

Examining the Nature of Resilience and Executive Functioning in People with Brain
Injury and People with Multiple Sclerosis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I

1 Statement of the Problem	1
1.1 <i>Introduction.</i>	1
1.2 <i>Definitions of resilience and executive functioning</i>	3
1.3 <i>Rationale</i>	5
1.4 <i>Aims and Outcomes</i>	8
1.5 <i>Research and Documentation</i>	9

Chapter II

2 Literature Review	11
2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	11
2.2 <i>Resilience</i>	13
2.2.1 <i>A definition</i>	13
2.2.2 <i>Resilience: A Historical Background</i>	15
2.2.3 <i>Protective factors</i>	17
2.2.4 <i>Coping</i>	29
2.2.5 <i>Mood states and resilient behavior</i>	30
2.2.6 <i>Humour and resilience</i>	31
2.2.7 <i>Disclosing positive emotions</i>	31
2.2.8 <i>Fredrickson’s broaden and build theory of positive emotions</i>	34
2.2.9 <i>Recent advances</i>	35
2.2.10 <i>The relevance and clinical implications of resilience to practitioners</i>	35

2.2.11	Assess resilience as a developmental process	36
2.2.12	Developing healthy perceptions of stressors	37
2.2.13	Conclusion: Research on resilience	39
2.3	<i>Executive functions</i>	41
2.3.1	Importance of executive functions	47
2.4	<i>Traumatic brain injury</i>	49
2.4.1	Introduction	49
2.4.2	Neuropathology and causes of TBI	50
2.4.3	Diagnostic criteria for Traumatic Brain Injury	51
2.4.4	Physical changes following TBI.....	51
2.4.5	Cognitive functions.....	52
2.4.6	Impairments in Psychosocial Functioning following Frontal Lobe Injury.....	60
2.4.7	Mood disorders following a Traumatic Brain Injury.....	63
2.4.8	Substance abuse and disability	68
2.4.9	Identification and management of dual diagnosis	70
2.4.10	Aspects of rehabilitation used in the intervention	71
2.5	<i>Multiple Sclerosis</i>	75
2.5.1	Epidemiology, Incidence and Prevalence of Multiple Sclerosis	75
2.5.2	Etiology	76
2.5.3	Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis.....	76
2.5.4	Fatigue	78
2.5.5	Pain and Multiple Sclerosis	79
2.5.6	Types of Multiple Sclerosis	79
2.5.7	Diagnosis of MS	81
2.5.8	Treatment.....	82

2.5.9	Exercise and Multiple Sclerosis	83
2.5.10	Psychosocial Correlates of MS	84
2.5.11	Impairment of Cognitive and Executive functions in Multiple Sclerosis	87
2.5.12	Resilience for People with Multiple Sclerosis.....	88
2.5.13	Summary and conclusion.....	89

Chapter III

3	Research Methodology.....	90
3.1	<i>Introduction.</i>	90
3.2	<i>Quantitative Methods.....</i>	92
3.3	<i>Resilience Scale</i>	93
3.4	<i>Assessing Executive Functioning.....</i>	94
3.5	<i>Goal Attainment scaling</i>	97
3.6	<i>The Outcome Rating Scale.....</i>	98
3.7	<i>Participant Selection.....</i>	100
3.8	<i>Participant Demographic and Diagnostic Data.....</i>	101
3.8.1	Mean age.....	103
3.8.2	Gender	103
3.8.3	Education	104
3.8.4	Employment.....	105
3.8.5	Types of Multiple Sclerosis	106
3.8.6	Location of Brain Injury	106
3.8.7	Time since diagnosis	107

