

## CHAPTER 9

# Promoting Resilience in the Inner City

## *Families as a Venue for Protection, Support, and Opportunity*

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The conditions in the inner city create formidable impediments to healthy development. As a setting for children's development, the inner city offers scarce, and often unreliable, resources and frequent threats, many of which may be beyond a child's or family's control (Tolan, Sherrod, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2004). The multiplicity and frequency of threats can seriously harm many children and families. Children living in these environments are at increased risk for most social and psychological problems (Children's Defense Fund, 1991), and the cumulative effect is to seriously hamper healthy and safe development. Given this ecological risk, we explore how to promote healthy or resilient development of inner-city children. Based on the available research, we address a set of issues pertinent to understanding risk and resilience of inner-city youth, with a particular focus on the family as an important venue for promoting positive development among children.

Promoting positive development within the inner city rests on remarkably similar premises as those helpful for all children and families in society. Yet, at the same time, the unique strains, challenges, and impediments in the inner city require us to simultaneously consider

important distinctions and variations in risk factors when formulating approaches to positive development.

We begin this chapter by outlining the unique developmental context of inner-city neighborhoods, followed by a review of the current literature on resilience among children living in the inner city. We then offer a developmental-ecological model to help guide research. We address differences in outcomes for children and youth living in inner-city neighborhoods, including the mechanisms through which more positive adaptation might occur and those that are promising focus areas for prevention. Finally, we outline our suggestions for future research and discuss the implications for intervention and prevention.

### THE INNER CITY AS A DEVELOPMENTAL CONTEXT

Recently, there has been resurgent interest in evaluating the effects on youth development of community characteristics, particularly the characteristics of poor urban communities (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebenov, & Sealand, 1993; Coulton, Korbin, Su, & Chow, 1995; Sampson, 1997). Much of the research has been spurred by the work of William Julius Wilson. In *The Truly Disadvantaged*, Wilson (1987) argued that the deindustrialization of the U.S. economy—the shift of jobs from cities to suburbs and the flight of the minority middle-class from the inner cities—led to increasingly concentrated poverty in urban areas. The number of neighborhoods with poverty rates that exceed 40 percent, a threshold definition of extreme poverty or underclass neighborhoods, rose precipitously over the intervening decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Wilson argued that as a result, people living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty had become isolated from job networks, mainstream institutions, and role models and that this isolation could be linked to a number of problems, including school dropout and the proliferation of single-parent families. With this increased focus on the characteristics of inner-city life came interest in understanding what this context meant for children's development (e.g., see Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997).

There are obvious distinctions between urban, rural, and suburban contexts, with equally distinct implications for children's development. There is also variation *within* each of these broad types of settings that is important to consider. We focus on inner-city neighborhoods and distinguish these from other types of urban neighborhoods, particularly those occupied predominately by residents falling into the middle to

upper socioeconomic status, but also from those that are more simply “poor” (Crane, 1991; Wilson, 1987). As noted by Wilson (1987), inner-city neighborhoods are characterized by high concentrations of families living in poverty (greater than 40%), high crime rates, low rates of owner-occupied housing, more public housing, and a higher proportion of single-headed households. Urban poor (but not inner-city) neighborhoods are also economically impoverished compared with most communities (e.g., 20% to 40% of the population lives below poverty) and have elevated levels of most social problems, but they are distinguished from inner-city neighborhoods by the range of income levels, the extent of owner-occupied housing, business investment levels, and greater access to resources for social and economic problems. Although both types of impoverished urban neighborhoods can be linked to increased risk for most developmental problems, researchers have contended that life in the inner city has more pronounced effects on development and other outcomes for children and families (Garbarino & Sherman, 1980; Garbarino, Dubrow, Kostelny, & Pardo, 1992; Wilson, 1987). Evidence is accumulating that supports this contention. For example, Tolan, Henry, Guerra, Huesmann, VanAcker, & Eron (2004) found that rates for all types of psychopathology among children living in inner-city neighborhoods were above national rates, while this was not the case for other urban poor neighborhoods. Aggression and delinquency rates, for example, were 2.5 and 2.8 times greater, respectively, than the national rate in the inner-city communities. Similarly, Crane (1991) reported a sharp increase in risk of school dropout and teen pregnancy for adolescents living in inner-city neighborhoods over that found in other urban communities. These findings suggest a particularly risky developmental ecology associated with inner-city residence.

