

DISTINGUISHING DIFFERENCES IN PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE AMONG CANADIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT

As part of an 11-country qualitative study of resilience among at-risk youth, 19 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadian adolescents were interviewed. In this paper, we report on the Canadian youths' culturally specific and generic strategies to cope with adversity. Findings suggest that the youths' resilience, or capacity to cope under stress, reflects different degrees of access to 7 mental health-enhancing experiences (we term these "tensions"): access to material resources; access to supportive relationships; development of a desirable personal identity; experiences of power and control; adherence to cultural traditions; experiences of social justice; and experiences of a sense of cohesion with others.

The design of multinational health studies can unintentionally contribute to an assumption of homogeneity among country-specific samples. In the comparison of several different geographically located populations, broad indicators of difference such as political structure, access to health care, and level of social development are often used to make generalizations about well-being across a national population. In this paper we will use the Canadian data from an 11-country qualitative investigation of resilience to show that such assumptions overlook important culturally and contextually embedded aspects of healthy functioning within a country specific population. Nineteen Canadian youth were part of an international sample of 89 at-risk young people thought by their communities to

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be coping well (Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, et al., 2007). Findings suggest that there may be as much diversity in patterns of resilience found among youth living in geographic proximity to one another as there is between youth on different continents (Ungar, 2008; Ungar, Clark, Kwong, Cameron, & Makhnach, 2005). Our intent in this paper is to show that: (a) differences between participants in a single country can be large and assumptions of sameness based on geographic borders theoretically unsound; and (b) trans-border themes common to a multi-site study may remain relevant to a specific national group, though the specificity of participants' social ecologies will influence how themes identified internationally are experienced locally.

It is not uncommon that international studies hypothesize between country differences in indicators of well-being (see Hjermadal, 2007) and assume homogeneity within a country population. Our work suggests otherwise. Case-by-case comparisons of even quite similar youth demonstrate unique aspects of how resilience as an outcome is achieved.

DEFINING RESILIENCE

By explicitly designing this research to examine resilience across cultures, our goal was to understand resilience as more than the "ordinary magic" (Masten, 2001) of lives lived well. We speculated that resilience was not just an individual's capacity to cope with adversity but was also the capacity of the person's community to provide the health resources necessary to nurture and sustain well-being, providing individuals opportunities to access health resources in culturally relevant ways (Ungar, 2005; Peters, 2005; Seccombe, 2002). Thus, this research has contributed to a more comprehensive definition of resilience: first, the capacity of individuals to *navigate* to resources that sustain well-being; second, the capacity of individuals' physical and social ecologies to *provide* these resources; and third, the capacity of individuals, their families, and communities to *negotiate* culturally meaningful ways for resources to be shared. It is this dual process of navigation toward available resources and negotiation for resources to be provided in ways valued by young people that implicates both individuals and their environments in a dynamic process leading to well-being.

LITERATURE

Early resilience research focused on resilient individuals and their capacities as invulnerable children (Anthony, 1987). A second wave of researchers examined protective mechanisms that predicted resilience, seeking to understand how these buffered the effects of risk on children (Garmezy, 1983; Rutter, 1987). A third wave of researchers, such as those at Search Institute in the US (Lerner & Benson, 2003) and Resiliency Canada (Donnon & Hammond, 2007), are examining resilience-related resources that affect children population-wide. The focus has shifted from seeking to understand the mechanisms that prevent risk from changing a child's growth trajectory to how best to build developmental assets in children and their communities. These assets are being shown to fortify children against negative outcomes associated with unfortunate events.

A fourth wave of resilience research is breaking conceptual ground, demonstrating the need to understand resilience as an artefact of both individuals' capacities to navigate their way to health

resources and their communities' capacity to provide those resources in *culturally meaningful* ways (see Boyden & Mann, 2005; Wong, Wong, & Scott, 2006). Resilience and, more broadly, the outcomes associated with good coping are coming to be seen as the result of what communities define as healthy and socially acceptable functioning for their children (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003).

