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The Application of Psychology in Social Governance

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Abstract

What role does psychology actually play in the construction of social psychological service systems? How can we better build a comprehensive and systematic multi-stakeholder social psychological service system? How can we promote the development of psychology itself within the construction of social psychological service systems? These questions have consistently attracted the attention of psychology scholars. Taking resilience as an example, through theoretical synthesis of the construction pathways for individual, team, and community psychological resilience, together with practical case studies, this aims to provide knowledge references and guidance for the construction of social psychological service systems, reflect on the role and function of psychology in this process, and promote the application of psychology in social service systems through its integration within social support systems.

Full Text

The Role of Psychology in Social Service Systems: A Case Study of Resilience-Building

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Abstract: What role does psychology play in constructing social psychological service systems? How can we better build a comprehensive, systematic, multi-agent social psychological service system? How can the development of psychology itself be promoted within such construction? These questions have long concerned psychological scholars. Taking resilience as an example, this paper summarizes theoretical pathways for building psychological resilience at

individual, team, and community levels, supplemented by practical cases, to provide knowledge and reference for social psychological service system construction. We reflect on psychology's role and position in this process, hoping to advance psychology's application in social service systems through integrating its use in social support frameworks.

Keywords: resilience; social service system; emergence; psychological construction

We are living through a period of profound global transformation, facing intensive, pervasive, and fundamental changes across economic, political, social, cultural, and technological domains, with various risks and crises permeating our environment. In this rapidly changing context, nations, organizations, communities, and individuals are all direct subjects facing transformation. Addressing the various problems accompanying these transitions—how to objectively view issues related to security and trust, enhance people's sense of gain and happiness, and help all subjects facing change successfully resist risks, overcome adversity, restore balance, and achieve development (Saja, Teo, Goonetilleke, & Ziyath, 2018)—constitutes the essential meaning of truly realizing the supportive and sustaining functions of social psychological services.

As some scholars have proposed, we should use psychological concepts and theories to explain, predict, and control social behavior, conducting social psychological construction based on psychological characteristics. This involves establishing social psychological services, counseling, and intervention mechanisms to promote social safety and harmony, prevent public safety dangers, resolve social conflicts, improve social governance mechanisms, and enhance life happiness indices. While these goals are clear, the question remains: how to implement them? The vast majority of existing psychological research is based at the individual level, so current social psychological services mostly manifest as individual-level psychological counseling and mental health guidance. However, the subjects facing change include not only individuals but also nations, organizations, and communities. How then can we better meet the multi-level demands for social psychological services?

Comprehensive review of existing research reveals that building social psychological service systems is a task facing China's development in the new era. Although the West has nearly a century of experience, differences in political and economic institutions (hard environments) and cultural mindsets (soft forms) prevent us from directly transplanting entire social support and psychological construction systems from the West. How to build a social psychological service system within China's actual context, how to make this new social support system logically consistent with China's powerful cultural traditions and social customs, acceptable to the broad Chinese populace while remaining rational and scientific—these are important tasks facing contemporary Chinese psychology professionals. To construct a meaningful, full-process, multi-dimensional social support system, psychology's theories must be embedded within existing policies and service systems, truly integrating psychology with specific problems.

Only then can psychology achieve its true pivotal role and translate psychological achievements into practical results.

This paper attempts to use psychological resilience as an example. First, we analyze construction pathways for different subjects' resilience at the theoretical level, demonstrating from one perspective the stability and developmental nature of psychological theory in social psychological service systems. Combined with a specific practical case, we explore whether psychological theory and application support systems can maintain unified internal logic across different levels of concrete support system construction, providing a detailed case example for enriching full-process, multi-dimensional social support system construction and offering more evidence for researchers' consideration.