Characteristics of inner-city communities linked to increased risk include exposure to high rates of community violence (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 1996; Richters & Martinez, 1993), absence of economic and social resources (McLoyd, 1989; Sampson & Laub, 1994), family disruption (e.g., higher percentage of female-headed households), economic homogeneity (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993), and lack of neighborhood support and involvement (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Families living in inner-city neighborhoods are more likely to be headed by single-parents and to face underemployment, irregular employment, and economic stress. It is more likely that children living in these neighborhoods have adolescent parents, incarcerated family members, and a parent with alcohol or drug problems. In addition, families are more likely to live in substandard housing, and their children are more likely to attend inadequate schools (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997).

In addition to the specific stressors associated with living in the inner city, families living in urban environments are at increased risk for other life stressors, such as the loss of a friend or family member, significant health problems in the family, or separation or loss of a parent. They are more likely to be burdened by chronic and serious health problems (Hernandez, 1993), with less access to and familiarity with health care services (Aday, 1993). Women in lower socioeconomic classes are more likely to experience the illness or death of children, the absence of husbands, and major losses in childhood that may make coping with new losses even more difficult (Belle, 1982; McLoyd, 1989). Even when income is controlled, families headed by single mothers are more likely than two-parent families to experience stressful life events, such as unemployment and changes in income, job, residence, and household composition (McLanahan, 1983; McLoyd, 1989). High levels of stress are associated with greater risk of anxiety, depression, and other health problems. The psychological distress associated with such stress can undermine the quality of parenting and family relationships (McLoyd, 1989; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). The prevalence of risk factors and associated problems across residents in the neighborhood may exacerbate the impact of life events.

Children living in economically disadvantaged communities are also exposed to significantly more stressful life events than children living in other settings. In one study, children in inner-city communities experienced the same number of stressful events in 1 year as other children experience over their entire lifetime (Attar, Guerra, & Tolan, 1994). The greater number and types of stressors, combined with characteristics of urban environments, provide a particularly challenging set of circumstances under which families must manage the daily needs of their children.

The bleak portrayal suggests a life fraught with ever-present harm, impediments, and limited resources for successful development. However, many children in inner-city neighborhoods function at typical or "normal" levels for our society. Despite social and economic disconnection, many families protect, nurture, and support their children toward conventional success and integration into the larger society. What accounts for these differences in response to risk among families and what factors promote positive child development in these settings?

## **RESILIENCE AMONG CHILDREN LIVING IN THE INNER CITY**

The focus of this book is on resilience, a term receiving more scrutiny in recent years (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). For example,

**Table 9-1** Percentage Reporting Exposure to Violence and Victimization

Item	Last Year	Lifetime
Family member robbed or attacked	16.5	33.3
Other than family member robbed or attacked	23.5	33.2
Seen someone beaten up	54.0	67.7
Seen someone shot or killed	15.8	22.5
Witnessed other violent crime	5.6	12.6
Close friend killed	5.6	8.8
Victim of nonviolent crime	5.6	10.5
Victim of violent crime	6.5	10.5
Victim of sexual assault	0.4	1.1

Perry (1997) argues that simply because children may be malleable (able to adjust to changing circumstances) does not mean they are necessarily resilient (able to develop despite negative events or to recover readily). As the research on resilience develops, more are calling for incorporating concepts of development and successive developmental influences in efforts to understand children's resilience (Leadbeater, Schellenbach, Maton, & Dodgen, 2004; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), such as recognizing that functioning at any given point may depend on prior experience; current support for healthy functioning; and the pattern of support, opportunity, and effective developmental training within the child's environment over time (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 2003). We would add to this the importance of considering the setting within which a child develops and his or her social relationships as salient and ongoing influences on development and risk.