Understanding behaviour as adaptive in particular contexts is discussed in a number of related qualitative studies by Panter-Brick (2002), McAdam-Crisp, Aptekar, and Kironyo (2005) and Felsman (1989), who have conducted research with street children in both Western and non-Western settings. Descriptions of non-conventional lives lived on the street illustrate the capacity of children to overcome adversity by exploiting the available opportunities to secure the human and physical resources necessary to support health. Child labour, early home-leaving, and even prostitution, can be unfortunate "choices" made by youth who, in specific contexts, have no other choices available to them. Literature such as this, and other related studies by Hagan and McCarthy (1997) have shown this same pattern in the coping strategies of vulnerable youth. What looks like dysfunction to outsiders is often a child's only solution when health resources are scarce.

Contextual variability in studies of resilience also extend to family and community attachment patterns and to how social and emotional support is provided. Studies show that categorical classification of patterns of behaviour as either *resilience-enhancing* or *risk-exposing* is not sustainable when children's lives are explored in detail through their own narratives. For example, a study of factors predicting resilience among Native American adolescents in the southwestern United States (Waller, Okamoto, Miles, & Hurdle, 2003) used qualitative interviews with 32 male and female youth between the ages of 12 and 15. Findings show that changes in cousin and sibling social networks played a key role in children's decisions to use or abstain from using drugs and alcohol. In a culture that emphasizes "interdependence, co-operation, and mutual assistance" as core values, such relationships were shown to be critical to value definition despite exposure to the broader social context of individualism prevalent among American youth. This is not to say, however, that parents of these Native teens found it appropriate to influence their children's choice of peers. Quite the contrary. Waller et al. (2003) show that both abstinence and the use of drugs are promoted simultaneously by the parents of these youth.

Studies such as these suggest that coping strategies, the provision of health resources, and peer and family relationships all vary across populations even among youth raised in relatively similar Western-style democracies (Ungar, 2005, 2008; Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005). Therefore, the definition of resilience may be culturally and contextually referent (Boyden & Mann, 2005; McCubbin et al., 1998). In Canada, this cultural and contextual sensitivity is evident in the resilience-related writing of Peters, Leadbeater, and McMahan (2005), Ungar (2005), Wong and Wong (2006), and Flynn, Dudding, and Barber (2006).

METHODS

Nationally, research sites included Halifax, Winnipeg (two sites, one with urban Aboriginal youth, the other with non-Aboriginal youth in residential care), and Sheshatshiu, an Innu First Nations community in Labrador. These communities were part of the international study and provided convenient

access to a variable population of youth coping with diverse personal challenges and social ecologies. By design, the research methodology had built into it respect for cultural pluralism, using an iterative series of team meetings to ensure that the design choices fit with each cultural group (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2005).

Local Advisory Committees (LACs) in each community comprised local members of the research team and service providers from local community and government agencies. Reflecting the principles of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) LACs nominated youth participants to the study based on three selection criteria: the young person must be at an age where he or she was making the transition between childhood and adulthood (in all cases, youth ranged in age between 15 and 18); the young person has been exposed to at least three risk factors thought by community members to pose significant risk to youth in their community (risks included family breakdown, poverty, cultural disintegration, multiple relocations, being a child in care, drug and alcohol addictions, discrimination based on race, gender, or sexual orientation, and mental illness, their own or that of their parents); and finally, the youth were known by members of their communities to be “coping well.” Because the purpose of this research was to discern community-specific aspects of successful adaptation (resilience), it was difficult to predetermine the criteria for successful coping. Although risks were fairly easy to nominate, defining a child as “coping well” required a subjective assessment by members of the LAC. Committees typically agreed upon a list of conditions that signalled successful coping in the context of their community, such as attachment to school, reciprocal relationships with family and peers, and socially acceptable strategies to secure housing and food. The focus at this stage of the study was more on individual coping than the resources provided to the youth. In keeping with the purpose of grounded theory research to develop a substantive theory based on variability in the sample, LACs were asked to nominate youth with unique coping strategies.

The 19 participants came from three communities. Halifax provided access to 11 non-Aboriginal youth (6 males, 5 females); two Aboriginal youth came from Labrador (1 male, 1 female); and one non-Aboriginal (1 female) and five Aboriginal (1 male, 4 female) youth were interviewed in Winnipeg. Members of the research team observed youth in each setting and conducted site visits. The data collection also included focus groups and ongoing consultations with the LACs.

