

Chapter 9

Street Children: Stories of Adversity and Resilience

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Abstract The concept of resilience has initiated a paradigm shift in the fields of child development and prevention. This shift has focused on the innate capacity of individuals to face up to adverse events, withstand considerable hardships, and be made stronger by these events. There are few conditions in life that can be more adverse than to be young and live in the streets of major cities of the world. This chapter involves a study of a group of street children and youth in Manila who had shown evidence of resilience in the face of adversity. A search was made for the factors that made for their resilience, with the hope that these factors can be enhanced and be made useful in the battle against the dangers in the streets, particularly the danger of substance abuse.

Keywords Resilience · Adversity · Street children · Resilience factors

9.1 The Meaning of Resilience

Resilience is the capacity of individuals to face up to an adverse event, withstand considerable hardship, not only overcome it but also be made stronger by it. The concept of resilience has been discussed in the past studies as involving both the idea of stressor and an innate capacity of children to respond, endure, and develop normally in spite of the presence of stressors (Richmond and Beardslee 1988). The concept offers a comforting device because the consequences of childhood adversity can be potentially devastating. There is rich evidence in the research literature linking adverse life events and psychiatric disorders in adult and children (Freidrich et al. 1982), substance abuse (Biafora et al. 1994; Duncan 1977), and suicidal behavior (de Wilde et al. 1992). Wolff (1995) underscores the

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usefulness of the concept of resilience for research and practice in at least three ways: First, the notion of resilience and vulnerability, of risk and protective factors, highlights the complexity of psychiatric disorders and their causes. It stresses the need to go beyond simple associations between antecedents and consequences, and to look at exceptions rather than the expected outcome. Second, the discovery of why some children caught up in adversity nevertheless do well helps us to identify previously undetected possibilities for preventive action. Finally, the idea of resilience keeps hope alive in clinical practice; however much the odds against good outcome, we know that many children escape their expected fate. This is illustrated by one of the earliest longitudinal studies on high risk children in the Hawaiian island of Kauai exposed to both biologic and psychosocial risk factors (Werner 1994). In her study which began in 1955, Werner identified 201 high risk newborns whose lives she followed from the perinatal period to the age of 32. Of these 201 subjects, 72 grew into competent, confident, and caring adults. The results of the study showed that the effects of reproductive stress decreased with time and that the developmental outcome of practically every biological risk factor was dependent on the quality of the rearing environment. All the studies cited involved populations other than street children. This chapter focuses on street children in response to the growing number of these children found living and working in the streets of major cities all over the world. Furthermore, many of these children get involved in the trafficking and use of psychoactive substances, licit and illicit. Understanding the resilience of many of these children may help organizations working with them develop more appropriate intervention programs.

9.1.1 Resilience and Development

Resilience is best understood from the perspective of developmental process and transactional models (Sameroff and McKenzie 2003). Individuals pass through the various stages of development continually interacting with other social and physical systems. “Individual adaptation arises from many dynamic processes *within* the individual at the biological (e.g., genetics, hormonal) and behavioral (e.g., attention, capacity for learning) levels as well as between the individual and the different systems in which the individual is embedded [close relationship with caregivers and peers, influence from school and community (Masten and Powell 2003)]”. This complex network of interacting systems can influence the impact of adverse events on the individual, either increasing or decreasing the individual’s capacity to successfully adapt.

The concept of resilience initiated a paradigm shift in the fields of child development and *prevention*. This shift has moved from focusing on decreasing the environmental risk factors that make individuals susceptible to the development of maladaptive behavior and psychiatric disorders to the highlighting of resilience and its promotion. In this paradigm, it is essential to identify environmental and individual protective factors that can serve as a buffer against the detrimental

effects of risk factors, as well as the individual's vulnerabilities that can pose as a threat to resilient outcome. Resilience, therefore, is viewed as a product of interaction between individual and environmental factors, something that can be fostered through the developmental years of childhood and adolescence. It can be developed by strengthening the protective elements in a child's environment while simultaneously promoting the child's life and other personal strengths.

