International RESILIENCE Project
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The International Resilience Project

Introduction

THE INTERNATIONAL Resilience Project (IRP) uses different types of research methods to examine aspects of young people’s lives that help them cope with the many challenges they face. The project looks at how youth cope from the perspectives of youth and adults in participating communities around the world. The IRP now has partnerships with researchers and community-based organizations on six continents in over 25 communities. This report is based on work with youth and adults in eleven countries on five continents – the initial sites of the project.

Dr. Michael Ungar at Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada, founded the project in 2002. From 2003 to 2005, team members from around the world developed a quantitative measure to investigate aspects of resilience among youth in ways that account for both cultural and contextual differences. Qualitative tools and interview protocols were also developed to investigate children’s own accounts of their resilience and the meaning they, and their communities, give to resilience related phenomena.
The International Resilience Project Team

The International Resilience Project team is a diverse group of community and university based researchers, clinicians, policy makers, on-the-ground workers and child advocates from over 25 different communities around the globe. The IRP represents disciplinary and methodological diversity and cross-cultural expertise from the fields of social work, psychiatry, health statistics and measurement, psychology, medical anthropology, education, medicine, and epidemiology.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Michael Ungar, School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada

Project Manager: Dr. Linda Liebenberg, School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada

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• Dr. Wai-Man Kwong, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China
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• Father Jerry Thomas, Don Brosco Provincial Office, Guwahati, Assam, India
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• Dr. Nathalie Trepanier, Sociology and Anthropology, University of Montreal, Quebec, Canada

IRP team members and conference delegates gather at the Pathways to Resilience Conference, which was hosted by the IRP in Halifax, NS, Canada, in June 2005.
Collaborators:

- **Dr. Laura Abram**, Department of Social Welfare, UCLA School of Public Affairs, California, USA
- **Cindy Blackstock**, Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, Ontario, Canada
- **Dr. Marion Brown**, School of Social Work, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada
- **Burris and Louanne Devanney**, Nova Scotia-Gambia Association, Halifax, NS, Canada
- **Judi Fairholm**, Canada Red Cross
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- **Dr. Irene Salam Singh**, Head, Department of History, Manipur University, Imphal, India
- **Dr. Neerja Sharma**, Department of Child Development, Lady Irwin College, University of Dehi, New Dehi, India
- **Dr. Toine van Teeffelen**, Director, Arab Educational Institute, West Bank, Palestinian Occupied Territories
- **Dr. Wenxin Zhang**, Faculty of Education, Shandong Teacher’s University, Jinan, China

Consultants, Site Researchers and Research Associates:

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- **Andrea Gregus**, Speech Pathology, McGill University, Quebec, Canada
- **Danny Horesh**, Tel Aviv University, Israel
- **Babita Nambam**, Uripok Tourangbam Leikai, Manipur, India
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- **Dr. Barbara Broom**, Clinical Nurse Specialist, Child and adolescent mental health, IWK Health Center, Halifax, NS, Canada
- **Rasha Othman**, Pyalara, East-Jerusalem, Palestinian Occupied Territories
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- **Lyla Andrews**, Sheshatshui Innu Band Council, Sheshatshui, Labrador, Canada

Our Supporters:

- Dalhousie’s Department of Bioethics (Dr. Francoise Baylis)
- Canadian Red Cross, RespectEd Violence and Abuse Prevention Program (Judi Fairholm)
- The Child Welfare League of Canada (Peter Dudding)
- Senator Landon Pearson, Personal representative of the Prime Minister to the UN Special Session on Children
- Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Canada
- The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (Cindy Blackstock)
- The International Health Office, Faculty of Medicine, Dalhousie University
Canadian and International Community Stakeholders include:

**National:**

- **Nova Scotia, Canada:** IWK Health Center; CHOICES, Addiction Prevention and Treatment Services, Capital Health, Dartmouth; Nova Scotia Department of Community Services, Group homes; Soccer Nova Scotia; Metro Immigrant Services Association; YMCA Newcomer Youth Services; Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Project; Department of Bioethics, Dalhousie University.

- **Labrador, Canada:** Sheshatshiu Innu Band Council, Sheshatshiu, Labrador.

- **Manitoba, Canada:** Macdonald Youth Services; The Prairie Consortium for Child Welfare; Child and Family Services General Authority; First Nations of Northern Manitoba and Family Services Authority; Metis Child and Family Services Authority; Winnipeg Regional Health Authority; Winnipeg School Division.

- **British Columbia, Canada:** School District No. 39, District Learning Services, Vancouver.

- **Alberta, Canada:** Calgary Immigrant Aid Society; Wood’s Homes.

- **New Brunswick, Canada:** Learning Disabilities Association of New Brunswick.

- **North-West Territories:** Tlicho Community Services Agency.

- **Prince Edward Island, Canada:** Prince Edward Island Association for Community Living.

- **Quebec, Canada:** Commission Scolaire de Montréal; Commission scolaire de Laval; Service regional de soutien et d’expertise-TC Montréal, Saskatchewan, Canada: Children’s Advocate Office.

- **Ontario, Canada:** United Way of Greater Toronto, National: American and Canadian Academies of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; The Canadian Injury Prevention Association; The Sparrow Lake Alliance; The Child Welfare League of Canada; The Center of Excellence for Child Welfare; Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada; the Dellcrest Hincks Center; Resiliency Canada.

**International:**

- Don Bosco Youth and Educational Services, Imphal, India.
- Protect Children’s Rights Trust, Tanzania.
- PYALARA (Palestinian Youth Association for Leadership and Rights Activation), East Jerusalem and Gaza, Palestine.
- Centro Educativo Fe Y Alegria Santa Rita, Colombia.
- Institución Educativa Federico Sierra Arango, Colombia.
- Institución Educativa Antonio Derka, Colombia.
- The Boy’s and Girl’s Association of Hong Kong.
- Feidmeanacht na Seirbhís Sláinte, Ireland.

- The Social Shelter for Children and Adolescents Municipal Institution, Russia.
- The Na Snezhnoy Centre for Psychological and Pedagogical Rehabilitation and Correction, Russia.
- The Administration of Specialized General Education No.10 for children with deviant behavior, Russia.
- Masibambane Delft Youth Projects, South Africa.
- Muhimbili National Hospital, Tanzania.
- Muhimbili University College of Health Sciences, Tanzania.

**Our Funders:**

- Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation
- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
What is Resilience?

Resilience, as a psychological concept, was borrowed from the field of physics where it originally meant being able to “spring back” after being held down. Psychologically speaking, the term has come to mean an individual’s ability to overcome adversity, or difficult lives challenges, and continue his or her normal growth and development. The more comprehensive and progressive definition of resilience promoted by the IRP emphasizes both the individual’s role in nurturing and sustaining his or her well-being and the relational, social and cultural factors that must be available and accessible to individuals who face multiple risks.

Dr. Ungar has suggested that resilience is best understood as follows: Resilience is both an individual’s capacity to navigate to health resources and a condition of the individual’s family, community, and culture to provide these resources in culturally meaningful ways.