In the 1970s, American psychologists began examining how child laborers' production environments affected their long-term development, initiating resilience research (Murphy, 1974). Resilience was originally defined as the psychological characteristic enabling people to effectively cope with setbacks and adversity, recovering and even rebounding from difficulties (Masten, 2001). It also refers to the competence individuals demonstrate in maintaining stable mental health and physiological functions when facing negative events and crises, successfully coping with adversity (Morin, Galatzer-Levy, Maccallum, & Bonanno, 2017). Subsequent researchers enriched its definition. For instance, Park, Cohen, and Murch (1996) proposed that resilience is the capacity to manage the most severe potential dangers and recover after disasters. Other researchers conceptualized resilience as both psychological processes and systemic response capabilities (Norris et al., 2002; Norris, Tracy, & Galea, 2009).

As research deepened, two key findings emerged: (1) Although initially studied in children, resilience subjects are not limited to children but include employees, teams, and even communities; (2) Resilience requires systematic construction. While different subjects share resilience-building as a goal, construction pathways differ across subjects, necessitating specific targets and concrete pathways tailored to each subject's characteristics in practical work.

2.1 Individual Psychological Resilience and Its Construction Pathways

Individual-level resilience, also translated as anti-adversity capacity, toughness, or elasticity, originally meaning "rebound" or "spring back," refers to behaviors that enable individuals to resist adverse events or pressures threatening their functioning, life, or development (Ungar & Hadfield, 2019). Due to modern life's complexity and diverse stress sources, individual resilience-building has long been a common theme in psychology's service to social psychological construction, generating substantial research findings over the past 50 years (Lakey & Orehek, 2011).

Reviewing existing research, scholars have defined individual psychological resilience from different perspectives. Some approach it as a trait, viewing it as

psychological characteristics or qualities individuals possess. Others define it from an ability perspective as the capacity of individuals experiencing or having experienced stress or adversity to remain undamaged psychologically and physiologically, growing stronger through setbacks (Xi, Zuo, & Wei, 2012). Still others define it from a process perspective as the dynamic process of individuals adapting well in adverse environments (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000), where different individuals possess varying personality traits and abilities that, through dynamic interactions, enable rapid recovery and successful coping when facing major stress or danger (Gucciardi et al., 2018). Naturally, different definitions entail slightly different construction pathways.

In practice, individual resilience is often treated as a trait-like state, with researchers approaching construction through protective resources or antecedent variables affecting resilience-building (such as enhancing learning motivation, self-regulation, and psychological capital). However, reviewing existing research, the best approach to building individual resilience involves embedding it within the difficult contexts individuals face (such as adverse event types, crisis development stages, and culture) (Ungar, 2018). While this approach clearly suits individual needs, it raises an efficiency problem: individual psychological resilience construction pathways often differ across contexts. Consequently, individual-level resilience construction typically requires exploring different contextual demand characteristics based on variations in individual and situational factors to identify construction methods adapted to specific individuals and contexts. This pathway often suffers from low efficiency, necessitating exploration of cross-contextual individual resilience construction pathways and resilience-building methods for different subjects.

2.2 From Individual to Team Resilience Construction

Transitioning from individual to team levels, although individual-level factors can serve as resource inputs for team resilience (such as optimism, norms, decentralization), processes (such as cognitive restructuring, leadership, and information sharing), and outcomes (such as mental health, error avoidance, and goal achievement), these concepts cannot directly explain team resilience. For team resilience construction, two primary questions arise: First, how are these numerous factors processed and output at the team level? Second, team resilience consists of team actions or processes composed of many people, not simply the sum of multiple individuals (Meneghel, Salanova, & Martínez, 2016; Bowers, Kreutzer, Cannon-Bowers, & Lamb, 2017). During resource input into the team system, emergent team resilience possesses characteristic features in form and content, from compilation to composition, and in the necessary information generated. Numerous strong individual resiliences do not necessarily produce strong team resilience. Team resilience construction is a multi-level, dynamic construct. From multi-level theory and interaction perspectives, team resilience is a collective emergent state triggered by adverse events through person-person and person-situation interactions. Emergence refers to results produced by in-

teractions among lower-level subjects (individuals). Emergent states include dynamic interactions among individuals and internal changes within each individual, producing a new, higher-level subject through continuous splitting and merging over time (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016; Gucciardi et al., 2018). Therefore, team resilience possesses additional unique characteristics, and its construction pathway differs from individual resilience.