In considering development within the inner city, it is likely unrealistic to assume that children will be unaffected by exposure to chronic and pervasive stressors such as economic strain, overtaxed schools, and community violence (Bell, Flay, & Paikoff, 2002). For example, Table 9-1 lists violence exposure for our Chicago Youth Development Study sample of inner-city adolescents. It should be noted that this is a sample with overrepresentation of more aggressive youth by design. Nevertheless, the data are consistent with other inner-city samples (e.g., Attar et al., 1994), suggesting very high rates of serious violence exposure.

The chronic threats to healthy development and the requirements of adapting to conditions in the inner city may also create longer-term impediments to success as one moves toward adulthood (e.g., educational achievement and employment skills) (Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1996). Therefore, it may be more informative in developmental research to expand the focus beyond current functioning to include a longer-term perspective, specifically as it relates to coping, resources, and opportunities

that can promote positive adaptation and long-term functioning (Bell et al., 2002; Tolan et al., 2004). There has simply not been enough research to yet understand both the limits of positive adaptation and the extent to which positive outcomes along multiple dimensions are even possible (Garbarino, 2001).

## DEVELOPMENTAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

Our work, and the work of many others in this area, is guided by a developmental-ecological model of risk and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A central tenet of developmental-ecological theory is that individual development is influenced by the ongoing qualities of the social settings in which a child lives or participates and the extent and nature of the interaction between these settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1988). Family functioning, peer relationships, schools, communities, and larger societal influences (e.g., media) affect child development. Interactions among these settings and factors also affect risk and development. Thus, an important implication of developmental-ecological theory is that the impacts of major developmental influences, such as family functioning, are dependent, at least in some part, on the sociological characteristics of the communities in which youth and families reside. How families function or how they parent may differ depending on the neighborhood in which they live, and the same level of family functioning may carry different risks depending on neighborhood residence (Furstenberg, 1993; Gorman-Smith et al., 2000; Sampson, 1997).

A developmental-ecological model also views time as an important consideration, recognizing children's capacity for change over time. The same factor may have a different impact depending on the age of the child. Thus, risk and risk factors must be considered within the developmental trajectory.

We outline this perspective because in considering factors that promote resilience among inner-city children, it is important to recognize that each level of system is related to another. It is particularly important to consider how neighborhood characteristics and related social processes can frame family functioning and its impact on child development. In addition, we are suggesting a focus on family functioning that includes not only the traditional considerations of parenting practices and the quality of family relationships, but also family problem solving, coping, and management of developmental and ecological challenges. In Figure 9-1, we illustrate a conceptual model of how families cope with the stressors of inner-city life. This model has four components, each with multiple dimensions that may be important to consider. For

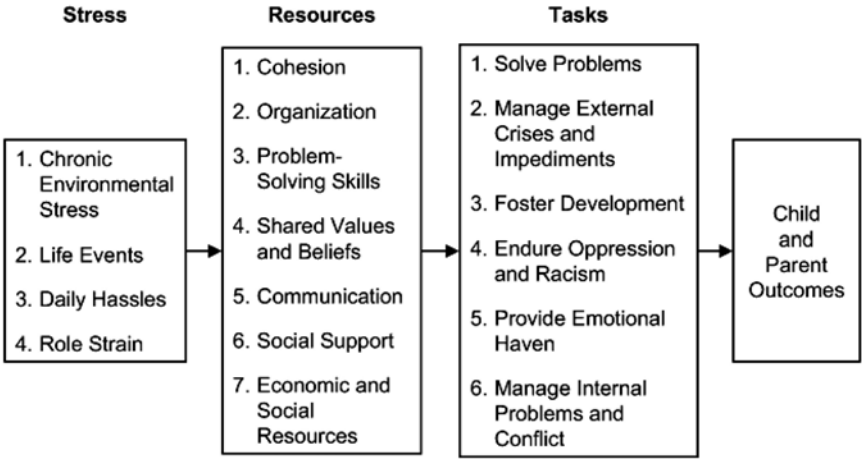


Figure 9-1 Conceptual model of family resilience promotion in the inner city.