Members of the IRP further believe that resilience is related to four important, and ecologically nested, aspects of each individual’s life:

A. Individual traits that include:
- Assertiveness
- Ability to solve problems
- Self-efficacy
- Being able to live with uncertainty
- Self-awareness
- Perceived social support
- Positive outlook
- Empathy for others
- Having goals and aspirations
- Showing a balance between independence and dependence on others
- Appropriate use of, or abstinence from, substances like alcohol and drugs
- Sense of humor
- Sense of duty (to others or self, depending on the culture)

B. Relationship factors such as:
- Parenting that meets the child’s needs
- Appropriate emotional expression and parental monitoring within the family
- Social competence
- Presence of positive mentors and role models
- Meaningful relationships with others at school and home
- Perceived social support
- Peer group acceptance

C. Community contexts that provide:
- Opportunities for age-appropriate work
- Avoidance of exposure to violence in one’s family, community, and among peers
- Government provision for children’s safety, recreation, housing, and jobs when older
- Meaningful rights of passage with appropriate amounts of risk
- Tolerance of high-risk and problem behavior
- Safety and security
- Perceived social equity
- Access to school and education, information, and learning resources

D. Cultural factors such as:
- Affiliation with a religious organization
- Tolerance of differing ideologies and beliefs
- Adequate management of cultural dislocation and changes or shifts in values
- Self-betterment
- Having a life philosophy
- Cultural and/or spiritual identification
- Being culturally grounded by knowing where you come from and being part of a cultural tradition that is expressed through daily activities.

It is important to note that in this study culture is understood to be the customs, traditions, languages, and social interactions that provide identity conclusions for individuals and groups. Context, as different from culture, is understood to be the social, temporal, and geographic location in which culture is manifested.
Where is the IRP?

Data reported on in this document comes from the pilot phase of the study. Fourteen research sites participated in this first phase, with at least one research site on each of five continents. These sites included:

- Halifax, Canada
- Winnipeg, Canada (2 sites, One Aboriginal, one non-Aboriginal)(Note: Winnipeg and Halifax data has been combined to represent “Southern Canada”)
- Sheshatshiu, Labrador, Canada (“Northern Canada”)  
- Tampa, Florida, Southern USA  
- Medellin, Colombia
- Greater Banjul, The Gambia
- Moshi, Tanzania
- Delft, Cape Town, South Africa
- East Jerusalem and Gaza, Palestine
- Tel Aviv, Israel
- Imphal, India
- Hong Kong, China
- Moscow, Russia

Each participating research site was selected for the diversity it brings to understanding children and youth in high-risk environments. Each context poses its own risks for youth living there, including war, violence, poverty, cultural disintegration, structural inequalities and mental health challenges. The IRP purposefully chose to work with communities in “western,” or economically developed nations, and “non-western” communities, those in less economically developed countries, countries with economies in transition (such as Russia) and marginalized communities in western countries (such as Northern Aboriginal communities). The selected sites have enthusiastically embraced the project, and lent generously of their organizational support and time. Please find the contact details for all sites starting on page 24.
What are Our Goals and Methods?

Participants

The study included youth who were coping with adversity in different ways. Some were doing well, according to their communities, while others were not. For the purposes of administering the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), some sites purposefully stratified their sample into resilient and non-resilient groups. Other sites simply selected individuals who represented a range of different coping strategies, from socially acceptable to socially unacceptable. Understanding resilience in context made it difficult to make judgments as to which youth would be more resilient than others. Instead of making a priori assumptions, for the purposes of analysis all youth were included in one “at-risk” grouping. The goal was to examine, within and between sites, differences regarding aspects of resilience that were most relevant to youth in different contexts. Further analyses of the quantitative data, to be reported in future publications, will examine differences between youth specifically designated by their communities as resilient or non-resilient. All participants included in the qualitative aspects of the research met the criteria for significant exposure to adversity and were seen by their communities as coping well.

All participants had experienced at least three culturally significant risk factors, such as poverty, war, social dislocation, cultural disintegration or genocide, violence, marginalization, drug and alcohol addiction, family breakdown, mental illness of the child or parent, or early pregnancy. All were at an age that their communities characterized as the transition point between childhood and adulthood.

We also interviewed adults about how they survived and thrived, what makes it possible for someone in their community to maintain their well-being, and how they (as adults) define resilience. We included adults who had suffered adversity themselves, or who may have had something important to say about these issues given the role they play in their community. The ‘non-suffering’ adults were typically health and social service providers, educators, or child advocates.

The Child and Youth Resilience Measure

In order to take part in this research, all participating youth were asked to complete a questionnaire, the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM); some were also asked to participate in an interview where they could talk about their lives. Participating adults took part in focus group interviews where they could talk about their lives and how they understood the challenges facing youth in their communities.

The CYRM was developed by first asking team members from all 14 research sites to review literature and existing instruments on youth resilience. Team members then met in Halifax, in March 2003, to discuss what they had found, and to speak about their communities and the challenges confronting youth living there.

Based on this two-day meeting, a qualitative interview schedule was developed that team members could use to conduct focus group interviews with youth and adults in their respective communities. From these interviews, each site generated a list of questions that one should ask in order to understand what it takes to grow-up well in that community. These questions were then pulled together into a single list. After reconciling redundancies, and identifying commonalities, 58 questions were chosen for the initial version of the CYRM. The inclusion of non-western researchers, child advocates, and front-line practitioners in the design of the CYRM meant that it contained many items that have not been the focus of western-based resilience research to date (See Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005).

In addition to the 58 core questions that youth responded to in every site, the CYRM also included 15 site-specific questions of particular relevance to each community (findings from these questions are reported in the individual site summaries which accompany this document). Demographic questions also allowed for the gathering of background information on participants (e.g. age, level of education, and family structure). The 15 site-specific questions and the 58 standard questions on the CYRM used a “To what extent ...” format and a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire (1=Not at all, 2=A little, 3=Somewhat, 4=Quite a bit, 5=A lot). Sixty or more youth from each site completed the CYRM. At least two youth in each site were interviewed as part of the qualitative data collection.
The qualitative aspects of the study occurred at the same time as the quantitative aspects. In each site, youth were interviewed by a local researcher. Nine “catalyst” questions were developed for the interviews. The order and emphasis of the interview questions changed depending on characteristics of the youth and the context in which the interviews took place (the child’s culture, the setting for the interview, time constraints). These nine catalyst questions included:

1. What would I need to know to grow up well here?
2. How do you describe people who grow up well here despite the many problems they face?
3. What does it mean to you, to your family, and to your community when bad things happen?
4. What kinds of things are most challenging for you growing up here?
5. What do you do when you face difficulties in your life?
6. What does being healthy mean to you and others in your family and community?
7. What do you do, and others you know do, to keep healthy, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually?
8. Can you share with me a story about another child who grew up well in this community despite facing many challenges?
9. Can you share a story about how you have managed to overcome challenges you face personally, in your family, or outside your home in your community?

The Youth That Participated

While 14 sites participated in the pilot research, this report presents the results from 12 specific populations. Problems collecting sufficiently large sample groups in the Winnipeg sites, and similarities between the sites in Winnipeg and Halifax, resulted in data from three sites being pooled for the purposes of analysis. A breakdown by site, and gender, of the youth who participated in the quantitative aspects of the research is included in Table 1.