3.8.8	Marital status	107
3.8.9	Children	108
3.8.10	Community Re- Entry Program.....	109
3.8.11	The Multiple Sclerosis Society.....	109
3.9	<i>Ethical Considerations</i>	110
3.10	<i>Data collection points</i>	110
3.11	<i>Analysis of Data</i>	112
3.11.1	Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test	113
3.11.2	Mann -Whitney U Test	113
3.11.3	Spearman Correlation Coefficient	113
3.12	<i>Triangulation</i>	114
3.13	<i>Reliability</i>	115
3.14	<i>Validity</i>	116
3.15	<i>Research Questions</i>	117

Chapter IV

4	Intervention	119
	Introduction	119
4.1	<i>Intervention Procedure</i>	119
4.2	<i>Items of the intervention</i>	121
4.3	<i>Structure of the bi weekly intervention sessions</i>	137

Chapter V

5 Results	139
5.1 <i>Case studies</i>	139
5.1.1 Tina.....	141
5.1.2 Leslie.....	163
5.1.3 Betty.....	183
5.1.4 Peter.....	200
5.1.5 Rob.....	218
5.1.6 Sarah.....	232
5.2 <i>Resilience Assessment Scores</i>	247
5.3 <i>Analysis of scores on the Resilience Scale</i>	250
5.4 <i>Executive Functioning Assessment Scores</i>	251
5.5 <i>Analysis of scores on the Dysexecutive Questionnaire</i>	253

CHAPTER VI

6 Research Questions Answered	254
6.1 <i>What is the relationship between measured resilience and executive functioning for all participants?</i>	254
6.2 <i>Is there an improvement in resilience and executive functions after the intervention?..</i>	258
6.3 <i>Are there any group similarities or differences in the demonstration of resilient and executive functioning behaviours?</i>	267
6.4 <i>What is the evidence of resilient behaviours in the sample in this study?</i>	272

6.5	<i>What factors contribute to the resilience and effective executive functioning of participants?</i>	275
6.5.1	Problem solving difficulties.....	277
6.5.2	Social support	278
6.5.3	Mood disorders	278
6.6	<i>How does having family/ spousal support influence resilience?</i>	284
6.6.1	Emotional support.....	284
6.6.2	Practical support	287
6.6.3	Strength of the family unit.....	288
6.6.4	Religious and spiritual support	289
6.7	<i>Does unemployment compound the difficulties of TBI & MS and if so how?</i>	290
6.8	<i>What part does level of education play in coping with these conditions?</i>	294
6.9	<i>What is the nature of social networks for all participants?</i>	295
6.9.1	Breaking of the social network	297
6.10	<i>To what extent is denial a factor in coping with either condition?</i>	300
6.11	<i>To what extent is age a factor in coping with either MS or TBI?</i>	304
6.12	<i>Since people with frontal brain damage generally have impaired executive functioning to what extent does a) training and/or b) mentoring compensate for executive functioning difficulties?</i>	306
6.13	<i>To what extent do mood swings for either sample affect measures of executive functioning and resilience?</i>	307

Chapter VII

7 Discussion	310
7.1 <i>Introduction</i>	310
7.2 <i>Executive functions and resilience</i>	312
7.3 <i>Social support and networks</i>	318
7.4 <i>Mood states and positive emotions</i>	327
7.4.1 High risk	330
7.4.2 Coping and Resilience	331
7.5 <i>Resilience the norm?</i>	339
7.6 <i>Relearning and reconstructing shattered selves</i>	340
7.6.1 Everyday Heroes.....	343

Chapter VIII

8 Recommendations and Conclusion	345
8.1 <i>Limitations</i>	345
8.2 <i>Directions for future research</i>	348
8.3 <i>Recommendations</i>	351
8.4 <i>Conclusion</i>	356
References	357

Appendix 1	Consent Form.....	447
Appendix 2	Ethics Approval Letter.....	449
Appendix 3	Letter of Introduction.....	450
Appendix 4	Participant Information Sheet.....	451
Appendix 5	Resilience Scale.....	453
Appendix 6	Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test.....	455
Appendix 7	Mann Whitney U Test.....	458