All youth were interviewed once with an open-ended interview guide based on nine “catalyst” questions developed by the international team. These 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?”

Members of the team were asked to review the coding of one or more interviews sent to them electronically. Analysis and data collection occurred concurrently. Face-to-face discussions in Halifax followed data collection, allowing the entire team to assist in the interpretation of the data. As the researchers sought to develop substantive theory that could inform practice (a precondition of our community partners having agreed to participate in the study) we employed the post-positivist techniques of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Our intent was to employ a flexible set of tools as discussed by Charmaz (2006) to “construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). These methods were later supplemented with a constructionist orientation to discourse and analysis in order to discern common narrative elements between participants (Rodwell, 1998). This extension of the methods reflects the advice of both Strauss and Corbin (1990) and Charmaz (2006) to demonstrate flexibility in the application of grounded theory techniques. Our analysis of the data moved from the concrete experiences of what the participants told us to higher levels of abstraction that could explain the social processes common to the participants.

Data were analyzed first using a constant comparative method in order to generate a plausible explanation for the data. Open coding of the data generated a long list of themes highlighting similarities and differences in the youths’ narratives. As patterns emerged we wrote interpretive memos and juxtaposed data from individual interviews with multiple interviews. These analytic techniques allowed us to search for exceptions and understand the intensity of experience and the relationship between different experiences. Eventually, a comprehensive set of themes emerged between team members coding the data. A second level of coding was then undertaken. Axial coding allowed us to review our coding and the raw data and interpret both for connections between categories and processes used by the youth to sustain well-being.

QSR NVivo software (Qualitative Solutions & Research, 1997) was used to manage the voluminous data and facilitate identification of prominent themes and concepts. In common with other studies of resilience, we coded for concepts like altruism; confidence; criminal activity; peer continuity; relationships with peers; mentors; level of substance use; future thinking; and attributions (with sub-categories such as blaming others, self-blame, “happens to everyone,” and “just happens”). We also coded for concepts more unique to this study such as awareness of political issues; definitions of health; equality; government support; modesty; resistance; sexual identity; culture (with sub-categories such as challenging culture, accepting culture, and bad behaviour); and success defined (with sub-categories such as internal barriers to success, intrinsic motivators for success, extrinsic motivators for success, and external barriers to success). Our final list of codes included 83 items. A process of dialogical reciprocity (feeding back of results as they emerged) between team members and youth participants ensured the trustworthiness of our analysis and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

FINDINGS

No single pattern of adaptive behaviour could be identified across the entire international sample of youth or among the Canadian participants. Team members did, however, notice the relevance of seven themes common to all participants. After much consultation between team members, the concept of “tensions” was agreed upon as a way of describing these themes. Terms like “themes,” “factors,” and “aspects of resilience” were all rejected because they failed to capture the conceptual complexity of what the participants had told us. Specifically, youths’ resilience, or capacity to cope under stress, reflects different degrees of access to seven mental health-enhancing experiences. We use the term tensions allegorically to draw attention to the way youth must negotiate a balance between all seven tensions simultaneously. The resolution of these tensions is a dynamic process more akin to what we now understand about ecology (non-linear, non-causal relationships between variables) than outdated models of cybernetics (with their implied homeostasis and predictable relationships) (Ungar, 2002). While these tensions (see Table One) were in evidence among the entire sample of 89 youth interviewed internationally, they manifested in unique patterns for each participant, whether those participants shared a national border or not. In this regard, there was as much variability within the Canadian sample as there was between the Canadian and international samples.

