

Aaron Antonovsky's Concept of Salutogenesis is 45 Years Old

Koncepce salutogeneze Aarona Antonovského má 45 let

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Abstract:


The article presents a genealogy of the origin of the SOC concept and a brief reappraisal to the present. In the late 1970s, the health sciences adopted Antonovsky's model of salutogenesis and shifted to a positive, resource-based view of health. This paradigm shift, which enabled a shift from preventive medicine focused on pathogenic risk factors to protective factors, was also of great importance for the development and implementation of health promotion that continues to this day. The article presents the genealogy of the origin of the SOC concept (lecture and meeting with the staff of counseling centers for family and interpersonal relations) and his personal conversation, for which we were grateful to the chief physician Petr Boš in Prague on 7 August 1991 on the occasion of the European Congress "Mental Health in European Families"). Antonovsky, while walking through Prague, then recalled K. Čapek and his RUR, Golem, Universal Robots and commented on the recurring analogies to this day. Thus, the concept of salutogenesis has its "ideological" birth in Prague. Indeed, the concept of health promotion was fundamentally influenced by the salutogenic model of health. Today, the practice of addiction prevention is also based on strengthening protective factors at the biological, psychological and environmental levels. To date, however, Antonovsky's legacy in health promotion has still not been fully realized. Either because of lack of time, because it is difficult to overturn the dominant scientific paradigm within a generation, or because research funding is still, unfortunately, attributed to "pathogenesis" rather than "salutogenesis". The article also reports on the themes of the last SALUTOGENESIS conference on 3-5 May 2024 in Passau dedicated to practical topics such as salutogenic communication in schools salutogenic intervention etc.

Keywords:

Salutogenesis; pathogenesis; communication; family; values; health; illness

Abstrakt:

Článek představuje genealogii vzniku konceptu SOC a jeho stručné přehodnocení do současnosti. Koncem 70. let 20. století zdravotnické vědy přijaly Antonovského model salutogeneze a přešly na pozitivní, na zdrojích založený pohled na zdraví. Tato změna paradigmatu, která umožnila posun od preventivní medicíny zaměřené na patogenní rizikové faktory k ochranným faktorům, měla velký význam i pro rozvoj a realizaci podpory zdraví, která pokračuje dodnes. V článku je uvedena genealogie vzniku konceptu SOC (přednáška a setkání s pracovníky poraden pro rodinu a mezilidské vztahy) a jeho osobní rozhovor,

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za který jsme vděční vedoucímu lékaři Petru Bošovi v Praze 7. srpna 1991 u příležitosti evropského kongresu „Duševní zdraví v evropských rodinách“). Antonovský pak při procházce Prahou vzpomínal na K. Čapka a jeho RUR, Golema, Univerzální roboty a komentoval dodnes se opakující analogie. Koncept salutogeneze se tedy „ideologicky“ zrodil v Praze. Koncept podpory zdraví byl totiž zásadně ovlivněn salutogenním modelem zdraví. Dnes je praxe prevence závislostí založena také na posilování ochranných faktorů na úrovni biologické, psychologické a environmentální. Dodnes však Antonovského odkaz v oblasti podpory zdraví nebyl plně realizován. Buď z důvodu nedostatku času, nebo proto, že je obtížné převrátit dominantní vědecké paradigma během jedné generace, nebo proto, že financování výzkumu je bohužel stále přisuzováno spíše „patogenezi“ než „salutogenezi“. Článek rovněž informuje o tématech poslední konference SALUTOGENESIS ve dnech 3.–5. května 2024 v Pasově věnované praktickým tématům, jako je salutogenní komunikace ve školách salutogenní intervence atd.

Klíčová slova:

Salutogeneze; patologie; komunikace; rodina; hodnoty; zdraví; nemoc

About Concept of Salutogenesis

When A. Antonovsky walked in the summer of 1991 in the old Prague, to which he had a special relationship, strengthened by his origins, around the New Town Hall, he wondered that it was certainly not by mistake or ignorance of the person whose statue stands in the portal of the entrance, destroyed by the Nazis. It is a statue of Rabbi Yehuda Loew ben Bezalel Maharal, chief rabbi more than 400 years ago. Antonovsky recalled that the film about the Rebbe was a powerful emotional experience during his adolescence that stuck with him permanently. The word Golem appeared there, a figure, an undeveloped mass, or more accurately a formless mass. Rabbi Loew carved on his forehead the three Hebrew letters Aleph - Mem - Tav, expressing the word Truth. After the failure of the Golem, the rabbi realized that he had made a mistake and erased the letter Aleph and left Mem Tav, which means Death in Hebrew. His next inspiration was Capek's play "R.U.R", where mankind was to be freed from a biblical curse by the products of Rossum's Universal Robot Factory.