example, stressors may be distinguished in form and likely impact as *chronic environmental stress*, such as poverty or community violence; *life events*, such as death of loved ones; *daily hassles*, such as difficulty getting to and from school or the grocery store; and *role strain*, such as conflict between expectations for behavior and attitudes locally and those at school or work settings. Also outlined are various coping resources used by families that relate to child (and parent) outcomes. This theorized process illustrates how the family’s context and its management of typical challenges in a stressful ecology might help explain child functioning over time. The model also emphasizes the family as a central system among neighborhood effects and as a focus of interest in resilience among inner-city children. Readers are referred to Tolan and Gorman-Smith (1997) for a more detailed discussion.

**THE INTERTWINED ROLE  
OF NEIGHBORHOOD SOCIAL PROCESSES  
AND COMMUNITY STRUCTURAL  
CHARACTERISTICS IN CHILD  
DEVELOPMENT**

Recent work has suggested that it is not just community structural characteristics (such as poverty, economic investment, heterogeneity, or crime rates) that are important in understanding risk, but also the social processes or organization within the neighborhood (Leventhal &

Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson et al., 1997). Social organization is reflected in felt social support and cohesion among neighbors, sense of belonging to the community, supervision and control of children and adolescents by other adults in the community, and participation in formal and voluntary organizations. Although the extent of the direct connection between neighborhood social organization and structural characteristics is unknown, researchers theorize that a community's structural barriers can impede neighborhood social organization, and minimal social organization, in turn, can increase various risks among youth (Elliott et al., 1996; Sampson et al., 1997).

This work suggests that a community's influence on development should be considered at two levels: the structure of the community (e.g., mobility, political economy, heterogeneity) and its social organization or network of relationships and organization. Perhaps the most influential study on this topic is the report by Sampson et al. (1997), who applied an elegant multilevel sampling procedure to evaluate these relations. They found that the relation of community structural characteristics to crime was mediated, in part, by neighborhood social processes. Sampson et al. (1997) labeled these processes "collective efficacy." Collective efficacy refers to the extent of social connection within the neighborhood combined with the degree of informal social control (the extent to which residents monitor the behavior of others with the goal of supervising and monitoring children and maintaining public order). This research suggests, by extension, that any attempt to understand protective processes should include neighborhood social processes. Tolan, Gorman-Smith, and Henry (2003a), for example, found that although community structural characteristics (e.g., poverty level, crime level, business investment) had some direct effects on youth risk for violence, these structural characteristics were mediated, in part, by neighborhood processes. Notably, the impact of these neighborhood processes on risk was primarily through family functioning.

Studies suggest that among communities with similar structural dimensions (e.g., poverty), there are significant differences in neighborhood social organization and networks that affect how families function and how parents manage their children (Furstenberg, 1993; Garbarino & Sherman, 1980; Sampson & Laub, 1994). For example, in a study of parenting among single mothers in poor, urban neighborhoods, Furstenberg (1993) found that those residing in the most dangerous neighborhood adapted by isolating themselves and their families from those around them. Although this served to increase the mother's sense of safety, it also cut her off from potential social supports. Similarly, Jarrett (1997) found that parents in poor neighborhoods often use "bounding" techniques that restrict children to their homes and limit access to



neighborhood influences, particularly peers. Other research has pointed to the importance of “precision parenting” in poor, urban neighborhoods (Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1996). That is, in some urban neighborhoods, the relation between parental monitoring and involvement is such that both too little and too much are associated with increased behavior problems among youth. This relation is not found in studies of families residing in other types of neighborhoods. This relation, dependent on neighborhood type, may reflect a variation by neighborhood in the relation between family functioning and risk.

