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School–Family–Community Partnership for Building Community Resilience Through Safe Supportive Environments

INTRODUCTION: SYNERGY IN COOPERATION TO ENSURE COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Contemporary social transformations, crises, and emergencies highlight the importance of communities' ability to support their residents, mobilise internal resources and adapt to new challenges. In such circumstances, the community's ability to provide mutual support and create conditions for the safe development, social well-being and cohesion of its members takes on particular significance.

The consequences of crises and the destructive impact of war affect not only individuals, but also families, vulnerable population groups, and local communities as a whole. Alongside the physical destruction of community infrastructure, there is a disruption of established forms of social interaction, forced displacement of the population, the weakening of local communities, educational losses, the breakdown of social ties, and an increase in psychological strain. Young people are particularly sensitive to these processes; they are regarded both as one of the population groups most vulnerable to social upheaval and as a strategic resource for the future sustainable development of the community.

At the same time, the limitations of traditional social support mechanisms, which are primarily implemented within individual institutions, do not always ensure an adequate level of coordination and concerted action between educational institutions, families, social services, civil society organisations and local communities. This is precisely why the search for partnership models capable of ensuring the coordination of actions by various youth support actors and the integration of community resources is becoming particularly relevant.

In response to these challenges, the research project “Synergy of Interaction: Educational Institution and Community – A Space of Safety and Support”, funded by the Ukrainian state budget, is being implemented in 2026–2028. The project aims to provide a theoretical basis for, develop and test a “school-family-community” partnership model, focused on creating a safe and supportive environment and strengthening community resilience in the face of contemporary social challenges.

The research is interdisciplinary in nature and lies at the intersection of social work, social pedagogy, youth policy, youth work, and the theory of cross-sectoral partnership. The main focus is on examining how the interaction between educational institutions, families, social services, civil society organisations, and local communities can contribute to creating a safe and supportive environment for young people and strengthening the community's capacity to respond to crisis challenges.

This approach is of particular importance for building community resilience, as it shifts the focus from responding to the consequences of crises to creating the conditions for their prevention and joint resolution. In the context of social work, the development of partnerships between educational institutions, families, social services, civil society organisations, and local communities is of key importance. It is precisely through the coordination of their resources and efforts that a safe and supportive environment is created, which promotes social support, participation and the well-being of young people. Accordingly, youth resilience is viewed not merely as an individual's ability to adapt to crisis situations, but as the result of a community-created support system. In this context, the “school-family-community” partnership model is seen as a tool for strengthening community resilience and developing its capacity to respond to contemporary crisis challenges.

THEORETICAL BASE

Community resilience perspective

The project is based on an understanding of community resilience as a key prerequisite for ensuring the safety, well-being, and sustainable development of its residents, particularly in times of crisis and social upheaval.

In line with the approach of Norris et al. (2008), community resilience is viewed as a process of adaptation to crisis impacts, based on the development of the community's adaptive capacities, including economic development, social capital, information and communication, as well as community competence. Within this approach, adaptive capacities are viewed as a set of resources and capabilities that ensure the community's ability to respond effectively to crisis challenges and maintain an adequate level of functioning in the face of change. Of particular importance here is the community's ability to mobilise its own resources, maintain social ties, ensure effective communication, involve residents in joint decision-making, and organise a collective response to crisis challenges.

Building on the approach of Norris et al. (2008), the findings of the systematic review by Patel et al. (2017) revealed that there is no single, universally accepted definition of community resilience, but confirmed that there is a consensus regarding its key components. At the same time, nine key elements of community resilience were identified: Local Knowledge, Community Networks and Relationships, Communication, Health, Governance and Leadership, Resources, Economic Investment, Preparedness, and Mental Outlook. (Patel et al., 2017). Within these elements, interrelated characteristics have been identified that reflect social support, civic participation, trust, access to resources and services, adaptability, and the community's capacity for collective action (Patel et al., 2017). Of particular value to our study is the fact that most components of community resilience are linked not only to the availability of resources, but also to the nature of interactions between actors within the local environment. This allows us to interpret resilience as the result of coordinated efforts, the development of trust, partnerships, and the active participation of community members in addressing shared challenges. A synthesis of the findings of Norris et al. (2008) and Patel et al. (2017) enabled us to group the key elements of community resilience into four interrelated areas: coordination of activities, partnership communication, social support, and environmental safety. It is these areas that formed the basis for the development of the authors' four-component model of the "school-family-community" partnership, which includes organisational-coordination, communication-partnership, social-support and safety-environmental components. Within the scope of this study, community resilience is viewed as the result of coordinated interaction between educational, family, social and community actors, aimed at coordinating and mobilising resources to create a safe and supportive environment and to support youth development.

Within the socio-ecological approach, resilience is viewed not merely as an individual characteristic, but as the result of a person's interaction with their family, educational, community and institutional environments. Accordingly, young people's ability to cope with crisis situations to a large extent depends on the availability of support resources and the quality of their social environment (Ungar, 2011).

In this context, support for young people is seen as a shared responsibility of families, educational institutions, social services, civil society organisations, and the local community. A further development of this approach is the Whole Community Approach, which involves engaging all key community stakeholders in creating conditions for the safe development of children and young people, and in strengthening their resilience and well-being (Khanlou, Wray, 2014). This approach is consistent with current trends in the development of social work, which involve strengthening cross-sectoral collaboration, community development, and the mobilisation of local resources to address social issues. In the current context, social work combines social science theories, practical support models, and local community knowledge, aimed at improving the well-being of the population (Savelchuk et al., 2021).