For Antonovsky the Golem and the R.U.R became two parallel tracks in his thinking: salutogenesis and systems theory towards the understanding that "... there are many cultural pathways to a strong sense of coherence" (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 94), according to Antonovsky this is the basic idea of what he called the salutogenetic model.

When he began to analyze the frequency of the occurrence of non-power, pathology in the singular, he realized that much more prevails than one might think. Antonovsky put it this way, "At any one time at least one-third and quite possibly a majority of the population in any modern industrial society is characterized by some morbid condition in any sense" (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 15).

His second knowledge came from a philosophical or historically conditioned area of thought. Looking at the physical microbiological and psychosocial world in terms of the ubiquitous pathogens with which human beings are confronted, the epidemiological data began to make sense.

The pathogenetic orientation is based on the axiom that homeostasis of non-illness is the normal state, deviation from such in quotes normality is what must be explained. Antonovsky realized that such deviations are almost self-evident given the nature of the world of the inevitability of death. Can we not then ask in his field: if the world is as it is, how come everyone has not gone mad, or if you have a philosophical mindset, how come everyone has not committed suicide? This question led Antonovsky to understand the rare, or even miraculous, phenomenon that there are people who do not collapse. This question was so extraordinary that there was no name for it at all. This led Antonovsky to coin the new concept of salutogenesis = the origin of health. This led to many consequences of adopting a salutogenetic orientation. Two of them are the most significant:

First, **when we think pathogenetically, we tend to dichotomize people: someone either has a disease or they don't.** But salutogenesis leads us to see health - disease - as a continuum. At any given moment, a person is situated in terms of their overall state of health, at a particular point on the continuum. Salutogenesis focuses on moving towards the pole of health.

Second - **pathogenesis examines "risk factors"**, a concept that is well known to all. We are even paying more and more attention to them, not only in psychology or pedagogy. But what does salutogenesis investigate? We don't even have a name, a term for the factors that promote movement toward health.

The human organism must be understood as a system that is constantly bombarded, both from the subsystem and from the suprasystem, by noise, entropic pressures. The general problem that stands at the heart of contemporary sciences is the problem that has been called Order originating from Chaos. Thus, for the first time, Antonovsky embodied the SOC formulation of the nuclear construct of the sense of coherence (SOC) model. As a generalized view of the world ranging from seeing the world as completely ordered to completely chaotic. The more one believes the world is orderly, the stronger one's SOC, the more adequately one can cope with even life's stressors, and thus should be healthier.

Antonovsky first defined them as a generalized worldview and related them to the belief that the world is organizable. However, in order to be able to manage well, one also needs to believe that the necessary resources are attainable. This component is called manageability. Finally, and most importantly, the motivational component of meaningfulness, the desire to get things done, gives motivation its power. This led Antonovsky to formulate the general hypothesis that the stronger a SOC is, the more able it will be to mobilize sources of negative entropy and deal successfully with all of life's stressors (Antonovsky, 1979, p. 23).

It is possible to distinguish three overlapping but distinguishable components.

The first is **intelligibility**, related to the belief that the world is **organizable**. One also needs to believe that the necessary resources are attainable for oneself. This component is called manageability. Finally, the third most pervasive component is the motivational component of **meaningfulness**, the desire to get things done, which provides motivational power.

But what are the implications of the salutogenetic construct and orientation for the health of the family system and for mental health? **We must not forget that the salutogenetic orientation originated in systems theory terms.**

The order and chaos of negentropy and entropy, information and noise, sub and sub-systems are key concepts. The focal point has always been the individual. But the literature on family systems shows that it is legitimate to think of the family as a system in which the sum of interacting parts forms a whole with its own energetic characteristics. Antonovsky recommended that it would be useful to apply salutogenetic, rather than traditional pathogenetic, thinking to family systems, and to individuals, in practice. **Suppose we stop classifying families as pathogenetic and healthy.** Instead, we should look at them as if they were at any point on a continuum between complete non-existent health and complete and non-existent pathology. **We should also look for and emphasize the strengths of the healthy elements that can be found in every family, rather than the weaknesses and pathological elements.**

But Antonovsky admitted that in his enthusiasm for the salutogenetic model, he never paid enough attention to the potential pitfalls. So Antonovsky began to look at the SOC of the individual and the health of the family system as well as mental health. **It is at this point that the Golem and the RUR return to the scene as inspiration.** The pathogenetic orientation of modern medicine has remained with the somatic diseases of the individual. Biological psychiatry fits into this scheme. Even the tradition of psychosomatic medicine, which makes room for psychological pathogens, does not create problems.

