

Self-Integrity and Family Support as Assets for Resilient Urban At-Risk Youth

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Abstract: While most of the Malaysian youth literature view young people as problematic and chaotic, this research aims to highlight that at-risk young Malaysians also possessed developmental assets which could contribute to their resilience level. This research explores at-risk youth resilience and predicts which protective factor is the most utilized. To be specific, at-risk young people who lived at the outskirts of metropolitan Kuala Lumpur were targeted. Survey designed method on 744 young people of Pantai Dalam, Kuala Lumpur who lived in low cost government flats. Integrity and family support predict levels of resilience. The results show that under disadvantaged environment, family support could sustain young people's resiliency in facing difficulties of life. This research argues that internal asset and family institution contributes to at-risk young people's internal defense system. This research recommends that future research should study the quality of family support and reveal the quality facets of resilience.

Key words: Young people • Resilience • Family support • Neighbourhood safety • Peer support

INTRODUCTION

World Youth Report [1] estimated that approximately 25 percent of world youth population is at-risk youth. Based on this estimation, one million of Malaysia's 4.5 million youth population at the age of 15 to 25 years is then categorised as at-risk youth. At the same time, according to Malaysian Youth Index [2], nearly 500,000 youth between the ages of 14-25 admitted being involved in at least one social wrong-doing. Samsuddin [3] constructed a profile of at-risk youth in Malaysia based on various local studies which comprised of eight factors: (1) grew up in families who are not emotionally supportive; (2) deficient parental supervision on activities that they are involved in; (3) poor in social skills; (4) low aspiration, self-esteem and emotional control; (5) come from low –waged family; (6) unsatisfactory living condition; (7) peer influence and (8) lack of appropriate role model. Previously at-risk youths were viewed through the deficit perspective where they were labeled as the root cause of social problems such as drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, HIV transmissions, pre-marital sexual activity, vandalism and portraying dangerous road

behavior. However, nowadays young people are considered as an asset to a nation. Respectively, young people are viewed as having potentials that can be realised. Therefore, in realising these potential, a resilience perspective can be employed to give a better understanding.

Resilience can be more precisely viewed as a normal part of healthy development that can be enhanced throughout life, instead of being viewed as a stable personality trait that a person either has or does not have [5, 6]. Resilient young people are capable to use his/her personal strengths to grow stronger because they "have the capacity to experience stress without being debilitated by it" [7]. This does not mean that a resilient persons are unaffected by adversity despite facing life's stressors and roadblocks. However, they be inclined to own the ability to bounce back from adversity [8]; or get protected from the effects of adversity [9].

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Resilience literatures generally organise protective factors which promote protective resilience processes into three categories: (1) individual factors, (2) family factors and (3) external factors [10, 11]. It has been found that learn critical, adaptive skills more through experience as compared through instruction [10]. Resilience development can be hindered if young people are overly protected while at the same time over exposure too soon could also overwhelmed individual protective processes in youth and compromise their resilience development [10, 12].

The range of individual factors suggested in resilience literature is extensive but not necessarily exhaustive [10]. In general, Olsson and colleagues identified individual factors include constitutional resilience, sociability, intelligence, communication skills and array of personal attributes. Cognitive factors include factors such as optimism, intelligence, creativity, humour, belief system that provides existential meaning, cohesive life narrative and appreciation of the uniqueness of self, whereas competencies that contribute to resilience include various coping strategies, social skills, educational abilities and memory above the average level [9]. This would imply that individual factors could provide the protection needed by at-risk young people against the challenging environment they lived in. However, if the conflict is comprised of multiple stressors including those of significant relationship (e.g., family and supportive peers) then these at-risk young people could encounter risk itself or even prolonged adversity.

