

CLEARINGHOUSE FOR MILITARY FAMILY READINESS

Resilience and Positive Outcomes in Adolescents: Rapid Literature Review

Clearinghouse Technical Assistance Team

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Executive Summary

This report was conducted in response to a request from Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) with the University of Minnesota in partnership with Penn State University. These findings address research related to resilience and the impact of resiliency on school engagement, pro-social behavior, community participation, positive peer group activity, and future aspirations in youth in Grades 5-12.

Many children grow up in conditions that are considered to be risk factors to normal, healthy development (e.g., poverty, violence, substance abuse, family discord, family or personal illnesses). These adverse conditions may hinder the intellectual, social, and emotional development of children and youth, consequently interfering with the ability to reach their full potential as adults (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). However, many children face such adversities and thrive in spite of challenges, demonstrating resilience (Blum, McNeely, & Nonnemaker, 2001). When professionals adopt positive youth development (PYD) practices and work to foster resilience, interventions can make a significant impact on well-being outcomes for at-risk youth (Sanders, Munford, Thimasarn-Anwar, Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2015). Youth outcomes may also be influenced by the type of service (e.g., child welfare, mental health, juvenile justice, special education), quality of interventions received, and the interaction between the different services if multiple services are utilized (Ungar, Liebenberg, Dudding, Armstrong, & van de Vijver, 2013).

This report provides:

- a definition of resilience; and
- brief descriptions of studies demonstrating the impact of resilience on outcomes related to school engagement, pro-social behavior, community participation, positive peer group activity, and future aspirations.

Please note that this rapid review provides a preliminary examination of the research on outcomes related to resiliency; however, it is not intended to serve as a comprehensive review of the literature.

Introduction

The Technical Assistance team at the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State (Clearinghouse) conducted a brief, rapid review of the literature on the topic of resiliency with a focus on research measuring outcomes related to school engagement, pro-social behavior, community participation, positive peer group activity, and future aspirations in adolescents.

Research examining resilience and outcomes in adolescents were identified by searching peer reviewed journal articles with an emphasis on research published

between 2000 and 2019. Search queries included various combinations of the terms *school engagement, pro-social behavior, community participation, civic engagement, positive peer group activity, and future aspirations, positive outcomes, and adolescents, and resilience.*

What is Resilience?

Resilience is a set of resources and characteristics that can offset the adverse effects of stress and risk exposure (Ungar, 2019; Boden, Sanders, Munford, Liebenberg & McLeod, 2016). An individual's personal characteristics influence adaptability and the ability to overcome challenges (Boden et al., 2016). The capacity to cope with adversity depends upon the resources available, as well as the cumulative number of stressors experienced (Ungar, 2019; Blum et al., 2001). Resilience may be enhanced by interactions with others, such as parents, teachers, and other adult influences, as well as peers (Blum et al., 2001).

Resilience and Youth Outcomes

School Engagement

A white paper from the University of Colorado at Denver, Hupfeld (2010) outlined numerous research studies demonstrating how resiliency affects personal and academic success. In each study, at-risk students who were performing well in school were compared with at-risk students who were failing. Motivation, optimism, and self-directedness were found to play prominent roles in school engagement. These studies and others are described below.

- Benard (2004) found that resilient children generally display four personal characteristics: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.
- Solberg et al. (1998) identified six resiliency skills linked to academic success: building confidence, making connections, setting goals, managing stress, increasing well-being, and understanding motivation.
- In a study of middle school students attending diverse schools, Waxman and Huang (1996) found that resilient students were much more likely to report greater involvement in school and higher levels of goal-oriented behaviors, such as task orientation, pacing, and feedback. Resilient students also reported higher levels of motivation and academic and social self-confidence (Waxman & Huang, 1996).
- In a study examining students living in high-risk environments, Solberg, Calstrom, Howard, and Jones (2007) found that the students who possessed resiliency characteristics such as high academic confidence and high motivation were more likely to stay in school and have higher grades than their peers. The most resilient students also reported relatively higher connections with peers and teachers and perceived family support.

- Gonzalez and Padilla (1997) compared high-risk Mexican-American students with significantly high grades and those with significantly low grades. In their study, resilient students reported higher levels of family and peer support, positive ties to school, high levels of teacher feedback, and placed a higher value on school (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). The most significant predictor of success was the student's sense of belonging to the school (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).
- Alva (1991) found that resilient Mexican-American students were more likely to report higher levels of educational support from teachers and friends, and greater encouragement to attend college, as well as a higher sense of enjoyment at coming to school.

Pro-Social Behavior

Gartland et al. (2011) describe the relationship between social skills and resilient outcomes and highlight studies that support the claim that resilient adolescents may exhibit more pro-social behavior than less resilient adolescents. Boden et al. (2016) identified research showing that adolescents who demonstrate resilient behaviors (e.g., social initiative, self-esteem, empathy) are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. These studies and others are described below.

- Resilient 10-12-year-olds have been found to see themselves as more competent, have higher self-esteem, have higher empathy, and use more effective coping and problem-solving skills than those who were stress-affected (Cowen et al., 1992).
- Sun and Shek (2012) found that resilient adolescents were more satisfied with life and had lesser problem behavior, with higher level of life satisfaction and lower level of problem behavior influencing each other.
- In a longitudinal study that assessed students from sixth grade to 11th grade, it was found that youth who were rated higher in self-regulation reported less engagement in antisocial behavior compared to youth who rated lower in self-regulation (Gardner, Dishion, & Connell, 2008). This finding was true when measured at two different time points.