However, one value judgment and only one is pronounced: a judgment with which few would disagree: non-violence is desirable. Antonovsky was operating with a **Golem**, a shapeless, spiritless mass; the RUR (Rossom's Universal Robot), with adequate link capacity, would be able to contain even somatic diseases that would interfere with its physical functions. **The golem could also be programmed to reproduce itself. So when supplies are completely depleted, the next generation of Golems can be the continuation of the species. He's programmed to survive.** The energy supply for his survival has its source outside the Golem. So it requires an ecological niche. **From a pathogenetic point of view, the concept of a human being as a Golem promises a highly effective solution to the problem of disease - a frightening notion.**

It shows up in full horror when we consider mental health and the family system. We feel keenly how antithetical the Golem is to these concepts. **The Golem is a system whose relationship to other systems is technical - machine-like.** It seems to make no more sense, then, to talk about the mental health, or family, of the Golem than it does to talk about the mental health of a thermostat, or a family consisting of a boiler thermostat and a room temperature.

In other words: What is the core of the human being? What is at the core of the family system, as opposed to the Golem?

Antonovsky argues that at the deepest level, this means having the ability to ask moral questions. To make value judgments. Therefore, the pathogenetic orientation comfortably comes out with an engineering-mechanistic view of the human being as a Golem. Moral and philosophical problems are not inherent in this area of interest. But does the salutogenetic orientation force us to confront these questions? I am afraid not, Antonovsky argues. Therein lies its danger. **The salutogenetic orientation, like the pathogenetic orientation, defines health and disease in terms of functioning and survival.**

First, it's hard to compare: being a Golem is one way to a strong SOC. We can be evolutionarily programmed to consider health and survival as the highest values. Moral

and philosophical questions are meaningless. Relationships with other humans are technical. Antonovsky thus brilliantly anticipated current experiments with the technician perspective of transhumanism.

The cultural path to a strong SOC is to internalize the answers that God or tradition or community gives to moral philosophical questions, Antonovsky argues (Antonovsky, 1987).

If we are to ask who is likely to have the stronger SOC, Antonovsky fears that the answer will be in favour of the closed, stable world of his ancestors. Such a stable world in which everyone has and knows their place, where there are clear rules and traditions.

Antonovsky gives one clear strong example of a social structure that can form the basis of a strong SOC in society: the world of the Nazis. All Germans - men, women and children - had a clear place in this world: the family was firmly integrated into the Party community. And lives were given meaning by the ideals proclaimed by the leader. The threat to this integrated world was posed by many enemies, and above all by the Jews.

We can also find another path to a strong SOC - one that is based on overt or covert power: control, manipulation, exploitation and oppression from the level of the individual family to the level of the whole society. Rulers in families, groups, institutions and societies will often have a strong SOC because they are the ones who set the rules for everyone, control resources and accumulate wealth. **Their health is at the expense of the oppressed, but they themselves are healthy.**

He fears that, if we are honest, we must acknowledge that both the pathogenetic and salutogenetic orientations in their focus on biological health, and on functioning and survival, on homeostasis and incorporation into the ecological niche, **both must acknowledge the power of the Golem**, of fundamentalist religion, of patriarchy, of the ruling class, and of the Nazis to secure the basis of a strong SOC for some, not all. The health of the patriarch at the expense of women and children, the believer at the expense of the non-believer, the Nazi at the expense of those labeled subhuman. But they themselves are healthy.

To this Antonovsky adds **that our position must look at two problems which must be distinguished from each other. The first is the question of health, the second is the question of values - moral philosophical issues.**

Antonovsky recommends that we examine these two areas separately and suggests that SOC is a key answer to this question. And he advised all professionals who work with families to make a significant distinction in setting their goals between what might be good for the emotional health of the family and what you as human beings think is good. More importantly, all who work with families need to clarify what the family as a system thinks is good and what its individual subsystems think is good. The two are often at odds.

Salutogenetic orientation has one advantage over pathogenetic orientation. Because it goes beyond non-illness and leads us to focus on the positive pole of health and allows us to question which of our values are happily coincidentally good for the mental health of the family.