9.1.2 Resilience Factors

Many studies have identified critical factors associated with the resilience of some children. These factors include external supports and resources available to a child (for example, family, school, and community institutions), personal strengths that the child develops (like self-esteem, a capacity for self-monitoring, spirituality and altruism), and social skills the child acquires (such as conflict resolution and communication skills). Werner's 1955 study specifically indentified individual and environmental factors that were linked to successful adaptation in high risk situations. Among these were: (1) temperamental characteristics that allowed the subjects to elicit positive reactions from others, thus facilitating positive relationships, (2) skills and values that allowed efficient use of their abilities and talents, (3) care-giving skills of the parents that fostered competence and self-esteem in the children, (4) adult support, and (5) opportunities for major life transitions.

The study of O'Sullivan (1991) showed that the presence of an adult who takes interest in a child can have a clear positive effect on the child's later life as an adult, even in the presence of a dysfunctional parent. It is obvious that resilience does not develop in a vacuum but grows within the context of the family and the community. As children become older, they assume increasing responsibility for their resilience. The challenge is how to help the children be more capable in promoting resilience in themselves and how to help adults contribute to this resilience more effectively. Findings related to different cultures and different age groups indicate that all cultures draw from the same pool of resilience factors but in different combination and dynamics. The age of the child has been found to play a critical role. There is a notable change from dependence on external supports and services on the part of younger children to a greater reliance on social and interpersonal skills on the part of older children, looking up to adults as models (Grothberg 1995). The data suggest that inner, personal strengths continue to build over the years.

As Wolff points out, resilience is an enduring aspect of a person. Genetic and constitutionally based qualities both determine and are in turn modified by life experiences. Good intelligence, easy adaptability, social temperament, and an appealing appearance attract positive responses in others, which in turn contribute to an inner sense of self-worth, competence, and sense of self-efficacy that have been consistently related to resilience. The importance of the macro environment in fostering resilience cannot be overstressed. The adversities associated

with poverty are great and quite susceptible to intergenerational transmission. These adversities contribute to domestic violence, maternal depression, parental discord, coercive and non-vigilant parenting, and child abuse. On the other hand, some studies suggest that these same adversities may serve to strengthen the resilience of children. Turner et al. (1993) synthesized various studies on resilience factors that serve to promote positive psychological growth and development. Turner et al. classified these factors into individual and environmental factors that decrease individual vulnerability and increase individual resilience. They include factors such as an easy temperament, intellectual capacity, self-efficacy, a realistic appraisal of one's environment, social problem-solving skills, a sense of direction or mission, a capacity for empathy, a sense of humor, a capacity for adaptive distancing, and gender. For environmental factors, they included family, school, and community protective elements such as early parental care, enduring warm and positive relationships with at least one adult, a positive family environment and bonding, high parental expectations, family responsibilities, positive modeling, good parenting skills and supervision, family and rituals, support for the youth's competencies and life goals, extended family support, opportunities for students involvement in various school activities, a caring, supportive school climate, and positive community norms.

9.2 Resilience in Special Population

The Philippine government has increasingly focused on children in need of special protection. These children are seen as a special population in need of attention and special interventions. This population of children includes those who are neglected, abandoned, physically and/or sexually abused; those who are in conflict with the law or caught in armed conflicts; victims of child labor; victims of substance abuse; and those who live and work in the streets (street children).

Many of the studies on resilience had been done with children and youth living with families under various circumstances of adversity. There are very limited studies done on the resilience of special populations like the street children. In a critical review of resilience literature and its relevance to homeless children, Neiman (1988) identified certain factors associated with resilience among street children. She grouped these factors into individual (constitutional factors, gender, temperament) and environmental factors (positive mother-child relationship, protective family relationships, extrafamilial factors).

9.2.1 The Street Children

There are very few conditions in life that can be more adverse than to be young and live in the streets of major cities in the world. Estimates reported by the WHO

Project on Street Children and Substance Abuse put the number of the street children between 10 and 100 million worldwide. The criterion for defining street children varies from country to country and with time, making it difficult to arrive at any precise global estimates. In the Philippines, there are 1.5 million street children nationwide. About 75,000 of them are found in Metro Manila alone (DSWD 1988). In more recent report, the estimate number is 220,000 nationwide (CWL 2006).