Eighty-nine youth, ranging in age from 13 to 23 years, participated in the qualitative component of this study. (See Table 1) All of these youth were considered by their communities to be “coping well with adversity.” Sites contributed as few as two, and as many as twenty-four, participants depending on the resources available to carry out the research. In total, thirty-one boys and fifty-eight girls participated in this part of the research. Adults in each community, identified as having something important to say about resilience (spiritual leaders, health care professionals, parents, etc), were also interviewed. Thirteen adults were interviewed individually and many more were included in five focus-group interviews. Various adults also offered commentary as part of Advisory Committee meetings. Detailed notes made during site visits, by members of the research teams, were also included as part of the data collection.

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**Table 1: Youth Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Male Participants</th>
<th>Female Participants</th>
<th>Qualitative Participants</th>
<th>Mean age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Canada*</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Canada**</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern USA</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1451</td>
<td>694</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sheshatshiu
** Halifax and Winnipeg
Findings from the Quantitative Data

Education Level

Looking at the overall levels of education among the total sample, most youth had completed a level of education equal to grades 7 to 9 or grades 10 to 12, with very few either not reaching this level of education or transitioning into post-secondary studies. Table 2 shows the highest level of education attained by all participants who completed the CYRM.

Who Participants Live With?

When participants were asked whom they lived with there was a wide range of responses. To adequately capture these responses, answers were dichotomized and entered in categories as either “yes” or “no.” Looking at the sample population in this study, most of the youth resided with their mother (74.1%) and/or father (61.9%) and/or at least two or more siblings (37.6%). It is important to note that only 1199 participants answered this question.

Mean scores on CYRM

The average score for data gathered using the CYRM, for all youth in all sites, was 3.4 out of a possible 5. Boys scored an average of 3.4 and girls’ average score was 3.5. This difference is statistically significant (p<0.05). Furthermore, several sites scored above average among all their participants. These sites included: The Gambia, Southern USA, South Africa, Russia, India, and Southern Canada. Israel, Tanzania, Colombia, and China all scored the average 3.4. Northern Canada was below the average with a score of 2.8. Table 4 presents the average score of the youth at each site.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Educational Level of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=1357</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Who participants live with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who Participant Lives With</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than one sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One sibling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a residential home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some step-family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their child(ren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a boarding school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adoptive parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Mean scores on the CYRM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Canada**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Canada*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**How Youth Scored**

Given that the aim of the CYRM was to measure how well youth were coping with adversity, it made sense to compare youth who scored higher on the measure with those that scored lower. This would allow identification of patterns and resources in the lives of youth that appeared pertinent to their ability to successfully negotiate healthy outcomes within their own unique contexts. In order to compare two groups of youth, the average score of all participants (195 out of a total possible score of 290) on the CYRM was used as a point of reference. Stated differently, youth who scored on or above the average score for all youth were compared with those youth who scored below the average.

A total of 925 youth’s scores were equal to, or above, the average score of 195; 523 scored below 195. The average age of both these groups was 16 years (equal to the overall sample). When looking at gender, 55% of the higher scoring group was female and 45% were male. This difference is not statistically significant. A higher percentage of females was expected in this population, as females scored higher overall on the CYRM. In the group that scored below the average, 53% were male and 47% were female. Again, this difference is not statistically significant given that females scored higher overall on the CYRM.

As in the study itself, the majority of participants whose score was equal to or above the average score were from China (20%), Israel (20%), and the Southern United States (9.6%). Similarly, the participants who most often scored below the average score were also from China (30.3%) and Israel (11.8%). Most significantly, however, it was Northern Canadian youth who were the most over-represented in the group that scored below the average. While Northern Canadian Aboriginal youth represented only 1.5% of all the high scoring youth, they made up 8.8% of the lower scoring group. For a specific breakdown of how participants scored according to age, gender, and country of origin see Table 5.

The living arrangements of participants who scored on or above the average score of the total group again reflected those of the total sample population. The majority resided with their mother (74.7%) and/or father (62%) and/or more than one sibling (35.8%). Participants who scored below the average were also similar to the overall group; most lived with their mother (73%) and/or father (61.8%) and/or more than one sibling (40.1%).

Specific percentages regarding living arrangements are listed in Table 6. When looking at these percentages each category should be considered separately. This means that if a participant indicated that she/he lived with his or her mother that does not mean that she/he does not also live with other family members. Furthermore, responses were individually coded so a person who indicated that they live with their mother, father, and sibling would have their response captured in each category. Finally, this information was not captured for the Israel site and therefore the data does not include those participants.

The education level of those with scores on or above the average again resembled that of the overall population. Most youth achieved an education level of at least grade 7 (25.1%). A higher number of these participants completed grade 12 than in the overall sample (14.0% vs. 12.6%).

For those participants who scored below the average, the highest level of education was grade 7 (38.0%). The important difference here was that those youth who scored below the average on the CYRM as a group had a lower level of education. Fewer youth in this group achieved grades 10, 11, or 12. Specific percentages regarding the highest level of education attained at the time of the study for these two groups are presented in Table 7.
Understanding the Quantitative Data: The Ecological Model

As stated in the introduction, the members of the IRP believe that resilience is related to individual, relational, community, and cultural factors in youth’s lives. These four aspects together create an Ecological Model and offer a framework from which to consider resilience in youth. The process of determining if the CYRM was a reliable and valid means of studying youth resilience also confirmed that this model was a reliable theory to apply to a cross-cultural, contextualized understanding of resilience.

When first looking at data gathered through the CYRM, the IRP’s ecological model was used to understand how youth negotiate and deal with the challenges they face. Calculating statistical values (called Cronbach’s alphas) for questions associated with each level of the model determined that each of the four components are important to youth in their attempts to deal with the challenges they face. Table 8 presents the results of this analysis, as well as how questions on the CYRM were grouped according to the four categories.

When looking at the overall results, based on the ecological model, youth in general scored highest on questions relating to community factors (with the exception of Tanzania and South Africa). These findings suggest that youth at all sites (except those two) did rely on resources in the community to navigate their way to health. Youth in general also scored lowest on cultural questions, which was different than what was expected – especially when looking at sites that were perceived as having heavy cultural affiliations such as Northern Canada and Hong Kong. Researchers expected to see higher scores associated with cultural or spiritual identity, but this was not the case for any of the sites. Site-specific results can be seen in Table 9.

When looking at standardized scores for the total sample of participants, the average score for boys was 3.4; for girls the average score was 3.5. This small difference is statistically significant (p<0.05). Girls scored higher than boys on questions relating to relationships (3.5 vs. 3.3) including exploring issues of emotional expression, social competence, and meaningful relationships. They also scored higher on questions relating to community aspects of resilience (3.6 vs. 3.5), which included aspects of resilience related to employment skills development, personal safety, and social justice. While one might expect girls to score higher on relationship questions (which examined the extent to which individuals felt able to express emotions, perform in socially competent ways, have mentors and role models, and sustain meaningful relationships), researchers did not expect that girls would also score higher on community questions which related to perceived equity, safety, age appropriate work, and rights of passage.

