

Introduction

The **Pathways to Resilience Project** is a 6 year (2007-2015), 5 country study associated with the [Resilience Research Centre](#) in Canada.

The [New Zealand project](#) is based at Massey University led by Robyn Munford & Jackie Sanders from the School of Health & Social Services.

The study seeks to better understand how youth navigate between mandated services (child welfare, alternative education, mental health, & youth justice) to successful outcomes.

Its aim is to identify services & strategies that are successful in assisting young people to achieve positive outcomes in their lives.

Particularly interested in understanding the way that involvement with these services influences outcomes for youth exposed to large amounts of risk, who face complex challenges or who come to attention because of chronic abuse & neglect.

Purpose

- ⇒ To identify factors in service provision & youth ecologies related to functional outcomes. Functional outcomes include the ability to complete education, capacity to sustain positive peer group relations & to engage in pro-social behaviour for multiple service users (MSU) youth.
- ⇒ How do vulnerable youth differ from youth on more normative developmental pathways?
- ⇒ What role do family/community & services play in outcomes for MSU?

Research Questions

1. How do vulnerable youth (facing lots of risk) differ from youth on more normative developmental pathways?
2. What key personal & ecological factors precipitate children & young people's entry into multiple service systems?
3. When services are provided in particular ways does this make a difference to functional outcomes?
4. What key personal & ecological factors facilitate functional outcomes?
5. How do high-risk children & young people construct healthy & resilient identities as they negotiate for resources with families/whānau & services?
6. What impact does collaboration between families/whānau & professionals play in effective service provision?

Method - a cross sectional, mixed method, multiple informant study including:

- Surveys of 1496 youth (12-17 years) & a person they nominate who knows them well (PMK)
- Qualitative interviews with a subsample of 120 youth & PMK
- Case file reviews (291) from up to 4 services nominated by youth

The Youth were recruited from the greater Auckland metropolitan area, Palmerston North, rural Horowhenua Kāpiti, the greater Wellington metropolitan area, Christchurch & Dunedin areas during 2009 & 2010.

They were all aged 12-17, half Maori (48%), a third Pākehā (31%), one fifth Pacific (18%) & more than half male (63%). After being matched for age, gender & ethnicity they comprised 2 equal groups:

- ⇒ A group of 605 multiple service using youth (MSU) – concurrently using 2 or more services
- ⇒ A comparison group (CG) of 605 youth on a more or less normative development pathway, who were using one or no services.

The two groups came from very different living situations, & had very different school & other service experiences.

Young people with higher risk tend to have **inconsistent or negative service experiences.**

Young people with higher resilience tend to have **consistently positive service experiences.**

Pathways to Resilience Study - overview

Statistical summary of the 2 groups

Measure	Multiple service users	Comparison group
Living with both parents	17%	52%
Living with non-family	30%	4%
Living on streets 3 nights or more in past year	27%	4%
Did not choose biological mother as 'mother figure'	27%	11%
Did not choose biological father as 'father figure'	44%	24%
'Not close at all' to mother & father 'figures'	13% (mother), 30% (father)	5% (mother), 16%(father)
'Somewhat close' or 'not close at all' to mother & father 'figures'	41% (mother) 59% (father)	36% (mother) 50 % (father)
Got 'no affection at all" from mother & father 'figures'	8% (mother) 22% (father)	2% (mother) 9% (father)
Youth is a parent	3%	.6%
Left school by year 10 (form 4)	64%	10%
Held back at school	17%	4%
Achieved NCEA level 1	47%	81%
Positive about current/last school	34%	71%
Has sense of belonging at school	37%	68%
Stood Down from school	71%	18%
Suspended from school	67%	14%
Expelled/excluded from school	54%	8%
Desire to achieve qualifications	82%	89%
Getting an education was important to them	59% *	86%
Use alternative education	6 times more likely	
Have special education services	5 times more likely	
Receive substance abuse services	11 times more likely	
Involved in general counselling services	5 times more likely	
Involvement with CP Services at time of first Interview	46%	2%
Involvement with YJ Services at time of first Interview	46%	2%
Involved in both CP and YJ Services	32%	0

* Most of the MSU youth (80%) had stopped attending mainstream schools prior to participating in the research yet 59% of them scored over the mean when asked if getting an education was important to them, so many clearly still placed a value on formal education as a developmental pathway.

Pathways to Resilience Study - overview

Data gathering

Quantitative - Youth & their PMK completed a questionnaire - the Pathways to Resilience Youth Measure (PRYM) & PRYM-PMK, an adapted version of a validated tool used in Canada by the Resilience Research Centre. They captured: demographic information on young person; lifetime service use patterns & satisfaction with services; access to community supports & resources; relationships with family & friends; school engagement & academic achievements; risk-taking behaviours (substance abuse, delinquency); pro-social behaviour; risk of depression, conduct problems, peer problems; perception of community risk, AND the Child & Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-28), which measured individual, relational, & contextual factors contributing to resilience.