Why are these children and youth on the streets? The interweaving political, economic, and psychological conditions that have driven children to the streets are too complex to give a simple explanation for this worldwide phenomenon. Poverty, like the kind spawned by the political and socioeconomic conditions in many developing countries, is the most commonly cited leading cause. Most children of poor families are forced to stop going to school and instead go to the streets to earn. However, beyond poverty, one suspects that the breakdown of traditional family and community values and structures serves as a major factor in the increase of children on the streets. Symptoms of such breakdown include the neglect and abuse of children, dysfunctional parents who could not adequately care for their children, lack of support from the traditional extended family system, abuse of psychoactive substances by the parents or by other members of the family, domestic violence, lack of employment opportunities, lack of access to basic community services, congestion in slum areas, violence in the community, deterioration of values permitting exploitation of children, and finally breakup of families.

9.2.1.1 Street Children and Health Hazards

Children and youths on the streets experience serious health risks and physical danger. They are exposed to high levels of violence, victimization, sexual exploitation by pedophiles and pimps, and to the use of harmful substances. Many suffer from psychiatric symptoms and mental health problems.

The percentage of substance abusers among street children varies greatly. Studies in different parts of the world indicate that between 25 and 90 % of street children abuse psychoactive and harmful substances. In the Philippines, about 50 % of the street children abuse substances. The most common substances used include: alcohol, nicotine, inhalants, marijuana, and amphetamines (CWL 2006).

9.2.1.2 Street Children and Interventions

In the Philippines, a large number of governmental and nongovernmental organizations (often offered to as agencies by the street children) responded to the growing crisis of the street children. Community-based, center-based, and street-based programs of intervention were created to help these children and their families. These interventions primarily addressed the deficits in the environment of these

children that pushed them to life in the streets. In the course of their work, people involved in helping street children were impressed with remarkable capacity of some of these children to survive adversities of life in the streets. Not only do they overcome these adversities, but are also made stronger by their encounter with adversities. Though confronted everyday with the multiple risk factors in their environment, they had been able to avoid substance abuse, prostitution, teenage pregnancy, and other major pitfalls in living on the streets. These children were later identified as resilient.

9.3 The Study

Supported by the UNICEF Philippines and the National Project on Street Children of the Philippine government, a descriptive study in the resilience of street children and youth in Manila was conducted. The study was, in part, motivated by the concern over the highly prevalent use of harmful substances among street children. The objective of the study was to identify individual, family, and environmental factors that made for the resilience of the subjects in the study, with hope that, once identified, these factors can be enhanced and made useful in the battle against substance abuse. A modified social stress model, derived from the original work of Rhodes and Jason (1990) and modified for use in the WHO Programme on Street Children and Substance Abuse, was used as the framework for identifying the children's resilience traits as well as the risk and protective factors in their environment. This model views the risk of substance abuse as directly proportional to risk factors (which include stress, mechanisms by which use of harmful substance is "normalized," and the desired experience with substance) and inversely related to protective factors (positive attachments, coping skills, and available resources).

This study is descriptive and qualitative in nature, based on a case study method. The objective is to identify individual, familial, and community factors that contribute to the resilience of a group of street children. While large sample sizes strengthen the quantitative design of a study, case study and other qualitative methods can provide deeper insights into the complex dynamics of the subjects' interactions and life experiences. Twenty-five (25) street children (17 males and 8 females) were interviewed for the study. The age range of the subjects was 12–20 for the males and 14.5–19 for the females.

These children were selected from various nongovernmental organizations or agencies linked with the UNICEF Program on Psychosocial Intervention. The children included in the study came from a pool of 50 names submitted by the different organizations who, at the time of the study, had demonstrated at least 2 years of steady, even though at times shaky, positive psychological development.

Based on the modified social stress model, the investigator developed a questionnaire for use in the evaluation of the subjects. The questionnaire was designed to assess individual, familial, and environmental factors that make for resilience. A series of in-depth interviews was done with each subject. A detailed mental status

examination was done on each subject. Personal and family histories were gathered from direct interviews of the subjects as well as from the existing records. Whenever possible, interviews were also made with peers, staff members, and family members with the consent of the subjects involved. Home visits were also done by a social worker when applicable. In some cases the subject was the only source of information, limiting the data gathered to the subject's memory and view of his word.