Boys did score higher than girls on cultural questions (3.6 vs. 3.3) capturing themes relating to spiritual or cultural identity, meaning in life, and self-betterment. Boys and girls scored equally on questions related to individual aspects of resilience (3.4). These questions explored assertiveness, problem solving abilities, self-awareness, dealing with uncertainty, and having goals and aspirations. It was originally hypothesized that boys would score higher on the individually focused measures, as they tend to represent more stereotypically masculine characteristics (See Table 10).

### Table 8: Cronbach’s Alpha Values for the Ecologically Nested Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CYRM question</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>.6553</td>
<td>.7939</td>
<td>.7134</td>
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<td>.6444</td>
<td>.7936</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.6176</td>
<td>.7801</td>
<td>5 .7053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>.6357</td>
<td>.7847</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>.6177</td>
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<td>.6076</td>
<td>.7844</td>
<td>19 .6925</td>
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<td>.8387</td>
<td>.5806</td>
<td>.7843</td>
<td>24 .6815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>.8367</td>
<td>.6275</td>
<td>.7774</td>
<td>25 .6794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>.8380</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.7797</td>
<td>52 .6799</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>.7724</td>
<td>53 .6873</td>
</tr>
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<td>.7786</td>
<td>55 .7132</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>.7740</td>
<td>57 .7089</td>
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<td>.7750</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>.8376</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>.7892</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>.8365</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>.7830</td>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>.8356</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>.8516</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9: Site Scores on the Ecological Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern USA</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Canada**</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colomba</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Canada*</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Sample</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sheshatshui
** Halifax and Winnipeg

### Table 10: Gender and the CYRM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>CYRM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (n=694)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (n=754)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exploring the ecological model further, the average score of the total group was again used as a point of comparison. As with previous analysis of this data, participants that scored above the average for the total group on the CRYM also scored higher than the total population across each of the four aspects of individual, relationship, community, and culture. This group scored an average of 3.5 on the individual questions, whereas the average for the total sample was 3.4; they scored an average of 3.6 compared to 3.4 on questions relating to relationship; 3.8 compared to 3.6 on community related questions; and 3.6 compared to 3.3 on cultural questions.

Youth with lower than average overall scores also scored lower on each of the four components of the ecological model: 3.1 on individual, 2.9 on relationships, 3.2 on community, and 3.0 on culture. The biggest discrepancy was on community scores, with less resilient youth scoring 3.0 while the total group average was 3.6 (See Table 11). The differences between the higher scoring and lower scoring groups are statistically significant (p<0.05).

Although this information offers some insight into the youth that participated and how they were coping with the adversities they faced, it does not really say anything about how youth actually managed to deal with these adversities. Analysis of the entire data set provided a broader understanding of this. It is important to realize however, that this is a generalized understanding. Small sample sizes at each site limit just how far site-specific analysis can be taken at this stage. What follows does, however, offer a platform from which to move forward in the next phase of the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11: Scores According to the Ecological Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culture</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CRYM Overall</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My mom has always worried about me and she becomes sad for my problems.  
— Colombian boy

Graph Two: Ecological Model Group Comparisons
Four Ways to Group the Youth

Using a process called exploratory factor analysis, researchers were able to determine that participating youth interpreted, or understood, the 58 CYRM questions in four different ways.\(^1\) The first of these groups included youth in western world contexts (Halifax and Winnipeg in Canada, and Tampa in the United States). The second group included all girls in non-western (or majority world) sites (Sheshatshui, Northern Canada; Medellín, Colombia; Greater Banjul, The Gambia; Njoro, Tanzania; Delft, Cape Town, South Africa; East Jerusalem and Gaza, Palestine; Tel Aviv, Israel; Imphal, India; Moscow, Russia; and Hong Kong, China). These girls showed remarkable similarity in their responses to CYRM questions. Boys from non-western sites formed the last two groups, based on the degree of social-cohesion in their communities. Socially cohesive communities were defined as communities that shared a common purpose or were united by a philosophy of inclusion and mutual betterment. Boys in non-western societies with high social-cohesion included those in Palestine, Russia, China, The Gambia, India, Israel, and Tanzania. Boys in low social-cohesion settings included those in Colombia, South Africa, and Sheshatshui in Northern Canada. Table 12 presents a breakdown of these four groups and how participants scored according to the ecological model.

### Table 12: Average CYRM Scores for 4 Groups of Youth (Ecological Model)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group One: Western youth</th>
<th>Ecological model</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Average CYRM score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southern Canada</td>
<td></td>
<td>124</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern USA</td>
<td></td>
<td>110</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>234</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Two: Non-western youth/girls</th>
<th>Ecological model</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Average CYRM score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>155</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>India</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>3.04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
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<td>3.89</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Canada</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>3.02</td>
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<tr>
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<td>41</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.57</td>
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<td>3.70</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>3.12</td>
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<td>3.62</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.58</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Three: Non-western youth/ boys, high social-cohesion</th>
<th>Ecological model</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Average CYRM score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.66</td>
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<td>3.71</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>3.54</td>
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<tr>
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<td>81</td>
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<td>2.97</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.55</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.61</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
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<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.51</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.61</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>513</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.53</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Four: Non-western youth/ boys, low social-cohesion</th>
<th>Ecological model</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Average CYRM score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.38</td>
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<td>2.10</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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I’m learning a lot to just accept the idea that everything is neutral and that there is no good or bad; it’s just each individual perspective of the matter.

—Halifax girl
This table illustrates that although all youth scored highest on the community dimension, they scored quite differently within the groups into which they fell and within the various dimensions of the ecological model. Table 13 explores these differences. The table is grouped according to the four groupings of youth and how their responses compared across the four dimensions of the ecological model. Highlighted cells containing an asterisk (*) indicate which differences are statistically significant and therefore more meaningful.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Western boys and girls</strong></td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-western girls</td>
<td>2.92*</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.53*</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-western boys, high social-cohesion</td>
<td>2.94*</td>
<td>3.20*</td>
<td>3.54*</td>
<td>3.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-western boys, low social-cohesion</td>
<td>2.65*</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Western boys and girls scored highest on the community dimension of the ecological model. Their scores, on both this and the individual dimension, have a meaningful difference from the other three groups of youth. This pattern was similar for girls living in non-western communities and boys living in non-western communities that also had high levels of social cohesion. Although both these groups also scored highest on the community dimension, and demonstrated a statistically significant difference in how they scored (on this and the individual dimension) compared to the scores of western boys and girls and boys living in non-western communities with low levels of social cohesion, there was no meaningful difference in the scores of the two groups themselves.

Meaningful similarities were seen in how girls living in non-western communities and boys living in non-western communities with high levels of social cohesion answered and scored on the CYRM. These differences did not correlate within either of the other groups. Furthermore, boys living in non-western communities with low social cohesion demonstrated the most meaningful difference in their scores compared to all three of the other groups (except in the relationship dimension). All groups showed the most variation on the relationship and culture dimensions of the ecological model.

Within each of these four groups of youth, participants grouped the 58 questions into categories that helped researchers understand how they resolved the challenges they face. CYRM questions grouped into each of these categories in ways that highlighted various theoretical themes related to resilience literature and analyses of the qualitative data (See Table 14). Aspects of the qualitative data and its analysis are discussed in the following section.