In our Chicago Youth Development Study (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000), we found different relations between family patterns and types of delinquency in different types of neighborhoods. We found that youth from “task-oriented” families (i.e., families with relatively high levels of discipline consistency, parental monitoring, and structure in family roles, but low levels of emotional warmth and cohesion and beliefs about family importance) were at increased risk for serious and chronic (including violent) delinquency. However, this was only the case when the families lived in neighborhoods with low levels of social organization. These findings suggest that if emotional needs such as a sense of belonging and support are met by the neighborhood, the risk carried by the family is minimized. This may indicate an important ecological consideration for prevention: It may be as useful to help families connect to and build neighborhood support as it is to try to improve parenting skills (Sampson, 1997).

### **FAMILY AS FOCUS FOR RESILIENCE VENUE FOR INNER-CITY YOUTH**

There is a considerable literature on how family-focused interventions can aid children and reduce risk (Kamon, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, in press; Tolan, 2002), and many of these interventions are devoted to inner-city families, youth, and schools (Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1996). In most cases, the interventions focus on promoting or mediating parenting skills and intra-familial problems. Few extend beyond parenting to helping a family manage excessive stress that challenges many inner-city families (Bell et al., 2002). We believe that efforts to increase resilience should focus on both effective parenting and building, sustaining, and using supports, protective processes, and opportunities for normal development (Bell et al., 2002).

Beyond the focus of intervention, however, lies a broader issue in the intervention research. Locating the source of risk in how well (or poorly) a family functions, and as such the sole target for intervention,

may be largely misdirected and limit the effectiveness of the intervention (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000). It may be that the best approaches are those that support families in managing developmental and environmental challenges while also helping build or support strong parenting skills and good family relationships. In addition, aid and support for problem solving and promoting safety and opportunity for youth may need equal consideration (Tolan et al., 2004). We summarize here three areas of emphasis in our proposed approach: family functioning, family as a buffer to stress, and family coping.

### **Family Functioning**

As indicated earlier, the evidence on family functioning and its relation to inner-city residence is still developing. Notably, there are many families within the inner city that are providing good parenting, have warm and effective communication, and have strong family problem-solving skills. There is also evidence that focusing on maintaining or improving parenting skills can reduce risk of inner-city children. For example, the Metropolitan Area Child Study, a preventive intervention for inner-city elementary aged school children, found that effects on aggression (reduced risk) were limited to those who had also been provided a family intervention that emphasized consistent parenting practices, positive parenting, and helped with family organization and problem-solving practices. A further analysis showed that the impact of the family intervention in promoting child cooperation and prosocial behavior, while reducing aggression, was linked to improved parenting skills (Tolan, Hanish, McKay, & Dickey, 2002). Similarly, in a more recent study of inner-city families with a child entering first grade, the SAFE Children preventive intervention (which focused on effective parenting skills among other areas) improved monitoring skills in high-risk families (those exhibiting poor parenting prior to entry). These examples suggest that supporting parenting practices, but with an expanded focus on problem-solving skills and strong and warm communication, is important in helping inner-city families to reduce child risk and to increase resilience.

### **Family as Buffer**

Although families are affected by neighborhood and community characteristics, they can also act as a buffer to the effects of stress on youth (Compas, Worsham, & Ey, 1992). Important family characteristics

that mitigate the stress of inner-city life for children are family resourcefulness, adaptability, and organization (McAdoo, 1982); the development of reliable and effective social ties (McAdoo, 1982); and protective parenting styles (Clark, 1983; Ogbu, 1985). For example, Staples (1978) notes that, historically, the African-American family has provided a sanctuary that buttresses against pervasive oppression and racism (Mason et al., 1996). Extended family and informal kin networks also create a buffer against stress (Massey, Scott, & Dornbusch, 1975). More recently, interest has turned to how family connections might help families manage developmental and ecological risks (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Henry, Quintana, & Lutovsky, in press).

Parenting practices have also been linked to the impact of stress on youth, although there have been few studies of any potential buffering effects among inner-city children. Research has shown that responsive, accepting, and stimulating parental care can promote resilience among low-birthweight, premature children living in poverty (Bradley et al., 1994). It has also been demonstrated that families that demonstrate good parenting skills, adequate problem-solving skills, and emotional cohesion create a protective effect in inner-city communities (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000). However, that protective effect depends on the extent of the family's sense of community involvement and ownership, including a social support network for parents. Again, these results suggest that focusing on skills and within-family relationships alone may be inadequate. Instead, focusing on supporting or promoting parenting that is embedded in the community is critical in fostering the positive effect that good family functioning can have on development.