Functional outcomes were measured in five different ways that together assessed a number of key normative, age-appropriate dimensions of youth lives:

- ⇒ Pro-social behaviour
- ⇒ Positive peer group
- ⇒ Future aspirations
- ⇒ Educational involvement
- ⇒ Civic Engagement

Quantitative - consisted of a semi-structured interview with 120 youth, their PMK & case file reviews (291 files). Data collected from the case files typically aligned well with the youth & PMK narratives collected in the interviews & the PRYM. This triangulation increased the overall level of confidence in the data collected in both the qualitative & quantitative phases. It also provided a unique opportunity to learn that youth do honestly answer the questions asked, even when they are challenging questions.

Some of the findings...

- The quality of interactions practitioners have with youth matter more to outcomes than the number of interventions. High quality relationships build resilience & this produces better outcomes. Relational practices that include genuine warmth, kindness & positive regard build capacity in young people. The more that services work in these ways with youth the better the outcome.

Specific practices that are important:

Youth are given clear information about services & interventions

Encourage youth decision-making & meaningful involvement that help build agency

Services & interventions are relevant & demonstrate understanding of the challenges youth face

Identify & build positive resources & relationships in youth lives

Respect youth culture & meaning systems & incorporate cultural practices into interventions

Allow sufficient time to build relationships

Avoid episodic responses to crises that are embedded in longer-term chronic issues

Create opportunities that support the development of positive identities

Introduce safe adults who make an ongoing commitment to the young person

Interventions respond to practical & emotional needs

Build positive relationships with other practitioners while maintaining focus on needs of youth

Ecological approaches work well with this group of youth who bring a complex mix of challenges & needs & who have often experienced a lot of instability & trauma

All the adults involved need to work together & support each other to work constructively with youth – parents, foster parents, teachers, support workers, social workers, youth workers

For youth justice responses that address the wellbeing needs of youth alongside accountability appear to assist with desistance

Pathways to Resilience Study - overview

Across the study youth appeared to do well when in residential programmes (time away from risky environments, introduction of structure & routines), but faced challenges maintaining positive changes when returning to the community – a focus on step down services would assist

While interventions focus on immediate issues, they also need to support youth to test out alternative identities and developmental pathways

A lot of resources were invested across service systems in assessment, but often these complex assessments were not followed by delivery of services

Integrated services and interventions work best

Staying at mainstream school facilitates positive outcomes but represents a significant challenge for this group of young people who report that school is often experienced as an unwelcome place

Keeping youth at school can be accomplished by a combination of community resources & formal supports outside of school & opportunities to spend time with positive peers.

Of significance is positive, understanding and encouraging behaviour by school professionals

Risks and resources (resilience) interact together. Resources can bring risks, risks can contain resources. Practitioners need to understand the impact of both individual and contextual risk.

Cultural resources: youth have different experiences and resources which then require different responses from services. For instance, Māori youth had highest risk, but also high resilience and better outcomes than Pākehā youth who had lower risk, but lower resilience. Pacific youth had the highest resilience, lower risk than Māori youth and the highest outcomes.

Risk behaviours are often an attempt by MSU youth to activate help with contextual risks. So we need to understand the context of youth and how to support workers to focus on these risks effectively as part of their work with youth, without losing focus on the youth.

PARTH - a model of effective practice ...

P = Perseverance, Persistence and Perspective

understanding how risk, context & resilience shape youth behaviours

focus on youth and be an advocate for youth

commit to staying the distance through difficult times & support youth to realise their aspirations

maintain positive youth development and strengths perspective

commit to effective collaboration in work.

A = Adaptability, Agency/Empowerment, Action-oriented

- ✓ look for alternatives, reflect on what you are doing that works & what doesn't & change what doesn't
- ✓ adapt practice to enable youth to test out new skills & support them to remain engaged in interventions a model of
- ✓ encourage agency & empowerment in youth – joint approach to solution finding brings best results
- ✓ ensure assessments lead to delivery of services
- ✓ make things happen for youth, achieve plans and include practical as well as emotional interventions.

R = Relationships – respect & reciprocity, Relevant, Responsive, Recognises context

- ✓ relational practice, focus on building relationships with youth, demonstrate caring & value
- ✓ affirm youth strengths & coping strategies
- ✓ avoid reactive responses – episodic interventions in situations of chronic need increase risk and undermine capacity to achieve good outcomes
- ✓ ecological interventions work best because they take account of the complexity of the challenges.

Pathways to Resilience Study - overview

T = Time, Transparency, Thresholds, Transitions

- ✓ quality & quantity, length of interventions will vary depending on youth need
- ✓ look for critical teaching moment
- ✓ take time to plan for positive encounters with youth & time to reflect on own practice
- ✓ ensure youth understand the how and why of decisions
- ✓ threshold and entry criteria often mean that interventions do not happen until too much damage has been done – adaptability and agility is important
- ✓ manage transitions within, between and from services carefully.

H = Honesty, Humility, Hope

- ✓ does what they say they will do and are honest about limitations to what can be done
- ✓ keeps youth informed
- ✓ works with humility – recognition that if practitioner was in youth shoes they might make the same choices;
- ✓ hold hope for youth – a vision for the future based on this young person's qualities and abilities.

For full research information go to
www.youthsay.co.nz