The development of partnerships between various actors within the local community is an important mechanism for ensuring community resilience. Research by Kmack, Pellino and Fricke (2023) has shown that sustainable partnerships are formed through a combination of three interrelated components: trust-based relationships, effective leadership and joint action. The integration of these components ensures the partnership's ability to engage in long-term collaboration and achieve shared goals.

In this study, community resilience is interpreted as the collective capacity of local actors to pool resources, maintain social cohesion and coordinate joint actions in order to create a safe and supportive environment for young people as a strategic resource for the sustainable development of the community. Accordingly, partnership-based interaction between educational institutions, families, social services, civil society organisations, and other local stakeholders is regarded as a key mechanism for strengthening community resilience. It is precisely this understanding of community resilience and partnership-based interaction that underpins the author's "school-family-community" model.

SCHOOL-FAMILY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP MODEL FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Given the need to coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders involved in youth support, a "school-family-community" partnership model has been developed as part of the project. The model is based on the premise that a safe, supportive environment and community resilience are fostered through the coordinated interaction of educational, family, and social and community stakeholders. During its development, the findings of Norris et al. (2008), Patel et al. (2017) and Kmack et al. (2023) were taken into account, according to which resilience is achieved through the mobilisation of community resources, the development of partnerships, effective communication, leadership, and joint activities. Based on a synthesis of these approaches, four interrelated components of the model have been identified: organisational-coordination, communication-partnership, social-support, and safety-environmental. Collectively, they reflect the key directions for creating a safe and supportive environment for young people and strengthening community resilience. A conceptual representation of the model is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: School-Family-Community Partnership Model for Community Resilience



In line with the model's structure, four interrelated areas of community capacity development have been identified, reflecting the key conditions for ensuring the community's sustainability and creating a safe and supportive environment for young people:

- the organisational and coordination area, which involves developing mechanisms for joint planning of activities, coordination of actions, distribution of responsibilities, mobilisation of community resources, cross-sectoral cooperation, and response to crisis situations
- the communication and partnership area, focused on developing partnerships, open communication and trust among stakeholders, involving young people and parents in decision-making, and supporting civic engagement and social cohesion
- the social support strand, aimed at strengthening mechanisms for socio-educational support, psychological support, the social inclusion of young people, the organisation of assistance for vulnerable groups, and the development of support resources within the community
- the safety and environment strand, linked to the creation and maintenance of a physically, psychologically, socially and informationally safe environment, risk prevention, ensuring preparedness for crisis situations, and supporting young people's sense of safety and well-being.

The development of these areas is seen as a prerequisite for effective cooperation between partnership stakeholders and for creating a safe and supportive environment for young people. With the aim of strengthening the community's capacity, a capacity-building programme for partnership participants is being developed as part of the project. The programme is aimed at forming a shared vision of a safe and supportive environment, developing cross-sectoral cooperation, and strengthening the community's ability to respond to contemporary social challenges.

At the current stage of the project's implementation, the programme structure includes:

- a training module for teaching staff, aimed at developing skills to create a safe and supportive environment and to coordinate interaction with families and the community
- a training module for social workers and social sector professionals, focused on developing mechanisms for social support, inter-agency cooperation, and crisis response
- interactive events for parents, aimed at strengthening their involvement in supporting young people and developing partnerships with educational institutions
- participatory activities for young people, aimed at developing civic engagement, participation in decision-making and strengthening social cohesion
- tools for cross-sectoral cooperation at the community level, aimed at developing partnerships between educational institutions, social services, civil society organisations, and local authorities.

Thus, the capacity-building programme is aimed not only at raising awareness among participants in the partnership, but also at strengthening the community's capacity to coordinate resources, develop partnerships and create a safe and supportive environment for young people.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

During the first phase of the project, a theoretical analysis of approaches to building community resilience and a safe, supportive environment for young people was carried out; a four-component "school-family-community" partnership model was developed; areas for community capacity-building were identified; and a framework was drawn up for a capacity-building programme for participants in the partnership. A key outcome of this stage was the establishment of a conceptual link between partnership development, the creation of a safe and supportive environment, and the strengthening of community resilience in the face of contemporary crisis challenges.

To clarify the practical aspects of implementing the model, a survey was conducted among 35 specialists from five local communities in Ukraine affected by the conflict. A preliminary

analysis of the empirical data revealed a number of issues covering all identified components of the partnership model, including insufficient coordination between institutions providing support to young people, a need to strengthen psychological support mechanisms, limited parental involvement in community initiatives, and underdeveloped practices of cross-sectoral cooperation. At the same time, respondents noted a high level of readiness for partnership, the existence of strong informal community networks, and the growing role of educational institutions as local youth support centres. The results obtained are being used to refine the structure of the community capacity-building programme and to adapt the partnership model to the needs of different local communities.

At the current stage, the data obtained is being systematised, criteria and indicators for assessing the effectiveness of partnership interactions are being refined, and methodological materials are being prepared for further testing of the model. Particular attention is being paid to identifying mechanisms for cross-sectoral cooperation between educational institutions, families, social services, civil society organisations, and local authorities.

In 2027–2028, the plan is to finalise the development and pilot the capacity-building programme for partnership participants, evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed partnership model, and prepare practical recommendations for creating a safe and supportive environment for young people. The final results of the project will be presented in the form of academic publications, methodological materials, and recommendations for local communities.

Preliminary research findings indicate that the School–Family–Community Partnership Model meets the current needs of local communities in the areas of youth support, the development of cross-sectoral cooperation, and the creation of a safe and supportive environment. The results obtained will form the basis for further refinement of the community capacity-building programme and the testing of the partnership model in local communities during the subsequent stages of the project's implementation.

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