## Family Coping

In addition to refuge from harm that families can provide, inner-city families may enhance the coping of children by teaching them strategies for survival and methods of mutual support, and by fighting negative myths of society (Massey et al., 1975). The effectiveness of a child's coping skills also depends on family functioning, and the best approaches are those that are sanctioned by the family, modeled by others, and consistent with family beliefs and expectations (Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1997). For example, Peters (1976) found that most African-American parents expected their children to encounter racism by age 6, but were uncertain how to prepare them or how to help them cope with it. Although it was clear that parents saw racism as an inevitable stressor, they also worried that it would have undue influence, making the child overly self-conscious about race and racism. Their primary strategy was

to delay the encounter as long as possible. Thus, the effectiveness of coping can be compromised when the stress cannot be prevented or be adequately prepared for. Coping is directed toward minimizing actual and potential harm. As increasing evidence surfaces on the effectiveness for inner-city youth of incorporating a sociopolitical understanding of racism and economic inequities, more programs are needed that aid parents in determining how to navigate these and other difficult issues (Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999; Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, & Maton, 1999).

### **PREVENTION TO HELP INNER-CITY FAMILIES ENHANCE CHILD RESILIENCE: AN EXAMPLE**

Despite data pointing to the importance of family in buffering risk associated with inner-city residence, there are few empirically evaluated, family-focused interventions (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 1998) that address this assumption. One example of a family-focused preventive intervention that has been empirically tested is the Schools and Families Educating Children (SAFE Children) (Gorman-Smith et al., in press; Tolan, Gorman-Smith, & Henry, 2003b). This intervention helps families with developmental and ecological challenges, and in doing so, helps them to garner support and resources. This project targeted families of first-grade children in inner-city neighborhoods in Chicago. The family-focused intervention is composed of 20 weekly multiple family group meetings (with four to six families per group) and addresses issues of parenting, family relations, parental involvement and investment in their child's schooling, peer relations, and neighborhood support. Embedded in the intervention is a focus of managing these within the context of inner-city life.

Analysis of outcomes 1 year after the intervention found general effects, with families assigned to the program maintaining initial levels of involvement in school, while controls who received no intervention decreased their involvement quickly and substantially. The intervention also improved reading achievement, with treatment children developing at a pace commensurate with national norms while controls dropped farther behind. Higher-risk families—those entering the program with limited parenting skills and lower family functioning—also saw significant gains in parental monitoring and decreases in child risk behavior (e.g., aggression, low concentration) and growing social competence in the children.

## SEVEN OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT FAMILIES FOR RESILIENCY IN THE INNER CITY

Effective interventions can be developed to address the ecological context and to help build opportunity and protect inner-city children and their families (Tolan et al., 2004). However, these efforts represent only a small portion of the avenues for building or supporting resilience among inner-city residents. Here we offer seven opportunities for supporting resilience. Each can be undertaken in many ways, but all can be focused through the family. None has been explored empirically to much extent, so they remain only promising or logically attractive rather than proven methods (Catalano et al., 1998).

1) *Support families to meet normal demands.* Much of parenting is providing clear and consistent rules and expectations that create an effective organizational atmosphere, and being involved in a way that supports the monitoring of a child's activities and friends. As in any context, parents vary in the extent of their ability to function well. Even in the inner city, most do function well (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000). However, these families may need additional support to maintain adequate levels of functioning. In addition, efforts to support positive child development may be more effective when combined with efforts to manage environmental challenges (Gorman-Smith & Tolan, 2003).

2) *Supporting access to and links between families, health care systems, and schools.* Because many families of the inner city are disengaged or alienated from health care and educational systems, they often do not make the best use of resources. In addition, many inner-city parents may feel intimidated by such systems, and as a result they may miss opportunities to advocate for their child. Concordantly, they may not understand methods of engaging these systems and those involved in administering them. Creating access and links to these systems can build resilience in families by connecting them with other families, creating a network of support and aid in easing strains of parenting. It can also build resilience by connecting families to resources and information.

