

PSY1053: Special Topics in Developmental Psychology (*"Risk and Resilience after Early Stress"*)

Class Summary: Sadly, millions of children in the United States and throughout the world are exposed to chronic and uncontrollable adversities, such as extreme poverty or child maltreatment. The aftereffects of early life stressors raise two important sets of questions for those in psychology and other allied disciplines. On one hand, adverse childhood experiences are related to compromised physical and mental functioning throughout development. However, and in contrast, individuals and communities exposed to these types of intense challenges often exhibit an amazing level of resiliency. This course will take an in-depth exploration of this dichotomy. First, students will learn about the experiences and factors that place families and children at risk, different research frameworks to understand these risks, and empirically-supported treatments to increase child and family competence. This course component will have a specific emphasis on understanding how stressful experiences may get integrated into individual's fundamental neurobiology (e.g., brain, physiology, epigenetics) and ultimately give rise to different developmental maladaptations. Next, students will discuss the individual and community assets that buffer against adversity. We will highlight ways that resilient qualities help an individual to thrive in the face of loss, trauma, or other adversities. We will then close the course by talking about local and national models of trauma informed care in medicine and community redevelopment. Across the course, we will continually return to bio-psycho-social models of development, thinking about interactions between the individual, family, community, and culture. Such information should provide a strong foundation for the argument that fostering greater psychological well-being, for all youth in our society regardless of their life circumstances, is a goal that we all should be striving towards.