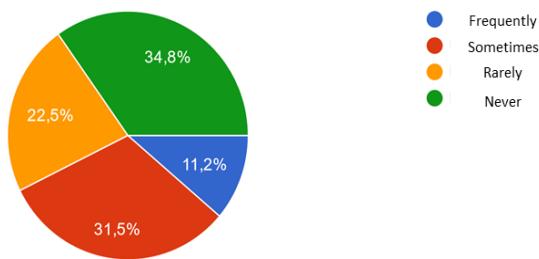


Fig. 11. The results show that a significant number of students end up losing interest in their chosen field of study. This can be prevented by implementing educational information and counseling programs.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, we can say that educational resilience is a topic of great interest that has not been fully addressed in the Romanian pedagogical sphere. A key element is to identify the causes that led to the phenomenon of school dropout. It is also essential to know the methods to prevent the interruption of studies. Encouraging high school students to participate in career guidance programs is vital.

REFERENCES

1. Copăceanu, M. (2021). *Consiliere și orientare în carieră. Ghid pentru profesori și părinți*. Bucharest: University Publishing House.
2. Cosmovici, A., Iacob, L. (2008). *Psihologie școlară*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
3. Constantin, A. C. (2004). *Conflictul interpersonal. Prevenire, rezolvare și diminuarea efectelor*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House, 145-149.
4. Cucoș, C. (2006). *Pedagogie. Second edition*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House, 169-171.
5. Elkind, D. (1998). *Teenagers in crisis all grow up and no place to go*. Reading, M.A. Perseus Book.
6. Garrido, V. (2022). *Psihopatia. Spectrul răului*. Bucharest: LITERA Publishing House, 45-46; 59; 103; 126-127.
7. Gherasim, L. R., Butnaru, S. (2013). *Performanța școlară. Determinanți individuali și contextuali în adolescență*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
8. Gordon, T., Burch, N. (2011). *Profesorul eficient. Programul Gordon pentru îmbunătățirea relației cu elevii*. Bucharest: Trei Publishing House, 40-42.
9. Howard, S. (2000). What makes the difference? Children and teachers talk about resilient outcomes for children at risk. *Educational studies*, 26, 321-337.
10. Ionescu, S. (2006). *Psihopatologia ca proces vulnerabilitate și reziliență. Ediția a III-a*. Bucharest: Trei Publishing House.
11. Milea, Ș. (2006). *Profilaxia primară a tulburărilor psihice la copil și adolescent. Vol. I*. Bucharest: Medical Sciences Publishing House, 13-14.
12. Owens, E. B., & Shaw, D. S. (2003). Predicting growth curves of externalizing behavior across the preschool years. *Journal of abnormal child psychology*, 31(6), 575-590. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1026254005632>
13. Pânișoară, G., Sălăvăstru, D., Mitrofan, L. (2016). *Copilăria și adolescența. Provocări actuale în psihologia educației și dezvoltării*. Iasi: Polirom Publishing House.
14. Rizeanu, S. (2014). *Psihodiagnoza și evaluarea clinică a copilului și adolescentului. Note de curs. Ediția A II- a*. Bucharest: University Publishing House, 146-152.
15. Sevilla, M. S. F. (2022). *Personalitatea. Ce ne face unici*. Bucharest: LITERA Publishing House, 72-73; 99-100; 135-136.
16. Wagnild, G.M., Young H. M. (1993). Development and psychometric evaluation of the Resilience Scale. *Journal of Nursing Measurements*. Vol. 1, nr. 2.
17. <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>