Team resilience is the capacity of teams to recover from failures, setbacks, conflicts, or other threatening experiences (West, Patera, & Carsten, 2009). This concept focuses primarily on team-level factors rather than input factors such as individual, team, and organizational mechanisms. Existing research indicates that team resilience is neither a trait nor a capacity, process, or outcome—it is the emergent result of these components as inputs. Many threatening situations require two or more individuals to be interdependent, achieving specific goals at particular times and places to confront challenges. Consequently, team resilience construction occurs in complex, dynamic, and uncertain environments, requiring team persistence, rebound, or recovery to overcome adverse events and achieve overall objectives.

Gucciardi et al. (2018) summarized relevant research findings and proposed an emergent construction model that essentially describes the basic elements of team resilience construction (as shown in Figure 1 [Figure 1: see original paper]). Based on this multi-level team resilience emergent process model, team resilience construction only requires considering the integration of human capital at the individual team level and situational cognition content. By developing response processes and systems, promoting community interaction norms and team identity, and monitoring construction progress and interpersonal dynamics, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes (team performance or cohesion) can ultimately be generated.

2.3 From Team to Community Resilience Construction

Over the past decade, resilience (anti-adversity capacity) has become a key term in international policy and academic discussions related to civil emergencies and crisis management. Under increasing threats from environmental pollution, ecological destruction, and terrorist attacks, resilience has been recognized as an important response measure to address these issues. Organizations including the United Nations, European Union, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, government agencies, and community groups have gradually promoted community resilience construction (Meerow, Newell, & Stults, 2015; Masnavi, Gharai, & Hajibandeh, 2018).

Community resilience construction research rapidly developed from community governance at the beginning of this century. Terms such as “engineering resilience,” “ecological resilience,” and “socio-ecological resilience” commonly appear in literature. Researchers view community resilience as an important intrinsic characteristic of community systems, encompassing both physical and

human factors that help organizations thrive amidst fierce competition and external threats. Since community resilience manifests as community capabilities in early warning, control, recovery, and adaptation to adverse events, community resilience construction for a continuously dynamic social-ecological system occurs through three processes: system-wide integration, self-organization capacity, and learning. These processes not only help communities rebound from destruction but also recover to a more desirable state. Because public managers emphasize procedural and efficiency concerns, community resilience construction pathways rely on concrete actions, procedures, investment projects, and evaluations.

Regarding specific actions for community resilience construction, Sharifi and Yamagata (2016), based on internal similarities, distilled five dimensions from 29 resilience research frameworks: material and environmental resources (such as wetlands and water bodies, ecological monitoring and protection); social and well-being (community boundaries, socio-economic characteristics, social support, social institutions, safety and health, equity and diversity, culture and tradition); economy (structure, safety and stability, development dynamics); built environment and infrastructure (infrastructure robustness and redundancy, utilization efficiency, information and communication technology facilities, transportation facilities); and governance and institutional construction (leadership and participation, resource management, emergency management). They evaluated resilience degrees across these five dimensions through four capabilities: early warning, control, recovery, and adaptability. Building on these five dimensions, they further proposed standard measurements for these capabilities, listing up to 29 measurement indicators such as community resilience early warning degree, robustness, and flexibility.

Compared with initial community resilience construction, although multiple understandings of community resilience still exist (Meerow & Newell, 2016) and measurement methods and standards continue to update, the most significant change is the increasingly prominent psychological component in community resilience construction. The primary reason is that public managers gradually recognize that community is not merely a physical environment but, more importantly, an interpersonal environment. When facing adverse events, different combinations and interaction patterns among community members generate different human capital (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000), thereby constructing different response plans for crises. Community resilience measurement system design increasingly emphasizes human factors, such as individual knowledge, skills, abilities, social interactions, social identity, and shared mental model construction. Community resilience performance during adverse events can be measured through resistance trajectories, bounce-back trajectories, and recovery trajectories (Gucciardi et al., 2018).

