

**Session Identifier: A.1**

**Session Theme: Aging, Adversity and Resilience**

**Thursday, June 16, 2016**

**10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**

Results of an Intervention Designed to Reverse the Effects of Early Life Adversity on Relationships in Later Life

Dr. Vince Waldron, Arizona State University; Kathleen Waldron, Arizona State University

Those who experienced serious adversity early in life appear more likely to experience challenges at midlife and beyond. These include social isolation, relational distress, emotional dysregulation, and some chronic illnesses. Persons with a history of early adversity may respond more intensely to stressful events later in life but they may also exhibit vantage sensitivity – heightened responsiveness to training and interventions designed to promote improved emotional coping and relational skills. This possibility is examined with preliminary data drawn from a community sample of 220 participants (ages 45-70) in an online course in social intelligence (Zautra & Zautra, 2015). The sample includes 110 persons who experienced high levels of childhood abuse and 110 persons with little or no abuse. Data include pre- and post-tests as well as 3- and 6-month follow-up assessments of changes in daily well-being, relational behaviors, and emotional reactivity to stressors, and stress biomarkers (DHEA-S and IL-6). Daily diary data are collected. A subset of participants and close confidants are randomly-selected to engage in extended qualitative interviews designed to collect detailed information about cognitive, affective and behavioral changes experienced after training. Initial findings from interviews suggest high adversity participants reported improved awareness of nonverbal behaviors, better emotional regulation, constructive reframing of childhood adversity, efforts to expand social networks, and a reduction in destructive communication. This presentation focuses on qualitative results, the promise of interventions of this type, and educational applications.

Refining the Ecological Model of Resilience for Older Widowed Men and Women

Dr. Kate M Bennett, University of Liverpool; Eva Balgova, University of Liverpool

Widowhood is a high-probability life event in later life. Whilst bereavement and subsequent widowhood are naturally highly stressful, the majority of widowed men and women cope well enough to continue their lives without professional intervention. Amongst those widowed people are some, reported as between 38 and 54% (Bennett, 2010; Bonanno, 2004; Spahni et al., 2015) who could be defined as resilient, able to adapt or bounce back in the face of adversity (Windle, 2011). Thus, there is growing interest in resilience amongst widowed people, and in the factors that contribute to that resilience. However, much of the work has focused on quantitative analyses and on bereavement rather than qualitative work focusing on the longer-term effects of widowhood. In this study we examine resilience amongst older widowed people using qualitative methods. We utilize the following definition of resilience: "the process of negotiating, managing and adapting to significant sources of stress or trauma. Assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity" (Windle & Bennett, 2011). We analyze data from over 100 in-depth interviews of older widowed people which focused on the experiences of widowhood. We

examined factors that promote or hinder resilience. 1/3 of participants were resilient and 1/3 were not. The remaining 1/3 showed some resilient features. Key factors include psychological characteristics, social support, and religious faith. We develop the idea of more than a binary classification of resilient or not-resilient.

Role of Storywork in Strengthening Resilience: A Comparison of Group vs. Solo Activities in Enriching Older Adults' Narrative

Dr. William Randall, St. Thomas University; Dr. Dolores Furlong, University of New Brunswick; Dr. Clive Baldwin, St. Thomas University; Dr. Sue McKenzie-Mohr, St. Thomas University; Linda Matthews, St. Thomas University

The research informing this paper is exploring the link between older adults' level of resilience and the sorts of stories that they tell about their lives (Randall, Baldwin, McKenzie-Mohr, McKim, & Furlong, 2015). The hypothesis behind this project is that helping people recount thicker, more developed narratives about their lives will enrich their inner resources for coping with the challenges that later life presents. This paper will provide data that compares two sets of participants. The first consists of 14 individuals (65+) who engaged in a process of telling, writing, and reflecting on the stories of their lives by attending 3 one-day group workshops entitled "The Autobiographical Adventure". The second consists of 4 individuals who engaged in a similar process of storywork not in a group but by themselves, as well as in the course of being interviewed one-on-one by a research assistant. Following engagement with the narrative materials and process, participants were asked to reflect on any change they experienced in their sense of overall well-being, sense of meaning in life, degree of resilience, and how they see their story developing. The aim of these comparisons is to assess the relative impact of doing storywork in a group setting vs solo upon a person's narrative development.