ABSTRACT

This study describes, identifies, measures and nurtures traits of resilience and executive functioning in two groups of participants, (a) ten with traumatic brain injury; 6 males, 4 females, (Mean Age = 42 years, SD =6.23) and (b) ten with Multiple Sclerosis, 3 Males, 7 Females (M =44, SD = 10.80). Participants who fulfilled the selection criteria underwent a six month individualized psychosocial intervention. The intervention was based on principles of person centred and cognitive behaviour therapy. Skill building exercises, problem solving training, appropriate management of mood disorders and support for building social networks were fundamental components of the intervention. Outcome data were collected using the Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993), the Dysexecutive Functioning Questionnaire (DEX) (Wilson, Alderman, Burgess, Emslie, & Evans, 1996), and Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS) (Kiresuk & Sherman,1968) on three occasions; (01) baseline, (02) post intervention and (03) at six months follow up. Supporting data were obtained through case studies, medical records, psychological reports, interviews and participant observation. Statistical analysis of scores (Spearman Correlation Coefficient) indicates that there was a significant correlation between executive functioning and resilient behaviours. As resilience improved for the MS group, so did executive functioning abilities. Significant improvements in resilience scores post intervention (Wilcoxon Signed Rank) were reported by both groups. However, due to the severity of cognitive impairments in participants with TBI, an increase in DEX scores post intervention was not obtained. Despite low scores, significant behavioural changes were identified. Amongst them was the ability to set and persist at tasks, set goals, demonstrate insight and the ability to problem solve. Successful achievement of personal goals was dependent on the availability of support. Only then, were resilient behaviours more perceptible in both groups. Resilient behaviour was also dependent on mood states. When experiencing sustained personal equilibrium,(ie an

optimistic and resilient state) participants were better able to respond to feedback, make decisions and plan activities. Given the right circumstances and support, even the most impaired participants (impaired because of serious frontal lobe damage for people with TBI or people with primary progressive MS experiencing considerable pain and loss of mobility) were capable of resilient behaviour which in turn, was motivating for them and inspiring for their family and friends.

SUPERVISOR'S CERTIFICATION

The researcher's supervisor confirms that he has approved all aspects of the research project detailed in this thesis, including the content of the literature review, the collection and analysis of data, reporting and the storage of data.

Supervisor:.....

Dr Brian Matthews

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The project titled: "Examining the nature and relationship of resilience and executive functioning in people with traumatic brain injury and multiple sclerosis has been granted ethical approval by the Social and Behavioural Ethics Committee of Flinders University, South Australia.

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I certify that this thesis does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed:

Nivashinie Mohan

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LIST OF TABLES

<i>Table 2.1</i>	<i>Characteristics of resilient behaviour.....</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Table 2.2</i>	<i>Literature review matrix of Characteristics of Resilience</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Table 2.3</i>	<i>Description of Protective factors</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>Table 2.4</i>	<i>Questions which can be used when assessing a client's schemas</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>Table 2.5</i>	<i>Executive functioning behaviours</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Table 2.6</i>	<i>Methods which can be used to assess executive functions.....</i>	<i>46</i>
<i>Table 2.7</i>	<i>Executive functioning processes commonly difficult for people with frontal lobe injury</i>	<i>48</i>
<i>Table 2.8</i>	<i>Strategies which facilitate attending behaviours</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Table 2.9</i>	<i>Strategies to reduce orienting difficulties</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Table 2.10</i>	<i>Strategies which facilitate language difficulties</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Table 2.11</i>	<i>Strategies which promote self-awareness</i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Table 2.12</i>	<i>Types of memory</i>	<i>59</i>
<i>Table 2.13</i>	<i>Memory Rehabilitation Strategies.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Table 2.14</i>	<i>Psychosocial difficulties in people with frontal lobe damage.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Table 2.15</i>	<i>Structure which promotes errorless learning</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Table 2.16</i>	<i>Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Table 3.1</i>	<i>Characteristics of the Dysexecutive Syndrome measured by the DEX Questionnaire (in question order).....</i>	<i>96</i>
<i>Table 3.2</i>	<i>Steps used for Goal selection</i>	<i>98</i>
<i>Table 3.3</i>	<i>Participants' demographic and social data.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Table 4.1</i>	<i>Items contained in the intervention</i>	<i>120</i>
<i>Table 4.2</i>	<i>Seven principles of problem solving</i>	<i>129</i>
<i>Table 4.3</i>	<i>Problem solving process</i>	<i>130</i>