Community Participation

Hart, Matsuba & Atkins (2014) identified and described two studies in support of the claim that resilient adolescents are more likely to be civically engaged and volunteer within their communities. The authors also cite two studies positing that community involvement in adolescence is influenced by social connections such as relationships, friendships, and memberships in social institutions (Matsuba et al., 2007; Smith, 1999). Boden et al. (2016) state that there is evidence that civic engagement may be interconnected with the development of resiliency in the form of decreased stress and may reduce the likelihood of adverse long-term outcomes. These studies and others are described below.

- Individuals with resilient traits such as being outgoing, caring, open, and curious were found to be more likely to pursue volunteer opportunities within their communities (Matsuba, Hart & Atkins, 2007).
- Atkins, Hart, and Donnelly (2005) found that children characterized as resilient were more likely to volunteer in adolescence. These findings held even after statistically adjusting for children's IQ, maternal educational attainment, and family income (Atkins et al., 2005).
- Block and Block (2006) found that children who were judged to have high ego-resilience were more likely to have participated politically in early adulthood.
- Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, Hull, Kilbourne, Reece, and Husaini (2008) found that community involvement (e.g., non-sport extra-curricular activities, religious participation, neighborhood interaction, employment) had substantial protective effects on adolescent mental health. These effects were moderated to an extent by race/ethnicity and neighborhood disadvantage (Hull et al., 2008).

Positive Peer-Group Activity

Boden et al. (2016) identified studies demonstrating the positive impact of resiliency on peer relationships. The authors argue that young people who report positive, supportive peer relationships are more likely to engage in positive behaviors themselves and to follow pro-social norms (Boden et al., 2016). Peers with positive, supportive relationships are also less likely to engage in risk behaviors such as substance use and delinquency (Boden et al., 2016). These studies and others are described below.

- In a study of gang-affiliated Latino youth, van Dommelen-Gonzalez et al. (2015) found that those who reported having a good friend who was planning on continuing their post-high school education had lower odds of frequent marijuana and alcohol use.
- Padilla-Walker and Bean (2009) found that positive indirect peer association and positive direct peer pressure were related to adolescents' positive behaviors. Positive indirect peer association was related negatively to adolescents' negative behaviors (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009). Positive direct peer pressure was also related negatively to delinquency (Padilla-Walker & Bean, 2009).
- Bolger and Patterson (2003) found that having a positive, reciprocal friendship increased the likelihood of resilience in maltreated children.
- In a study of British adolescents, higher perceived friendship quality was significantly and moderately correlated with higher psychological resilience (Graber, Turner, & Madill, 2016).

Future Aspirations

Seginer (2008) argues that adolescents who develop resilience can better construct their future. Factors such as culture, developmental period, interpersonal relationships, and intrapersonal characteristics affect an individual's aims for the future (Seginer, 2008). Gartland et al. (2011) identified studies claiming that resilient

adolescents are more likely to be optimistic, have a positive sense of the future, and hold future attainment objectives than those affected by stress. Boden et al. (2016) identified studies demonstrating the positive impact of resiliency on future aspirations. These studies and others are described below.

- Wyman et al. (1993) found that children with high future expectations had less anxiety/depression, more self-reported competence, higher reading achievement scores and were rated by teachers as more engaged and better-adjusted socioemotionally.
- In a study of urban 10- to 12-year-olds, resilient children were associated with positive expectations for future employment, success in school, and interpersonal relationships (Wyman et al., 1992).
- Using data from a large U.S. representative panel, De Neve and Oswald (2012) found that adolescents and young adults who reported higher life satisfaction or positive affect grew up to earn significantly higher levels of income later in life.
- Students with higher levels of ambition and optimism who expressed a desire to obtain employment that enabled them to get ahead earned more money as adults than teenagers with less ambition and optimism (Ashby & Schoon, 2010).
- A study of middle-school age Croatian students found that hope significantly and positively relates to traits, beliefs, and attitudes that promote future success, such as life satisfaction, self-esteem, perceived social support, and family cohesion (Merkaš & Brajša-Žganec, 2011).
- In a study examining psychosocial resilience in rural adolescents, teens who had more positive expectations for their future were less negatively impacted when adverse events occurred and they displayed more active perseverance than those who expected worse outcomes (Tusaie, Puskar & Sereika, 2007).

Conclusion

Accumulation of risk and protective factors may be responsible for positive outcomes in adolescents (Boden et al., 2016). Many of the studies identified in this report focused on the relationships between several components of resiliency characteristics and positive outcomes, many of which are interconnected, such as environment, demographic factors, and parental influence. Developing and fostering opportunities to build resilience in teens may lead to better outcomes in school engagement, pro-social behavior, community participation, positive peer-group activity, and future aspirations.

Additional Assistance

The technical assistance specialists at the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State are happy to assist you. We provide support to professionals in making informed decisions about which programs fit specific situations and are worth the investment. Whether it's connecting you with the resources and tools to conduct a needs assessment in your community, suggesting the best evidence-based program or

practice for your situation, or developing an evaluation plan, our team of experts is simply a call or email away.

Please visit our website at www.militaryfamilies.psu.edu or call 1-877-382-9185 to speak with a TA specialist.

Suggested Citation

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