The manner in which youth formed these four different groups, each with their own pattern of response to the 58 CYRM questions, demonstrates the heterogeneity, or the diversity, with which resilience is understood in different cultures and contexts. How questions group and the numerical values associated with those groupings when conducting a factor analysis of the data demonstrates the degree of relevance of the questions to different groups of youth, as well as the influence of each set of resilience related aspects in the lives of these participants. In this regard, the study demonstrates that although global aspects of resilience can be identified, culturally diverse groups of youth show unique patterns in how resilience is understood and manifested. It can also be speculated that the youth who completed the CYRM interpreted items based on their context and culture; suggesting that how resilience is measured must account for the diversity of how health is seen globally. Given this finding, it is believed that resilience needs to be better understood as both a culturally/contextually embedded construct and one that shares commonalities in different groups globally. By implication, how youth demonstrate their resilience will be culturally distinct but will also share some global aspects.

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It all just boils down to one old thing. It’s just the poverty. [After my son failed in school, he said:] ‘Ma it’s because sometimes I sit in school and I think when I come home there’s no bread to eat.’ You know, that tore me apart.

—South African mother talking about her son’s lack of success in school

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Table 14: Thematic Content of Each Factor by Factor Structure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Western girls and boys</th>
<th>Non-western girls</th>
<th>Non-western boys, high social-cohesion</th>
<th>Non-western boys, low social-cohesion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The way I live my life reflects the values of my community (.86)</td>
<td>I experience self-efficacy individually and in community relationships (.82)</td>
<td>I have a respected place in my community (.77)</td>
<td>My health and social needs get met (.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My future is mine to create alone and with the help of others (.84)</td>
<td>Solutions to life’s challenges are rooted in relationships (.72)</td>
<td>I experience self-efficacy (.75)</td>
<td>I am confident (.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am socially mature (.80)</td>
<td>I have my emotional and instrumental needs met (.77)</td>
<td>I have emotional maturity (.56)</td>
<td>I can express myself in ways I value and others value about me (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do things adults do (.78)</td>
<td>My life philosophy is rooted in my culture (.75)</td>
<td>I feel responsible for my community (.61)</td>
<td>I have a life-philosophy (.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I experience intergenerational respect (.79)</td>
<td>I experience intergenerational expectations (.70)</td>
<td>I live my spirituality (.61)</td>
<td>I am attached to my local culture (.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have values that guide my life, reflecting the social institutions around me (.68)</td>
<td>I show adherence to my local culture (.63)</td>
<td>I am socially competent (.55)</td>
<td>I am responsible for myself and others (.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I experience social acceptance of my peers (.52)</td>
<td>I balance dependence and independence with my family (.56)</td>
<td>I behave like an adult (.43)</td>
<td>I have cultural and familial roots (.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have a life philosophy (.48)</td>
<td>My community functions well (.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I have self-worth (-.23)</td>
<td>I am emotionally mature (.35)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* With Cronbach’s alpha

Understanding the Qualitative Data

Working across so many cultures simultaneously created a rich space in which to explore the term resilience. From the very beginning, all involved agreed that finding one expression of what resilience looks like in youth would probably not be possible. Team members also realized that this study relates only to this sample of youth and to this point in time. The data gathered, however, does suggest seven tensions that youth negotiate in order to thrive in spite of their environments (See Table 15). Each participant’s story offers context-specific illustrations of these tensions. Though the tensions themselves were found in every culture involved in this study, each tension had a different amount of influence on the stories told by those who participated.

Table 15: The Seven Tensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tension</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Access to material resources</td>
<td>Availability of financial, educational, medical and employment assistance and/or opportunities, as well as access to food, clothing, and shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Relationships</td>
<td>Relationships with significant others, peers, and adults within one’s family and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Identity</td>
<td>Personal and collective sense of purpose, self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, beliefs and values, including spiritual and religious identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Power and control</td>
<td>Experiences of caring for oneself and others; the ability to affect change in one’s social and physical environment in order to access health resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Cultural adherence</td>
<td>Adherence to one’s local and/or global cultural practices, values, and beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Social justice</td>
<td>Experiences related to finding a meaningful role in community and social equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Cohesion</td>
<td>Balancing one’s personal interests with a sense of responsibility to the greater good; feeling a part of something larger than oneself socially and spiritually</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings show that youth who experienced themselves as resilient and were seen by their communities as resilient were those who successfully worked their way through these tensions (each in her/his own way, and according to the strengths and resources available to the individual within her/his family, community, and culture). It is the fit between temporary solutions youth try and how these solutions address the challenges posed by each tension, within the norms of each community, which contributes to a young person’s experience of resilience. The study provides no evidence that one way of resolving these tensions is better than another. There was no causality or linearity (meaning each youth, or adult, whose words were captured during the study, spoke of the unique ways in which they had succeeded when faced with adversity). From this, resilience can be understood as a way of life, whereby each person finds the best way to resolve the tensions she/he experiences. Seen in this light, there is no means of evaluating positive outcomes despite adversity; it is up to the person to decide whether his/her life, at this point, is being lived
in a manner that best resolves these tensions. At the same time, the tensions are dynamic, connecting in
different ways across time (meaning that how youth resolve these tensions will look different across time as
well). The person’s perception of the tensions, and of their resolution, is therefore influenced by culture, by
his/her appraisal of the adversity she/he faces, and by the feedback from the surrounding context within
which she/he resides.

Presented below are brief discussions of each tension. It is important to understand that even though
the seven tensions are discussed separately, this is done for the sake of clarity. In reality these tensions are
connected and impact each other to varying degrees. Culture, context, and the individual also impact the
tensions and researchers hope to learn how they collectively infiltrate the lives of young people living as far
apart as Russia, South Africa, Hong Kong, and Florida. Examples of how a youth’s complete life story can
be understood, using the seven tensions, follow the explanation of the tensions.

**Seven Tensions**

**Access to Material Resources**

Access to material resources can be understood as the availability of structural provisions, including financial
assistance and education, as well as basic instrumental needs (e.g. food, shelter, clothing, access to medical
care, and employment). Getting one’s instrumental needs met generally requires at least two things:

1. That the material resources required for survival actually exist, are available, and can be accessed.
2. That the individual, within the family context, has the personal resources to activate this availability
and accessibility.

Perception of what is, and is not, a “need,” however, is very different in different contexts, and influences how
participants experience whether their needs are being met or not. The following are examples of how the youth
in this study understood their needs for material resources, and negotiated for them when required.

A Russian boy said,

“I doubt it seriously that one can achieve anything without finances in Russia…It’s clear how all of my friends
were matriculated—not without their parent’s and grandparent’s support. And I’m no exception here.”

A Tanzanian girl, referring to the lack of instrumental support from her father, told researchers,

“He was not serious with my studies, like buying for me the
exercise books, or school uniform.”

A South African adult, commenting on her son’s lack of success at school, said,

“...it all just boils down to one old thing. It’s just the poverty. Really, it’s just poverty because I can
tell you from my own personal experience it’s not an easy thing to be poor. So poor that you don’t
even have a job. It’s not easy. Because I’ve got a son… he failed matric [his studies]. He was so
despondent. He was almost like a weakling….He would just tell me, ‘Ma it’s because sometimes I sit
in school and I think when I come home there’s no bread to eat.’ You know, that tore me apart.”