Table 1
Seven Tensions

Tension	Explanation
1. Access to material resources	Availability of financial, educational, medical, and employment assistance and/or opportunities, and access to food, clothing and shelter
2. Access to supportive relationships	Relationships with significant others, peers, and adults within one’s family and community
3. Development of a desirable personal identity	Desirable sense of one’s self as having a personal and collective sense of purpose, ability for self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, beliefs, and values, including spiritual and religious identification
4. Experiences of power and control	Experiences of caring for one’s self and others, the ability to affect change in one’s social and physical environment in order to access health resources
5. Adherence to cultural traditions	Adherence to, or knowledge of, one’s local and/or global cultural practices, values, and beliefs
6. Experiences of social justice	Experiences related to finding a meaningful role in one’s community that brings with it acceptance and social equality
7. Experiences of a sense of cohesion with others	Balancing one’s personal interests with a sense of responsibility to the greater good; feeling a part of something larger than one’s self socially and spiritually

While youth valued all seven aspects of their lives, it was the meaningful resolution of these tensions simultaneously that brought youth a perception of themselves, and perceptions of them by others (peers, family, teachers, community members), as resilient. The data show the participants making strategic decisions about how to deal with each tension depending on how all seven aspects of well-being are negotiated. According to the participants, any change in how one of the tensions is resolved will affect the nature of all seven. We provide below a brief description of each of the seven tensions.

Tension One: Access to Material Resources

In this study, material resources include financial assistance, education, food, shelter and clothing, medical care, and employment. How these are provided and the degree to which each is *expected* varies by context as does perception of what is and is not a reasonably well-met need. In the Canadian context one young non-Aboriginal woman spoke of her material condition, commenting,

I was very poor when I was younger and I didn't go to school as much as I should've and there was a lot of criminal activity going on. There was all the drug usage. It was a bad environment to live in....There wasn't really much there. There wasn't as many resources that I could go to. Like I couldn't go out and join a club or whatever. It was really hard for me especially because I was in a very bad environment, poor, all that kind of stuff.

Tension Two: Access to Supportive Relationships

Relationships with significant others, including family members, teachers, mentors, community members, coaches, peers, and intimate partners were reported as a central component of coping with crisis and adversity. These relationships were often characterized as the vehicle through which a sense of mastery over crisis was achieved. Such relationships offer emotional comfort, experiences of trust, a sense of belonging, love, caring, and compassion. For example, a Halifax girl (in reference to her disclosure of sexual abuse) said,

I have a lot of things I'd never told anybody about. A lot of things. And as soon as I got those things out to someone I could trust it felt like such a relief that somebody knew what I was going through, that somebody understood.

Tension Three: Development of a Desirable Personal Identity

The youth in this study discussed identity issues related to life purpose, self-appraisal, aspirations, beliefs, values, and strengths. Related to this, many of their narratives contained accounts of mutually dependent experiences, in which they fluctuated between independence and dependence on others, and the implications of these fluctuations on how they see themselves. An Aboriginal girl from Sheshatshiu discussed at length her competing needs for familial support and individuation:

[My parents] think that I am setting myself up for educational failure. I am not that concerned about school because I seem to be passing in all my courses. I think they want me to be a geek or something. It seems as if they are on my case all the time. . . They do say good things about other things I do such as writing. They think I have a creative mind. . . My family gets disappointed when I have broken rules or told lies about another sibling. They also take interest in most things I'm involved in.

Tension Four: Experiences of Power and Control

Power and control in this study came to mean a youth's self-reliance and capacity to take care of her- or himself, including having the confidence to affect change in the world to ensure material resources are acquired and relationship needs met. For example, a boy from Labrador said, "I can solve problems pretty fast. Just think it through a couple of times, make sure it's the right choice. Talk to myself." A girl from the same community said, "I have decided that my life will only exist if I want it to. It's totally up to me if I want to pursue a career or stay on welfare all my life...I think having or adopting new philosophies can help you stay positive and on top of the world." Such quotes demonstrate the intersection between a number of themes, and nested coding (one code found within another) was common during our analysis. Though quoted here as examples of young people finding power and control in their lives, linked to these experiences are aspects of identity, relationships, and the availability of instrumental supports.

Tension Five: Adherence to Cultural Traditions

"Americanized" global cultural dominance can mean that a child's more immediate cultural group identification is obscured. In this study, Aboriginal elders and youth clearly distinguished between local and global aspects of culture. Innu elders in Labrador, for example, worry that parents who resist "white" ways of living but do not provide their children with traditional Innu culture are putting their children at great risk of not belonging anywhere. In contrast, local cultural adherence was evident in the youth narratives as aspects of ethnic, family, or community identification. Youth spoke of their heritage and traditions in ways that were highly specific to their context. They also spoke of how they rejected these aspects of their lives when they experienced them as oppressive.