Community resilience and team resilience share the same emergent process. Through integrating multi-level theory, individuals (such as human capital), and teams (shared mental models), community resilience construction pathways

closely resemble team resilience pathways. However, the difference lies in community resilience construction's greater emphasis on stability and temporality. Therefore, in crisis and high-pressure situations, implicit coordination among team members and between teams becomes particularly crucial. If high-quality shared mental models exist among team members, they can freely organize activities without external information influencing their behavioral coordination. Combined with explicit and implicit coordination between teams, community resilience can emerge. With rapid technological development, researchers can also use various methods to assess group coordination, such as video analysis, activity tracking, psychophysiological and neurophysiological techniques, thereby assisting community resilience construction.

Synthesizing resilience construction across three levels reveals similarities among different subjects: all aim to maintain health under different stressful contexts. However, the individual level emphasizes interaction between individual characteristics and contexts, team resilience construction focuses on interactions among individuals and the identity and shared models generated through interaction, while community resilience construction relies more on public management procedures and project-based approaches. Its internal psychological construction pathway shows greater similarity to team resilience construction.

3. Case Analysis of Psychological Resilience Construction

Over the past two years, we accepted a government commission in a specific region to conduct resilience construction for local residents. The area is located in an urban fringe zone of a first-tier city. At the beginning of reform and opening-up, this area served as a residential district for state-owned enterprise employees. With economic restructuring and reform, the area became increasingly marginalized. Original state-owned enterprises went bankrupt or restructured, residents aged, support from original enterprises decreased, surrounding living environments deteriorated, and illegal construction proliferated. Combined with influxes of migrant populations, the area deteriorated into a disorderly, dirty, and chaotic neighborhood. Seventy percent of residents had incomes below 5,000 yuan, over 30% were retirees over 50 years old, and migrant populations accounted for 60% of the total population. Our construction project came from the local management committee, which faced problems of poor resident security and low satisfaction during urban renewal, with frequent petitioning and conflicts. Despite employing many measures with poor results, they hoped psychological construction could improve satisfaction. After repeated discussions, we established the first-phase objective: enhance residents' sense of security and reduce community conflicts by 50%.

Through preliminary research and communication, we conducted resilience construction at three levels. The first targeted residents with very low satisfaction for individual resilience construction. The second focused on original enterprise employees (from restructured state-owned enterprises) for team resilience construction. The third established counseling rooms for community resilience

construction.

Research, interviews, and surveys of residents with low satisfaction revealed common psychological and environmental characteristics. Common psychological features included low social support levels and weak psychological risk resistance, with older residents showing lower satisfaction. Physical environmental characteristics included living in old residential areas without surveillance or security management, coupled with unwillingness to participate in joint defense security management. We created psychological profiles and described to local management and neighborhood committees the basic psychological characteristics and emotional states of residents with low security and satisfaction. During construction, we developed mutual aid groups for home-based support, installed one-click alarm systems in old neighborhoods for psychological and environmental support, distributed promotional materials, encouraged participation in joint defense groups, taught risk identification, used publicity to prevent elderly-targeted telecom fraud, widely organized various activities, performed psychological dramas to foster mutual support atmospheres, and taught many elderly residents to use smartphones and WeChat voice chat. After three months of support, individual psychological resilience levels improved significantly. Post-project surveys showed resident satisfaction increased from under 40% to 70%.

For team resilience construction, we mobilized original employees to build WeChat groups, with a team builder assigned to each group. The team builder's task was team construction—first building communication mechanisms, teaching smartphone use, encouraging photo sharing in WeChat groups, gradually fostering shared team identity and mental models to improve satisfaction. Most importantly, builders guided team atmosphere toward positivity, promoting positive communication among more members. Through team resilience construction, we reconstructed organizational support systems similar to early state-owned enterprise women's federations and labor unions, helping residents psychologically identify with their status, confirm team belonging, and construct the team resilience-building philosophy of “I serve everyone, everyone serves me.”

For community resilience construction, with neighborhood committee and property management committee assistance, we adopted a project-based approach, developing project activities for different populations. Each team builder served as a project leader, organizing weekend activities suitable for all ages like storytelling and comic reading, health exercises specifically for elderly residents, and knitting stress-relief activities for middle-aged residents. Through community project construction, we engaged broader populations to enhance overall community resilience. Finally, through “I Love My Community” activities, we decorated the entire neighborhood to achieve mutual community identity.