**Relationships**

Young people around the world seemed to use relationships to figure out and access what they needed
in order to cope with their surroundings. These relationships could be with family members, peers, adults
in the community, teachers, mentors, role models, intimate partners, and/or enemies. Many times it was
these relationships that youth who participated in this study remembered when they addressed their
ways of facing challenges in their lives. Sometimes emotional support was found through relationships,
addressing needs for comfort, trust, a sense of belonging, love, care, and compassion.

A Colombian boy told interviewers, about his relationship with his mother,

“My mom tells me that when I was a boy, she remained always with me. I slept with
her and I cried when she did not come back from her friend's house. My mom has
always worried about me and she becomes sad for my problems.”

A girl in Florida spoke about the emotional support she feels when she shares her concerns with others,

“I let a lot of things build up sometimes and when I talk to someone, I just kind of let everything
out and that helps me relieve a lot of stress. I sometimes talk to my mom, or I talk to my sister,
or my boyfriend, or something like that. Somebody I feel close to and I can trust.”

**Identity**

In this study, sense of individual identity was seen in statements such as “I am…,” “I believe…,” “I feel…,”
and can be understood as attempts by youth to find a place from which they can experience a ‘flow’ in their
lives. Centered on experiences and conceptions of “I,” this tension varied widely across cultures. Identity
was more easily recognized, and spoken about, in contexts influenced by western ideals of individualism
and competition. It seemed to be less relevant in cultures where collective identity was more important
than a focus on the individual.
A young Indian woman said,

“I am quite independent. I look for emotional support from people when I am unhappy. I know that I cannot depend on anyone financially, so I try to make my ends meet with whatever money I earn.”

The same themes echoed in the words of a Halifax girl, who said,

“Independent just doesn’t mean that you get it for yourself. Independent means that if you need something, you ask, kind of thing. You ask for help. That’s independent, being responsible.”

These narrative elements combined provided a way of understanding the young person’s personal compass when navigating life’s challenges. A South African girl, wrestling with this problem of both fitting in and being proud of her uniqueness, said,

“I often stand-up for myself because if you don’t stand-up for yourself then you actually don’t mean anything, because you allow other people to rule your life and so, you do it... That’s why you must stand up for yourself to show that you are a person and that you are in control of your life.”

Similarly, a girl from Florida said,

“I just need to focus on whatever I want. If I can focus on what I want I can do it. Because there is nothing to stop me. I got this far, right, by focusing on what I wanted, so if I just focus I get whatever.”

In contrast, the Palestinian youth who participated spoke of identity without any reference to the “I,” and always in concert with the collective movement for independence from Israel. Self-efficacy was measured in terms of contribution toward that collective goal, and identity as an individual appeared to be irrelevant.

Cohesion

How one’s sense of responsibility to self, duty to one’s broader community, and the greater good intersect and are dealt with by youth, is captured under the concept of cohesion. This tension is neither about “self” nor “other.” It addresses how youth engage with their communities and families, according to cultural and community expectations and their place within that community. It encompasses an orientation to group life that is bigger than the “I” and yet includes the “I.”

It was exemplified through a young Tanzanian woman who said,

“My way forward is to be engaged in an income generating activity and stop dependency on my mother. Through this philosophy I can instead take care of my mother and my juniors.”

An adult in Halifax noted the role of the church in contributing to a sense of connection within his community,

“When I grew up the game was that you grow up in your neighbourhood and went to school, played, and went to the same church. Parents knew each other and there was respect. But then when you went to one of the two high schools then you were up against a different situation and people from the south end were the party types and on student’s council and it was hard to break into the social circles. So, the church had a lot of activities and helped to keep things in balance and the family unit was a lot stronger.”

Power and Control

Power and control refers to a persons own capabilities and the resources surrounding that person that enable her/him to experience material and/or discursive power in terms that are meaningful to her/his context. These aspects demonstrate a person’s perceptions of her/his capacity to influence the world around her/him.

For example, a Tanzanian teenaged mother said,

“I was married [to] one gentleman and after a week of my marriage I went to take care of my sick grandmother living in Machame. We were living in Majengo. When I returned to my marital home, I noticed that some of my dresses in my bag and my picture missing. When I asked my husband where these things were, he claimed to not know. I was told by others that while I was away, there was another woman living with my husband. I thought if the marriage has not even lasted for one week and it is already marred, there was no need to continue with the marriage so I returned home.”

A young Russian man said about going to university,

“I am here because I’ve been working towards it for many years. And it takes me a long time. I guess I made it thanks to my persistence, tenacity, concentration, or perhaps my stubbornness.”

Similarly, a young man from South Africa wove together themes of identity with access to material resources and power and control when he said,

“I did not want to change my life. My sisters and family looked at me as just another... child in the house. But look that I now stand in front of you with a complete mind, with a sober mind. I know what it is to grow up, what it is to be a teenager; I see the picture in a complete thing. I see them now... they will always have great respect for me. And the community as well. People never thought that I could do it. People never knew. They never knew what I was capable of doing. I did not know myself either. I am today what I am. And I am proud of myself. Why? Because I can work – and in Delft to do such things is not for everyone. So, my people never saw what I was capable of doing, understand. Today they can see that there is a light shining in me.”
Cultural Adherence

Adherence, or opposition to global culture, was either a barrier or pathway to resilience, depending on the link between this tension and others. For example, Adults in The Gambia worried that youth were too quick to endorse “all things western.” Meanwhile, a young Indian woman said that global culture could either be accepted or rejected, but not ignored...

“Whatever is shown on TV is for everyone to watch. It depends on whether you want to take it positively or negatively. You have to find out the truth of what is being shown and judge it yourself.”

An elder from India, when asked if he thought American television channels such as MTV contribute to the drug and violence problems in his community, responded,

“No, just watching will not create the problems; when we imitate the western culture, there the problem will start.”

Local culture includes all aspects of ethnic, family, or community identification that are distinguished from aspects of global culture. In some cases, local culture was very clearly identified, as when youth stated their tribal affiliation or national identity. In other cases, local and global culture became blurred, as when youth and their family expressed a strong desire to stay in school even though the community placed little value on education. Adherence to one’s local culture, whether family or community based, may vary regardless of whether the youth also adheres to global culture. As with all of the tensions, these two dimensions (local and global) of resilience are related but distinct from one another.

To illustrate, a Gambian girl explained that her father had supported her getting an education, even though others in their community thought girls should not study, placing the girl’s family’s culture (which we might say is congruent with global culture) in conflict with local customs and traditions. Very differently, a young man from Sheshatshui spoke about his community’s increasing emphasis on Innu culture,

“We have the greatest culture in this country. When we are in the bush we have no time for booze, drugs, or other problems that are in our community. The youth enjoy the nomadic lifestyle of our ancestors. It is peaceful, quiet, and relaxing. We are free of negative things. My parents take us camping for 3-4 weeks at a time. They make sure that it doesn’t interfere with our education too much. The culture and its history is no longer taught in the school because there is no teacher. I know some people who have quit school because they can’t learn their own culture and way of life.”