Even though there is an emerging focus on the peer group, for many young people the family still remains the primary social support [10]. Parents are responsible for providing protection and security, which helps to shield adolescents from negative life events [12]. For example, parents influence who their children’s friends and acquaintances are going to be to avoid their children getting into unnecessary trouble. A sense of belief towards young people together with a non-blaming parenting style is considered important in maintaining family protective processes [10].

The external factors present another important avenue to promote resilience. Kumpfer [13] outlined some interactional processes that included selective perception,

cognitive reframing, planning and dreaming, identification with and attachment to pro-social people, active environmental modifications by the young people and active coping to be responsible in assisting young people transform a high-risk environment into a more protective environment. By utilising these interactional processes with caring others, resilient young people are able to enhance their external processes through various modes such as role modelling, teaching, advice giving, empathetic and emotionally responsive caregiving, creating opportunities for meaningful involvement, effective supervision and disciplining reasonable developmental expectations [13]. Focusing on at-risk young people who lived at the edge of metropolitan Kuala Lumpur, this research aim to explore at-risk young people resilience and predicts which protective factors (personal, family or external) are most utilised.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Pantai Dalam which is a residential area located south-west of metropolitan Kuala Lumpur, under the parliamentary constituency of Lembah Pantai. The study focused specifically on three flats under the People’s Housing Project (PPR) which were PPR Pantai Ria, PPR Seri Pantai and PPR Kerinchi. In other words, those who lives here comes from a low socioeconomic background. Twenty three Developmental Assets Questionnaire (DAQ-23) was used in this study [14]. The DAQ-23 was developed by Centre for Youth Empowerment. It aims to measure both positive attitude and behavior among at-risk young people from various ethnic groups and low income groups [14]. DAQ-23 consists of 23 positive internal and external assets that are referred to as the “positive experiences of the self and others among youth” [14].

In the preliminary study 103 items of DAQ-23 was administered to 744 at-risk young people aged 12 to 25 years old, living at metropolitan Kuala Lumpur. This study was conducted between February to December 2010. Reliability of the constructs revealed that the values of Cronbach’s alpha were ranged from.87 to.88 which suggested that these items were internally consistent. Factor analyses indicated a three factor-model of developmental assets were satisfactory and stable. Further analysis was conducted to see if DAQ-23 was stable against antisocial behavior. A good correlation from small to modest was found. These results suggested that internal consistency and good construct validity to measure positive experiences of self and others among young people were satisfactorily achieved.

Out of the total 800 questionnaires distributed, 744 questionnaires were completed according to requirement. In other words, this represent 93 percent response rate and it achieved satisfactory level. Of the 744 at-risk young people sample 52 percent were males, 48% were females. The majority of the participants identified themselves as Malay (87%) followed by Indian (12%), other ethnic groups (0.5%) and Chinese (0.3%). The age range of the respondents was between 12 to 25 years old with the mean age of 17.85 years old. The majority of the participants (93%) were school students and the other seven per cent were employees. Most of the participants (81%) shared the same household with both parents, whilst 11 per cent of them were from single-parent households and seven per cent lived with their guardians. Mean income of the parents were approximately RM1525.75 per month. This indicates that most of them were under poverty line by the standard of metropolitan Kuala Lumpur.

A convenience sampling technique was used to select the participants. The participants were explained about the study and their verbal agreement can be considered as their consent. At the same time, they were also explained that they can withdraw from this study at any time and there was no obligation to participate in the study. The data were keyed in and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). A statistical analysis employed was multiple regression analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings in this research for all the hypotheses were presented here. Hypothesis 1 was formulated to test the significant relationship between each protective factor (SE-self-esteem, FS-family support, INT-integrity, NS-neighbourhood safety, PS-peer support) and RE-resilience using Pearson correlation. Results in Table 1 showed that there were significant correlations between family support, integrity and peer support with resilience.