After three months of multi-level resilience construction, the area's satisfaction ranking rose to the top five in its district, while overall public security satisfaction ranking improved by eight places citywide. The project was officially recognized as a star brand project in the region.

4. Reflection: Psychology's Role and Function in Social Psychological Service Systems

From the above summaries of different subjects' resilience construction pathways and case exploration, resilience construction's greatest benefit lies in its flexible adaptability when connecting identical terms across different fields. The concept of psychological resilience and its construction pathways can link different hierarchical subjects and combine with achievements from management, public administration, and other disciplines. However, this adaptability also creates difficulties for operations in specific policy environments (Matyas & Pelling, 2014; Meerow & Newell, 2016), such as how to more clearly evaluate project construction effects and uniqueness, requiring further differentiation. Therefore, as psychology opens its arms to integrate with social management and other systems to build unified social service systems, constructing a series of measurable evaluation elements, process management elements, and outcome elements for developing different subjects' social support services by drawing on other disciplines' development and combining psychology's individual, team, and organizational research achievements constitutes crucial exploration. Some researchers thus argue that existing social psychological service system construction should explore a dual pathway combining "psychological pathways" and "systemic pathways" (Zhu, Zhao, Zhou, & Wu, 2018).

4.1 Social Psychological Service System Construction Cannot Do Without Psychological Theoretical Research Literature analysis reveals that psychological resilience construction develops from phenomena to theory. Before emergencies, the focus is primarily on capacity, examining different subjects' early warning levels for adverse events and improving capability and resource reserves. During adverse events, the emphasis is on controlling crisis extent and adaptation levels, using process concepts to respond to and examine events. After adverse events, the focus shifts to performance in facing adversity, recovery, adaptation, and change levels, allocating different resources and response methods based on different system and capability performances throughout the development process. All these processes for responding to adverse events pose core theoretical questions for psychological research: How should psychological resilience be elevated from practice to general psychological laws? How can we construct both specific and universal psychological laws and resilience construction models facing different contexts and individual characteristics?

China's cultural historical continuity, unique values and concepts, social complexity, and economic diversity provide broad perspectives for Chinese psychological theoretical development. Providing theoretical explanations for China's objective problems from Chinese realities importantly responds to "theoretical confidence." Therefore, building social psychological service systems to meet social needs does not set aside psychological theoretical research; rather, social psychological service system construction cannot do without psychology to

enrich theoretical perspectives.

On the other hand, psychological theoretical construction for social service systems does not mean recreating research ethics and thinking paradigms. Important theoretical perspective psychological research cannot do without universal psychological research achievements. Various resilience construction pathways show that drawing on Western management psychology research achievements, team resilience construction for adverse events involves changing physical states (biological factors) (Luthar et al., 2000), transforming attitudes (cognition, emotion, will) and behaviors, cultivating group collective identity, and constructing shared mental models. Community resilience construction for enhancing community capacity to resist adverse events and promote better development involves building physical environments, cultivating community attitudes and behaviors, fostering community identity through various activities, constructing community shared mental models, establishing management systems and policies serving community well-being, accumulating community resilience resources, and manifesting community resilience through continuous community interaction. Both levels require individual psychological resilience construction, as the above case demonstrates. This essentially illustrates the inseparability of theoretical research and social service system construction, showing that universal psychological theoretical perspectives plus theoretical research in Chinese characteristic contexts contribute to Chinese social service system construction.

4.2 Social Psychological Service System Construction Supports Psychology' s Applied Expansion Psychological resilience construction must place people at the core, achieving “deep understanding of people' s hearts” (Xin, 2018). Undoubtedly, as community resilience construction should aim to build “shared community mental models,” improving residents' community identity, promoting mutual trust and support, establishing harmonious interpersonal relationships, and filling communities with care and understanding form the foundation for “resolving small adverse events” and “jointly resisting large adverse events,” thereby creating psychological community communities rather than merely dispersed populations living in the same location. Psychology is thus an irreplaceable and unquestionable central role in social psychological service system construction. The content and pathways of social psychological service system construction certainly cannot do without psychological explanations and conceptual services. As Wang (2015) proposed, psychological construction is the methodology of social governance. Through psychological construction, we can promote development in social cognition, social emotion, social identity, and social psychological distance, thereby improving social governance levels. Therefore, we should introduce knowledge systems and latest research achievements from social psychology (social identity, interpersonal trust, sense of community, etc.) and management psychology (resilience, team resilience, shared mental models, etc.) into community institutions and management systems, applying psychological knowledge to community resilience construction.