Beyond building links, families would benefit from efforts to maintain parental motivation in the face of environmental impediments. For example, one finding from our SAFE Children intervention was that it helped to maintain an initial level of enthusiasm for school involvement among parents; the involvement of those without the support and links dropped off precipitously during the first year of school (Tolan et al., 2003b). Such efforts can be extended to aiding parents in advocating effectively and engaging in collaborative efforts with health care,

law enforcement, and educational professionals to build protection and opportunity for their children.

3) *Provide zones of safety, watchful adults, and community ownership.* In addition to bolstering parenting and helping parents engage in the systems that promote healthy development, families can increase their resilience through strong neighborhood social processes (Sampson et al., 1997). Informal social networks can help to increase resilience to various problem behaviors. In neighborhoods where adults report feeling connected to and responsible for the community, and are able to monitor children's behavior, children's risk for problem behaviors is lower, and particularly for those children living in higher-risk families (Gorman-Smith et al., 2000). In addition, providing safety zones—places where adults monitor the activities of children—allows for children to engage in normal recreational activities, or even in the more basic activity of getting to and from school.

4) *Embed parenting and families in the neighborhood.* Related strategies to the above are efforts to make parenting and family well-being a neighborhood value and concern. For example, early in the development of the Metropolitan Area Child Study, we conducted focus groups with parents about what they wanted from an intervention. One of the most common requests was to be able to develop networks with other families to make their parenting efforts more successful and to become a force in the community. Connecting families with similarly aged children and who are struggling to manage many of the same demands can provide sources of social support. Efforts to embed or re-embed parenting and family concerns in neighborhoods within the inner city seem likely to help build resilience (Catalano et al., 1998).

5) *Linking risk, problems, and impediments to civic and political issues.* Although often not considered in building resilience, efforts to help children and parents in the inner city to understand the political and civic processes that affect the concentration of poverty, the limited access to educational and child resources, and other issues might prove valuable. The focus may be on improving their ability or in increasing their confidence in their abilities to make use of resources (Watts, Abdul-Adil, & Pratt, 2002). For example, one effort uses rap music and other popular culture to address the economics of the drug trade and its relation to violence as a way of helping inner-city youth to develop constructive methods of attempting to address this scourge (Watts et al., 2002). A process study of that intervention suggested that, as political awareness increased, the tendency toward violence was replaced by focused interest in affecting the circumstances and political conditions of the drug trade and violence in their communities.

6) *Skills training and opportunity promotion.* It is evident that inner-city children face a more risky and less supportive developmental ecology than children elsewhere in this nation, and this in turn leads to lower academic performance and increasing disparities in preparedness for adult life (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). To counter this, skills training and increased opportunities to engage in roles and activities that will lead to success are important elements of resilience building (Bell et al., 2002). These may be specific programs to remediate relative deficits in reading or other academic skills, or opportunities to enroll in educational and vocational opportunities.

7) *Reconnecting the inner city to the political economy.* A major problem for inner-city communities is that they are not perceived as integral to the economy or political power bases of cities (Wilson, 1987). Thus, efforts to better connect the economic and social life of these communities to the rest of the city are likely to build protection and opportunity for youth residing there. Whether through increased business investment or greater access to and development of educational and health systems, reconnecting the inner city to the political economy of the city and region will benefit its children and families (Catalano et al., 1998; Tolan et al., 2004).

## CONCLUSIONS

Our empirical understanding of the development of children residing in our country's inner cities is growing. What is emerging is a grim picture of the level and extent of risk faced by these children and their families. At the same time, there is evidence of strong family functioning that helps mitigate these risks. In addition, it appears that family functioning can be aided by neighborhood networks and growing opportunities and resources to manage normal child development. As we have noted, there are many opportunities for building resilience by building family strengths in these high-risk communities. However, few have explored the potential of these avenues and even fewer have conducted empirical tests of their impact.

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