Hypothesis 2 was formulated to examine whether resilience was significantly predicted by five protective factors. As shown in Table 2, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the contribution of these five protective factors toward resilience. The regression model showed that integrity and family support factor did predict resilience with 16% variance, $R^2 = .16$, $F(5, 741) = 27.84$, $p < .05$.

$$\text{Resilience} = 9.72 + 0.30(\text{Integrity}) + 0.08(\text{Family support})$$

Table 1: Correlation between protective factors and resilience

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
SES	-					
FS	0.24*	-				
INT	0.22*	0.27*	-			
NS	0.00	0.12*	0.03	-		
PS	0.24*	0.31*	0.38*	0.13*	-	
RE	0.07	0.18*	0.39*	0.06	0.21*	-

** p < 0.01

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis between internal, external factors, family support and resilience

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	T
Constant	9.72	1.00		9.74**
SES	0.06	0.05	-0.04	-1.21
FS	0.08	0.04	0.08	2.06*
INT	0.30	0.03	0.35	9.41**
NS	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.03
PS	0.05	0.05	0.05	1.43

* p < .05

** p < .000

Results indicated that all internal, family and external factors were correlated to resilience to a certain degree. To be specific, young people who scored high on family support (family factor), integrity (internal factor) and peer support (external factor) were found to have high resilience profile. In other words, this finding agrees with Olsson *et al.* [10] argument that internal, family and external protective factors are crucial in building resilience among young people. However, only family support and integrity predict resilience.

Integrity was found to be a stronger component of resilience as compared to family support. This finding is as predicted since integrity is a component within the personal protective factors. Since most of young people live in at-risk environment, they will encounter more struggle and challenges in their daily lives as compared to those young people who are living in a wealthier neighbourhood. Thus integrity could be the internal protective factor in facing challenging life experiences. By learning through life experiences these at-risk young people are able to develop their adaptive skills. The development of these adaptive skills will enhance personal protective factors. Thus, a virtuous cycle is formed and contributes to young people's internal assets. Surprisingly, the other internal factor, self-esteem, is neither related to or contributes to Resilience.

This implies that how young people evaluate themselves does not help them in becoming more resilient. Indeed, how they consistently hold on to their principles and values seems to be more important in building their resilient skills than what they define themselves as. Thus, learning to be firm and be assertive could promote resilient skills among at-risk young people.

This research support the finding from Olsson *et al.* [10] who indicated that family support still remains the primary social support as compared to peers. There are several reasons as to why this happens. First, surprisingly although these at-risk young people live in the outskirts of metropolitan Kuala Lumpur which reflects modern lifestyle, these at-risk young still uphold strong sense of family bonding which is a prominent thing within the eastern culture. Second, parenting style might also be a contributing factor whereby since these at-risk young people live in high rise flats and safety is considered as a major issue. Thus, parents might be more protective of their children to ensure maximum safety.

Further analyses also demonstrated that peer support, self-esteem and neighbourhood safety did not predict resilience. Surprisingly, the external factors, neighbourhood safety and peer support did not predict resilience. A neighbourhood which perceived as safe did not seem to provide an ultimate protected environment for young people to build their resilience skills. The results also showed that neighbourhood safety does not relate significantly to resilience. This shows that maybe insecure life experiences in an unsafe neighbourhood also did not give young people the chance to develop their adaptive skills. Hence, it seems young people were not affected by the community at the macro level. In fact, self endurance is determined by self integrity and family environment at the micro level. This implies that external factor is not the key to promote resiliency among at-risk young people.

CONCLUSION

This research gives an insight on the limited research on the protective factors of the resilience of urban at-risk young people in Malaysia. Among the five protective factors tested for resilience, integrity and family support was found to be the most prominent factors used by at-risk young people living in Pantai Dalam. Taken together, internal assets and family institution contributes to at-risk young people's internal defense system. Thus youth and social policy makers should look into the educational

programs in enhancing self-development among young people and healthy family development among their families. This research recommends that future research should study other external factors which might affect levels of resilience and also explore the quality of family support and reveal the quality facets of resilience.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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