However, implementing modern “governance” concepts, leveraging multiple subjects’ roles, and cultivating residents’ community identity and members’ consciousness requires more than psychology alone. As is now widely recognized, psychology is a hub science whose pivotality lies in its interdisciplinary and integrative nature. “Where there are people, there is psychology.” Yet all social service systems are applied in specific contexts with unique characteristics, whether enterprise management or public administration, interpersonal interaction or physical environment design. Psychology is essentially a component of this interdisciplinary integration rather than the integration itself. Psychology must combine with other disciplines to truly fulfill its social psychological service system role. The case demonstrates that team resilience construction without considering original residents’ team belonging faces complex role reconstruction, and community resilience construction without considering existing institutions and systems and their integration degree makes research difficult to conduct in current environments. Therefore, while psychology holds a central role in social psychological service system construction, this central role must combine with environmental, temporal, and existing specific situational factors to construct effective social service systems and truly serve their function. Social psychological service system construction thus supports psychology’s application and expansion.

4.3 Issues Requiring Attention in Constructing Full-Process Multi-Dimensional Social Psychological Service Systems Social psychological service system construction is an inevitable social demand arising at certain development stages, a social demand that can only be realized and satisfied when psychological theory and practice reach certain levels, and a mission that can only be accomplished when psychology and other disciplines achieve sufficient interdisciplinary integration. Given psychology’s relatively short history in China, developing social psychological service systems in China’s current stage requires not only psychological achievements’ application but, more importantly, strategic planning and exploration of service system construction pathways.

Psychological theoretical research is typically problem-guided and theory-driven, with research thinking usually exploring mechanisms between stimulus and response. However, social psychological service systems are reality-context-guided, requiring not only process explanations but more importantly pre-event and post-event measures. Moreover, real contexts mix different-level subjects, seeking unified intervention and management. This requires theoretical consideration of construction laws for different subjects on the same issue and their integrated construction pathways. Different subjects’ psychological resilience construction reveals pathway differences, yet social psychological service system construction requires both simultaneous different-pathway construction and synchronized construction rhythms across different subjects. As project-based management processes, synchronized construction rhythms are needed for phase-based management. Additionally, the interrelatedness of different subjects’ construction levels constitutes an important factor affecting construction effective-

ness. Therefore, theoretical and practical exploration of social psychological service system construction requires more consideration to build mutually inclusive yet independent construction systems.

Social psychological service system construction must consider not only psychology's unique role but also its mutual inclusiveness with other disciplines, applying psychological thinking and achievements to social management systems—the so-called combination of “psychological construction pathways” and “systemic management pathways.” Emphasizing either single pathway is unscientific. Focusing solely on psychological construction pathways prevents existing management and social service systems from accommodating psychological logic and integrating psychological achievements with existing frameworks. Focusing solely on systemic management pathways sees only systems without psychology, making social service system construction impossible. Therefore, social psychological service system construction requires opening psychology's thinking barriers, treating psychological research achievements about humans as universal knowledge and specific application contexts as domain-specific knowledge. Only their combination can truly construct social psychological service systems, requiring more psychological researchers to actively step out of their studies to integrate with concrete contexts and build social support systems.

Finally, social psychological service system construction ultimately requires people who understand psychology to complete. Therefore, widely disseminating psychological knowledge to other disciplines and fields constitutes an important construction pathway. Moreover, cultivating interdisciplinary talent combining psychology with other disciplines forms the foundation and prerequisite for constructing social psychological service systems. Without personnel reserves, open thinking, and scientific spirit to explore and develop psychology's integration with other disciplines, constructing social psychological service systems to serve current social needs remains a distant goal.

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