Participants from western research sites commented less directly on culture, whether local or global; though relationship to western or “Americanized” aspects of global culture were more evident in how youth in Canada, the United States, and other countries achieved what they described as resilience.

For example, a young woman from Halifax said,

“I’m learning a lot to just accept the idea that everything is neutral and that there is no good or bad; it’s just each individual perspective of the matter. And keeping in mind that everything is neutral, you don’t really get so caught up in fears so much and it also helps you understand and accept that every other person will have their own individual perceptions. Like one person might consider one thing is good while another person might consider that thing is bad. And you can’t say, ‘Well, no, this is right.’ Ok well, that’s right for you but maybe it’s not really right for me.”

In contrast, cultural norms were far more evident in the narrative of non-western youth. A young Tanzanian woman who had had a child was clear that in her country pre-marital sex is unacceptable,

“To the community of Njoro, a pregnant girl means a tramp. Indecent. I was pregnant before being married and when I am at home old people and my fellow young people advised me to undergo abortion, a thing I hated to do. It is bad to be pregnant for a girl without a husband.”

Social Justice

Social justice captures experiences of prejudice and dynamics of socio-political context encountered individually, within one’s family, in one’s community, and culture, as well as experiences of resistance, solidarity, belief in a spiritual power, and standing up to oppression.

A Palestinian boy spoke of political turmoil and violence experienced as matter of his daily existence,

“One of my friends fell martyr only forty days after the martyrdom of his brother. I feel sorry for his mother… He used to be my close friend, we used to drink and eat with each other… I cried a lot when I visited him at the hospital and cried more when he was buried… My dream is to see Palestine free.”

A Colombian boy, seeking justice for the violence perpetrated against him, said,

“God forgive me, I don’t wish death to anybody, but this guy [ ], see… I hope God will take him right away forever. I hope so… as long as they kill [ ], as long as they kill him; after they kill him I will be happy.”
Case Studies

If each of the tensions, and the previous examples, are examined in isolation the most important finding of the study will be missed: the seven tensions influence and inform one another. Findings from this study suggest that resilience is about finding a way to ‘hit your stride’ and live with relative comfort despite the contradictions and incongruencies in the community that create so many challenges for youth today. How youth manage these tensions are forever changing, although the process remains: negotiate and navigate through the seven tensions to deal with the challenges. The stories that were included with each tension provide a snapshot of how the youth who participated in this study negotiated and navigated at one moment in time. These stories suggest that resilience can be understood as a dynamic process, never permanent, always in motion. How these tensions meet, and intersect, reveals the richer layers of what constitutes resilience in many cultures and contexts. The following case studies illustrate the interplay between tensions and how each manifested in different ways, contextually bound and culturally embedded.

Miguel's Story

Miguel is a 20-year-old male who grew up outside of Medellín, Colombia. Miguel’s broader context, the industrial capital of Colombia, is well known for housing some of the most sophisticated drug trafficking operations since the 1970’s and is considered one of the most violent and dangerous cities in the world. Key adversities experienced by youth in Colombia, and specifically Medellín, include family violence, poverty, inadequate health and social support, drug addiction, warfare, and lack of security. Miguel had experienced many of these adversities. His parents divorced when he was two years old, the marital relationship was one of domestic violence and alcohol abuse on the part of his father. Following the divorce, he and his mother moved in with “a bunch of uncles and my grandfather.” There was a steady theme of the importance of relationships with family members, neighbors, peers, and even religion throughout his narrative. Some of these relationships were characterized as supportive and loving, others abusive and demeaning; both ends of the continuum reinforcing a continued involvement with others in ways that held meaning for Miguel.

Positive relationships in Miguel's life have provided him with an important resource from which he has been able to usefully negotiate his life. An example was when Miguel was photographed for a magazine article on the importance of studying; he spoke of the pride that his mother showed for his accomplishment,

I felt very well about the pride that my mom felt when she saw it. She still has those magazines and it has been almost 9 years since that happened.

Similarly, Miguel referred to a woman in his community who helped care for his mother when she was experiencing mental health challenges,

I owe a lot to a lady, my mom’s friend, where my mom goes early in the morning and remained there until night. There they give her lunch, used clothes, and all her lifetime has been on that way.... if it was not for that lady, I do not know how would be my mom’s life, because my mom is a bit illiterate, ignorant....For example mom has difficulty to speak, she has suffered of epilepsy.”

He also spoke of his relationships with peers,

...what I believe that helped me [was] the social environment that I developed in the street. When I began the fifth grade of elementary, in the school of Villa del Sol, there was a group of friends with whom I grew, who [were] very different to me, because they had families and they maintained doing wickedness, wanted to be laughing all the time and things like that. I grew with them and... I was the judicious one of all, but not the boring one, I laughed with them; although at the beginning it was as difficult to get into the group.

At the same time, Miguel experienced abuse at the hands of his uncle’s partner, who moved in with the family when he was 7 years old, reflecting one of the negative relationships in his life. This relationship impacted other relationships in the house heavily. He said,

...and it was there, at that time, when the family began to be dissolved... that was one of the causes for the family to separate, because the family felt a lot of fear from him, and so did I, obviously... I arrived home with my head down, I passed beside him with fear. It was very uncomfortable... He yelled me every day, hit me, from time to time calvetazos [slaps on my head] but the moral abuse was impressive.

God forgive me, I don’t wish death to anybody, but this guy [ ], see... I hope God will take him right away forever. I hope so... as long as they kill [ ], as long as they kill him; after they kill him I will be happy.

—Colombian boy
In coping with this living situation, it was significant relationships to which Miguel attributed his survival. He spoke of the relationships he had with a school friend and his family, saying,

//I used to go at night to do my homework to his house. . . . Being there I talked, I laughed, his mom asked us how we were. His dad punished us, he did what my uncle never did; he punished us when we did not do our homework, he hit us with a belt when we did pass an assignment, but he also rewarded us with trips if we approved a school year. . . . I also in the family environment and for them I was practically a member of the family. To them I owe them everything: without them I do not know if I had gone mad in my uncle's house, because the lack of confidence affects you a lot."

Miguel also described developing a sense of power and control over his circumstances and his future through his commitment to education and his interest in reading; he decided to persevere in school and drew strength from his success there. From the age of 12, when his mother left the home, he noted that neither his uncle nor his uncle's partner encouraged him in school or assisted him through what he considered were the struggles of adolescence. He said,

//I was the best and I always obtained the best grades, I never lost one or even 2 assignments. . . . I never studied in the best institutions, but in public schools, where lazy boys and pregnant girls were very normal, like in certain areas of Medellin; but I always stood out and I had something that made me be leader of the others. For example, in tenth and eleventh grade, I was the one that organized everything, and even now in my job they love me so much for that reason."

Miguel's experiences with schooling, and his relationships, provided anchors to his identity and offered a sense of cohesion in his life,

//When you desire to move forward, it does not matter that you are poor, the important thing is that you have that desire. The fact of to think and to analyze what it is you want, to visualize yourself and to know how you can overcome the possible problems, of any type, that you are experiencing. To know what you are and what you can be if you make the effort. The most important thing is to begin knowing what it is that you want [and] where you go; to imagine that road and do not care about the stones and the bad things this road can have, to fight until reaching it....For me, they are bad things that have to happen; moments of the life of a man that makes part of the life, and it is necessary to be prepared for them. Then, I do not know...bad things no, I do not give them that definition....I have not seen myself in an adversity, in spite of what I have lived, then, I insist and repeat, I have been proud of the things that passed me."