<i>Table 4.4</i>	<i>Examples of the principles used in the intervention.....</i>	<i>138</i>
<i>Table 5.1</i>	<i>Tina’s short term objectives, therapeutic intervention and goals.....</i>	<i>152</i>
<i>Table 5.2</i>	<i>Leslie’s short term objectives, therapeutic intervention and goals.....</i>	<i>173</i>
<i>Table 5.3</i>	<i>Betty’s short term objectives, therapeutic intervention and goals.....</i>	<i>192</i>
<i>Table 5.4</i>	<i>Peter’s short term objectives, therapeutic intervention and goals</i>	<i>211</i>
<i>Table 5.5</i>	<i>Rob’s short term objectives, therapeutic intervention and goals.....</i>	<i>225</i>
<i>Table 5.6</i>	<i>Sarah’s short term objectives, therapeutic intervention and goals.....</i>	<i>240</i>
<i>Table 5.7</i>	<i>Total Resilience Scale Scores.....</i>	<i>248</i>
<i>Table 5.8</i>	<i>Resilience Scale categories for TBI participants</i>	<i>249</i>
<i>Table 5.9</i>	<i>Resilience Scale categories for MS participants.....</i>	<i>249</i>
<i>Table 5.10</i>	<i>DEX scores for all participants.....</i>	<i>251</i>
<i>Table 5.11</i>	<i>Dysexecutive Questionnaire scores for participants with TBI.....</i>	<i>252</i>
<i>Table 5.12</i>	<i>Dysexecutive Questionnaire scores for participants with MS</i>	<i>252</i>
<i>Table 6.1</i>	<i>Participants’ correlation significance scores on the DEX and RS.....</i>	<i>254</i>
<i>Table 6.2</i>	<i>Characteristics of people who are regarded to be flexible</i>	<i>257</i>
<i>Table 6.3</i>	<i>Cognitive activities involved in executive functioning and compensating strategies</i>	<i>258</i>
<i>Table 6.4</i>	<i>Benefits of participation in the intervention program.....</i>	<i>263</i>
<i>Table 6.5</i>	<i>Resilient behaviours</i>	<i>273</i>
<i>Table 6.6</i>	<i>Group conditions which contribute to depression in participants with TBI or MS.....</i>	<i>280</i>
<i>Table 6.7</i>	<i>Individual conditions which contribute to depression in subjects with MS or TBI.....</i>	<i>282</i>
<i>Table 7.1</i>	<i>Observed adaptive and maladaptive coping behaviours</i>	<i>332</i>

LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 2.1</i>	<i>Protective factors which promote resilience</i>	20
<i>Figure 2.2</i>	<i>Frontal lobe umbrella: Executive functions and the relationship to personality</i>	44
<i>Figure 3.1</i>	<i>Gender of both groups of participants</i>	104
<i>Figure 3.2</i>	<i>Levels of education for both groups of participants</i>	104
<i>Figure 3.3</i>	<i>Employment for both groups</i>	105
<i>Figure 3.4</i>	<i>Types of Multiple Sclerosis</i>	106
<i>Figure 3.5</i>	<i>Location of brain injury for TBI participants</i>	107
<i>Figure 3.6</i>	<i>Marital status for both groups of participants</i>	108
<i>Figure 3.7</i>	<i>Children for both groups of participants</i>	109
<i>Figure 3.8</i>	<i>Time line of data collection</i>	112
<i>Figure 5.1</i>	<i>Tina’s strengths and protective factors</i>	146
<i>Figure 5.2</i>	<i>Tina’s Outcome Rating Scale Scoring at 0, 2, 4 and 6 months of the intervention</i>	148
<i>Figure 5.3</i>	<i>Tina’s Resilience Scale Score</i>	154
<i>Figure 5.4</i>	<i>Tina’s Dysexecutive Questionnaire scores</i>	154
<i>Figure 5.5</i>	<i>Leslie’s protective factors and strengths</i>	168
<i>Figure 5.6</i>	<i>Leslie’s Outcome Rating Scale scoring at 0, 2, 4, and 6 months of the intervention</i>	170
<i>Figure 5.7</i>	<i>Leslie’s Resilience Scores</i>	177
<i>Figure 5.8</i>	<i>Leslie’s Dysexecutive Questionnaire Scores</i>	177
<i>Figure 5.9</i>	<i>Betty’s protective factors and strengths</i>	188
<i>Figure 5.10</i>	<i>Betty’s Outcome Rating Scale scoring at 0, 2, 4, and 6 months of the intervention</i>	190

<i>Figure 5.11 Betty's resilience scale scores.....</i>	<i>194</i>
<i>Figure 5.12 Betty's Dysexecutive Questionnaire scores</i>	<i>194</i>
<i>Figure 5.13 Peter's protective factors and strengths</i>	<i>206</i>
<i>Figure 5.14 Peter's Outcome Rating Scale scoring at 0, 2, 4 and 6 months of the intervention</i>	<i>208</i>
<i>Figure 5.15 Peter's Resilience Scale Scores</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>Figure 5.16 Peter's Dysexecutive Questionnaire Scores</i>	<i>213</i>
<i>Figure 5.17 Rob's protective factors and strengths.....</i>	<i>221</i>
<i>Figure 5.18 Rob's Outcome Rating Scale scoring on 0, 2, 4 and 6 months of the intervention</i>	<i>223</i>
<i>Figure 5.19 Rob's Resilience Scale scores</i>	<i>227</i>
<i>Figure 5.20 Rob's DEX scale scores</i>	<i>227</i>
<i>Figure 5.21 Sarah's protective factors and strengths</i>	<i>235</i>
<i>Figure 5.22 Sarah's Outcome Rating Scale score at 0,2,4 and 6 months of the intervention</i>	<i>238</i>
<i>Figure 5.23 Sarah's Resilience Scale Scores</i>	<i>242</i>
<i>Figure 5.24 Sarah's Dysexecutive Questionnaire score.....</i>	<i>242</i>
<i>Figure 5.25 Mean resilience scale scores for both groups.....</i>	<i>250</i>
<i>Figure 5.26 Scores on the Dysexecutive Questionnaire (DEX) for all participants</i>	<i>253</i>
<i>Figure 6.1 TBI participant's resilience total scores at the three data collection points</i>	<i>259</i>
<i>Figure 6.2 MS participant's resilience total scores are three data collection points</i>	<i>260</i>
<i>Figure 6.3 TBI participants' Dysexecutive Questionnaire scale scores at three data collection points.....</i>	<i>261</i>
<i>Figure 6.4 MS participant's Dysexecutive Questionnaire scale scores at three data collection points.....</i>	<i>261</i>

<i>Figure 6.5 Mean total resilience scores for both groups at baseline, post intervention and follow up.....</i>	<i>269</i>
<i>Figure 6.6 Mean scores on the DEX at baseline, post intervention and follow up</i>	<i>270</i>
<i>Figure 6.7 Implications of persistent unemployment.....</i>	<i>293</i>
<i>Figure 6.8 Social networks for Leslie a participant with TBI</i>	<i>298</i>
<i>Figure 6.9 Social networks for Sarah a participant with MS.....</i>	<i>298</i>

IF.....

IF you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream – and not make dreams your master;
If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
' Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
if neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

Rudyard Kipling