Antonovsky clearly lists RESPONSIBILITY as such a value, second SOLIDARITY and third DEVOTION.

Other areas that are increasingly popular, unfortunately, tend to favor values such as creativity, individual autonomy, narcissism, self-development or experimentation that

are good for health. It is necessary to decide! A. Antonovsky pointed out that we should not forget what he has always maintained, that **HEALTH IS NOT THE HIGHEST VALUE**.

Paradoxically, it is common even in professional publications dealing with concepts of health, salutogenesis, to distort Antonovsky's position, to pass in the sense of preferring concepts of health and to fundamentally neglect his fundamental opinion that the priority is not health, but the highest value for us must be the mentioned responsibility - solidarity and devotion. **It is therefore the ability to ask moral questions and form value judgements.**

Despite the time that has passed since the death of A. Antonovsky, meetings dedicated to this concept of health are still regularly held around the world. The last conference *SALUTOGENESIS* was held on May 3-5, 2024 in Passau and the theme of the meeting and the number of workshops presented different ways of applied theory of salutogenesis in the field of psychology, pedagogy, theology, sociology or medicine.

Focusing on methods that strengthen our sense of coherence can act as an anchor when we face the unexpected challenges of our time, because they make us stronger in a meaningful and natural way. Some workshops have focused on meditation (direct breathing / training the inner observer), relaxation with singing bowls in nature (regeneration / visioning), creative impulses (projects up to questions of how to "live your dreams"), principles of organization (daily structure and prioritization while maintaining flexibility), networking (counseling, self-help, specialists, circle of friends), reflection (training sensitivity / current position).

The topics discussed, "**Strengthening Immune System Resilience**" and "**Stress - My Cooperative Partner**" are topics of interest to corporate health management and are requested for keynote lectures or Health Day launches. It is an opportunity to approach salutogenesis, coherence and stress regulation with strong neuro-motivational systems and to clarify the links with resilience and stress regulation. Using "experiential lectures" must make the audience feel and act, thus opening new levels alongside thinking and making salutogenesis "tangible".

A new way of being together - How can we achieve salutogenic communication without fear? Children's talks - salutogenic support in school. Attentive educators sometimes notice children in everyday school life who show signs of psychological or somatic irritation. How can you help such a child? What measures are recommended and in what order? How can you find adequate support? The child discussion method provides an approach.

Another theme was the **integrative model of health care**. The health system needs a fundamentally salutogenic orientation in order to sustainably fulfil its diverse social tasks of health promotion, from primary to tertiary prevention, therapy and end-of-life care. Previous models such as the biopsychosocial model or the SAR system demand-resource model bring important aspects but do not fulfil these tasks. The integrative health model is consistently salutogenic. That is, it assumes that at the core of their lives, as well as in their healthy self-regulation, people strive for coherence within and in their external relationships. For healthy development, they should not only be responsive and resilient to stressful conditions, but most importantly, help shape their multidimensional environment in a "co-creative" way in order to lead a good life.

The core components of this integrative model of healthcare are:

A) a systems model of life dimensions in interactions with people,

B) a communicative self-regulatory model with central attractive information about coherence as an attractor and three basic skills for continuous recursive access to internal and external coherence; and

C) three basic motivations with neuro-motivational systems for a cooperative approach to coherence and wholeness.

The integrative model of health has practical implications for stimulating healthy and cooperative self-regulation in a variety of environments across the dimensions of life, for example, strengthening basic skills such as perception, action and learning, successful and mindful communication of needs, and co-creative, cooperative communication that is appropriate to the environment.

Salutogenic communication is recommended as part of teacher training.

Salutogenic approach and communication are very important in an educational context. Perspective teachers are obliged to accompany the children entrusted to them in their development so that they can develop a healthy life orientation and coherence.

Salutogenic interventions, (self-)hypnotic procedures to support healing processes. Internal or external conflicts, fears and massive constant stress, lack of exercise and poor nutrition - these are some of the factors that promote illness and hinder healing processes. If we want to create favourable conditions for healing processes, the first step is to replace such impairments with positive elements. The second step is then to carefully and respectfully influence the reactions of the body and the immune system, for example, in order to promote healing and increase the chances of recovery.

This workshop also gave a brief introduction to the language patterns of hypnosis and showed examples of how we can change emotions, behaviour and bodily reactions using hypnotic techniques (e.g. light trance exercises, fantasy journeys, metaphors).

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Salutogenese-Symposium am 03.-05. Weiterentwicklung der Salutogenese?! - Wo stehen wir?

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