There was little emphasis on access to material resources in Miguel's story. Rather, as noted above, the themes of relationships and cohesion and power and control were more prominent. Regarding availability of basic instrumental resources, Miguel said,

//We did not face necessities. Among my uncles there is a carpenter and the oldest is a baker....We were poor and suitable, we did not face necessities, but we did not live with luxury.

The central theme in Miguel's cultural adherence was his belief in God. He noted, “I choose the side of God,” relaying that he felt he had been buffered, not from negative experiences but from negative outcomes, due to “that ‘bubble’ that God put around me.” While his Catholic beliefs were consistent with indigenous culture (Colombia is a heavily Roman Catholic country), it appeared that he did not regularly practice his faith within a church, which counters local traditions and customs.

For the purposes of illustration, the relationship between the seven tensions and the relative influence of each in Miguel's life are represented graphically in Figure One.
Mani's Story

Mani, a young woman in Sheshatshiu, Labrador, Canada also painted a complicated picture of the many aspects of her resilience. As an example, in referring to the suicide of her 13-year-old cousin, Mani spoke about personal coping as both an individual strength as well as the capacity of her family to cope and the availability of formal and informal supports,

“My coping skills were tested and it was hard….I never knew that kind of devastation existed in my own family members. I didn’t know how to react or respond. I just couldn’t get myself to speak or think. I didn’t know the difference between what was real and wasn’t real. It was a scary time for us and the scars will live on. We did receive lots of support from community leaders, workers, and members. It was kind of nice how my whole family were together like that….Our family needs to stay together and focused now. I need them to balance their lives and mine.”

Following procedures for the analysis of qualitative data, this piece of text was coded simultaneously under responsibility to others, problem solving, suicide, and family relations. This nested coding demonstrates complexity in the relationships between aspects of resilience and how each contributes to the resolution of one or more of the seven tensions. As with Miguel’s story, the relative influence of each of the tensions in Mani’s complete narrative can be mapped graphically (See Figure Two).

Mani also noted that this suicide connected with the degradation of indigenous Innu culture (a social justice issue), which was a central component of her narrative. Her family’s and community’s response, as well as her own interpretation of the significance of the death of her cousin, could all be located within a cultural understanding of the tragedy. Elsewhere in her interview, Mani spoke of her life philosophy as a reflection of her self-efficacy and the links between emotional and instrumental supports as she navigates her way to independence.
To the community of Njoro, a pregnant girl means a tramp. Indecent. I was pregnant before being married and when I am at home old people and my fellow young people advised me to undergo abortion, a thing I hated to do. It is bad to be pregnant for a girl without a husband. —Tanzanian girl

Implications for Intervention

As Monica McGoldrick (2003) explains: “Mental health professionals everywhere are being challenged to develop treatment models and services that are more responsive to a broad spectrum of ethnic, racial, and religious identities” (p.235). Interventions that seek to bolster aspects of resilience in culturally diverse populations of at-risk children and youth will succeed to the extent that they accomplish the following:

1. Privilege local knowledge about aspects of resilience, comparing and contrasting these to the results of studies from other cultures and contexts. Evaluating outcomes will require participation from local stakeholders in the definition of meaningful and positive health indicators relevant to the population studied.
2. Evaluate the influence of each aspect of resilience on health outcomes taking into account the specific context in which it is found. Interventions need to be sensitive to which aspect of resilience, in a specific context, will have the greatest impact on a particular population.
3. Intervene in multiple forums of young people’s lives (e.g. personal counseling, family based interventions, school programs, community mobilization) at the same time in ways that acknowledge the ecological nature in how youth experience resilience.
4. Intervene in ways that address the many different pathways through the seven tensions that children and youth navigate. Interventions that help children to navigate to health resources and negotiate for what they need to resolve these tensions are those most likely to be helpful.

Through the iterative process of the research design, implementation, and analysis, it has been shown that resilience is a culturally and contextually sensitive construct. Therefore, projects that work well with youth in one context are not necessarily going to work well in another. Researchers will need to be more participatory and culturally embedded to capture the nuances of culture and context, while avoiding bias and designing interventions to promote how resilience is understood. The better a youth’s own constructions of resilience are documented, the more likely it will be that those intervening identify the specific aspects of resilience most relevant to health outcomes as defined by a particular population.

A Culturally Embedded Understanding of Resilience

How youth deal with the challenges they face depends upon the resources available within their contexts, as well as how their community defines positive outcomes. Developmental challenges, such as whether a young person stays in school or not, involve the connection of the seven tensions (detailed above). For example, while youth in the sample all valued education, it was their families’ attitudes and beliefs, the provision of instrumental and emotional support, experiences of broader social justice, and accessibility to educational resources that influenced the type of schooling youth would strive for and the length of time they remained engaged in that schooling. Family values, after all, reflect community wide orientations toward planning for the future, economic hopefulness, and gender bias. But even this is not nearly enough to understand an individual youth’s decision to stay in school or not. Whether a young person understands staying in school as a way to express power and control, whether obtaining an education is a way of addressing social justice, whether school is seen as fitting in with local cultural values, and whether schooling is supported financially by parents (Can they afford it? Has the government made public education accessible?) all combine to shape a youth’s school experience. One could easily imagine two children from the same culture dealing with these tensions quite differently. The choice to stay in school, therefore, is not in and of itself an outcome that has to be associated with resilience. Instead, the resilient child is the one who resolves the seven tensions according to culturally relevant ways to thrive.

Findings from the IRP may be summarized as four propositions supported by the data:

• **Proposition One**: Resilience has both global and culturally/contextually specific aspects.
• **Proposition Two**: Aspects of resilience exert differing amounts of influence on a child’s life depending on the specific culture and context in which resilience is realized.
• **Proposition Three**: Aspects of children’s lives that contribute to resilience are related to one another in patterns that reflect a child’s culture and context.
• **Proposition Four**: How tensions between individuals and their cultures and contexts are resolved will affect the way aspects of resilience group together.

These findings have implications for interventions with at-risk youth across cultures and contexts. Those working with these youth will need to examine the uniqueness of individual pathways to resilience, learn about, and then address all seven aspects detailed here. For example, stay-in-school programs in western countries will more likely be successful if the program reflects the values of students as reflected in culture and key relationships, fits with terms defined for identity and connection, and coheres with experiences and needs for power and control.

The culturally embedded understanding of resilience, as expressed through this research, will help to guide both interventions and policy development in the communities involved in this research. Future research, building on the success of this project, is expected to refine measures and interview procedures while creating more participatory and inclusive processes for research with other communities interested in understanding resilience both locally and globally.
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(Footnotes)

1 The total variance explained, rotation sums of squared loading and the corresponding screen plots were used to determine the number of factors for each of these groupings. By reviewing the logical sort of questions on each factor with cut-off values of .35 for the various groupings of participants, final solutions were determined.

2 These factor models have either a seven- or nine-factor solution, with good loadings and inter-item reliability.