Tension Six: Experiences of Social Justice

As a group, the Canadian participants had experienced prejudice because of their race, sexual orientation or gender, been victims of violence and sexual abuse, or lived in conditions of poverty and exclusion. Feelings of social justice resulted from experiences of resistance, solidarity, and belief in a spiritual power or meaning for these experiences. A young Halifax man who self-identifies as gay talked about the prejudice he experiences from his family and community:

Basically in order to grow up well you need to find a way to be yourself, yet fit into a mould of everyone else, because if you don't you're going to be alone, and that isn't good for growing up well . . . I got to the point where I didn't care anymore. I was going to be who I am and was going to live in this world from my point of view, and if it didn't fit with their [his family members'] point of view, well that's too bad. I'm not a societal reject. I'm not a criminal. I am still a person. I'm just different, but that's not a bad thing.

Tension Seven: Experiences of a Sense of Cohesion with Others

Balancing one's personal interests with a sense of responsibility to one's community and to the greater good is captured under the concept of cohesion. The concept of cohesion in this study relates to

how a young person engages with others appropriately according to cultural and community expectations while at the same time preserving a place for the “I.” For example, a female participant from Labrador talked about the attention she pays simultaneously to herself, her family, and her community following the suicide of a family member:

My cousin who was only 13 years old committed suicide outside his home. . . I didn’t know how to react or respond . . . 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.

Within such quotes are found themes of continuity over time and identification by an individual youth with his or her community’s well-being.

HOMOGENEITY VS. HETEROGENEITY IN CANADIAN YOUTH NARRATIVES

While it was possible to isolate examples of each of the seven tensions and demonstrate the variety of responses related to each, the more significant finding from the research is the lack of evidence for any one preferred pathway to resilience. Girls and boys from one cultural group in one country (Canada), living in one city (Halifax), demonstrated unique patterns to their navigation through all seven tensions. A case example from Halifax is presented to illustrate the intersection between the tensions.

Case Study One: Pauline

Pauline is a Caucasian, 16-year-old adolescent who grew up in Halifax, Canada. Pauline’s cultural context therefore reflects dominant Canadian values and beliefs that emphasize individualism, define “normal” family functioning as including two parents, and consider “appropriate” roles for men and women. Despite these values, she lives at a local group home facility for youth in care because of the abuse she experienced when at home. She moved to the facility at age 15. This has been her first time under child welfare guardianship. Pauline recounts a childhood marked by inconsistent parenting, violence, and poverty—what she calls “a hard life.” She said she knew her mother did not have the financial means to provide materially for her and her brother and sister. In this regard, Pauline identifies difficulty in the availability of, and accessibility to, *material resources* as a challenge to her resilience. She negotiates this tension by recognizing that her experience helped her not take “stuff” for granted, by appreciating what she has, and by taking responsibility for meeting her own needs. She has internalized the cultural norms of personal responsibility and self-care.

Liberation from the *social injustices* she has faced, namely poverty and physical abuse from her mother, seems to have come from her sense of *cohesion*, which for Pauline is expressed through a belief that there is a God who decides for her what lessons in life she must learn. As she says,

When I was younger I used to be really religious. We used to go to church. I am still religious now but I have my own kind of church kind of thing like I don’t go to church but when I need help, I do talk to God and it’s like, when I want something to happen or not to happen, I ask Him, so I kind of have my own kind of church and you know what? This is kind of bad but, in my mind, I have like a friendship with God.

This brief excerpt from Pauline's interview not only shows a sense of cohesion with something larger than herself, it shows evidence of one way she successfully finds *power and control*. Later in the interview she constructs her identity in opposition to the dominant cultural beliefs regarding male-female relationships and locates her sense of power and control within her statement of refusal to "live off a man." Most notably, though, Pauline has survived by balancing her need for protection with her need for a relationship with her mother. Eleven months prior to the interview she identified herself as a "child in need of protection" and had herself removed from her mother's home.

I put myself in the group home....I said I needed to do good for myself and even though I have a big heart, I will always put myself first. . . I don't try and rely on people to care about me.

By this act of self-referral, Pauline shows how experiences related to accessibility to material resources, identity, power and control, social justice, and relationships are interwoven.

DISCUSSION

Our findings challenge common understandings of resilience as a predictable set of developmental processes and positive outcomes among youth who face significant amounts of adversity. Although there are common themes in the narratives of participants, the dynamic resolution of those themes demand a more fluid interpretation of resilience. There is support in the data for the definition we proposed: that resilience is the outcome of navigations to health resources and the provision of health resources by one's social ecology. Resilience results when individuals are able to negotiate for resources to be provided in culturally and contextually meaningful ways. Reflecting on the results of a study of youth suicide among First Nations communities in British Columbia that he helped conduct, Lalonde (2006) notes that children avoid self-harming behaviours when their communities provide them with the culturally relevant resources they need. Lalonde's work, like our own, demonstrates support for a definition of resilience that acknowledges the dynamic nature of the relationship between individuals, resources, and culture/context. While each of the seven tensions may contribute to a youth's experience of well-being, it is in our grounded understanding of how the tensions merge and overlap, resist and pull on each other that a more complete portrait of how youth navigate and negotiate for health resources is discovered.

Our findings suggest that youth find creative ways to cope, compromising to find a balance between the resources that sustain resilience. Relationships with parents may be abandoned and new ones found that bolster identity better or offer more power and control. Dominant culture may be avoided in favour of community or family values when doing so is part of an overall strategy to feel a sense of cohesion with others. Based on these results, we believe it is highly unlikely that a concept like resilience can be shown to be associated with unidirectional causal processes or a set of fixed indicators for any youth population, whether they share a national identity or not.

IMPLICATIONS

Future research will need to investigate the transferability of our results to other populations. Still, our findings demonstrate the need to reconsider what investigators use as indicators of resilience

and how those who intervene tailor their interventions to the needs of specific populations. Greater sensitivity to culture and context is indicated by our work. Our findings also indicate a need to address more than one risk factor at a time (such as threatened relationships with parents and poverty). The more comprehensive and coordinated the intervention (addressing all seven tensions at once), the more likely youth are to find ways to adapt positively (Barber, 2006; Peters, 2005).

Furthermore, our findings indicate that program outcomes are more likely to capture experiences associated with resilience when cultural and contextual differences are built into the design. A static set of homogeneous outcomes as benchmarks for successful psychosocial development will not likely capture the dynamic decision-making processes youth employ to get their needs met (Boyden & Mann, 2005). Whether we are speaking about populations in Western and non-Western contexts, or a single Western context like Canada, such homogeneity in perspective is unlikely to capture the nuanced variability in young people's patterns of successful coping. Speaking about tensions rather than either protective factors or protective processes may allow us to better represent the lived experience of resilient youth.

These findings, therefore, point to the need to contextualize programming for children and youth. For example, educational programs that honour students' local cultural adherence, as well as address the social injustices they face, help to make education more accessible and relevant for African Canadian students (Dei, Massuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997). We suggest that interventions that address more of the seven tensions simultaneously are likely to be those that are most effective. Programs that simultaneously promote culturally embedded and meaningful expressions of power and control, identity, relationships, and cohesion are likely to help young people navigate to health resources effectively.

RÉSUMÉ

Une étude qualitative de la résilience chez les jeunes à risque a été menée dans 11 pays. Dans le volet canadien, on a interviewé 19 adolescents et adolescentes autochtones et allochtones. Dans cet article, nous présentons les stratégies, tant culturellement spécifiques que généraux, employées par ces jeunes face à l'adversité. Les résultats indiquent que la résilience—le coping face au stress—est liée à l'accès à 7 expériences qui favorisent la santé mentale (que nous qualifions de « tensions »): l'accès aux ressources matérielles, l'accès aux rapports utiles, le développement d'une identité personnelle souhaitable, les expériences du pouvoir et du contrôle, l'adhésion aux traditions culturelles, les expériences de la justice sociale et les expériences de cohésion par rapport à autrui.

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