9.3.1 Individual Resilience Traits

As previous studies show, a cluster of personality traits enable high stressed children to overcome their stresses and develop a sense of competence and control in their lives. These traits enhance their resilience.

In this study, a sense of direction or mission and self-efficacy are the two most common individual traits identified by the street children. The positive effects of a sense of direction or mission can be attributed to the relative stability that a goal offers as opposed to the drifting nature of a directionless life. Many of the children affirmed that a sense of direction gave them a purpose or a life task that guided the decisions they made. One of the subjects, Ronnel, was guided by his self-chosen mission to save his younger siblings as well as other children from experiencing the life he had on the streets. His dream of becoming a policeman someday can be seen as an extension of a sense of mission to save other children who go astray.

At 17, Ronnel is one of the older boys at KAIBIGAN (FRIEND), a non-governmental community based center for street children. He felt responsible for the younger boys and tried to act like a role model by actively participating in the center's activities such as sports like swimming and basketball, as well as handicraft making. During his extra time he worked as a "car wash boy" outside the center. Having known the damaging effects of abusing substances, he felt he had a responsibility to save other street children from drug abuse. When he met children in the streets using drugs, instead of joining or ignoring them as he might once have done, Ronnel would talk to them to warn them of the dangers in abusing harmful substances. Specifically, Ronnel wanted to make sure that his younger siblings would not have to go through what he had undergone. In his words "I didn't take good care of myself back then, so now I intend to guide and care for my younger siblings"

The importance of a sense of direction can be seen in the case of Joel, an 18-year-old high school senior. His desire to go to school goaded him to continue studying despite the many upheavals and changes in his life.

Joel remembered that his family was too poor to send the children to school regularly. After his father left them, his family moved in with some friends in another section of the city. Subsequently, he and his mother moved to the reclamation area by the Manila Bay. Joel never gave up on his school. He completed grade 6 while living in the reclamation area and subsequently went to high school with the help of a street children organization. According to Joel, he wanted to finish his schooling because he believed he could get a better job than what he did in the streets and a better chance to help his family.

Closely related to the sense of direction or mission is the sense of *self-efficacy*. Self-efficacy has been defined as a “positive perception of one’s competence to perform certain tasks” (Bandura 1977). It includes the faith of an individual in his ability to control his or her life and environment in positive ways. Seen in this light, self-efficacy gives an individual a feeling of self-empowerment and self-worth that is needed to attain one’s goal. Almost all the children interviewed constantly demonstrated their sense of self-efficacy through repeated and effective daily behavior aimed at gaining a livelihood in the streets. Rafael, for example, believed in his abilities to change his future. He approached the staff of KANLUNGAN (SHELTER) seeking help to enroll in a vocational course; he eventually learned refrigerator and air condition repair. This sense of self-efficacy could be seen even earlier in his life.

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Many of the street children who shared their life stories demonstrated *social problem-solving skills* and street *survival skills* as important factors in their survival. Both sets of skills are important in that they allow the street children to live in the streets and survive. Maximiano, 14 years old, illustrated good social problem-solving skills. When he left home, his immediate concern was where to eat and sleep in the streets. He quickly asked around at nearby stores, offering to work for food and shelter. He was eventually hired by a canteen owner to help out in the kitchen, and learned how to cook in the process.

Jerry and the other boys quickly found out that much to their dislike, they had to resort to begging, occasionally stealing and handbag snatching in order to survive. They felt they had no choice because they were hungry and had no money. They slept in different places such as sidewalks and under the Light Rail Transit (LRT) station. All of them learned to

do drugs, two of them even engaged in prostitution for some time. But each of them made a turn around when they faced up to their mistakes and corrected them.

Problem-solving skills reinforce one's sense of competence and self-esteem. Street survival skills, on the other hand, often involve self-damaging behavior that heightens the risk of failure in a street child who is not resilient. Whereas the case of Jerry and the other boys focused more on survival skills, the case of Marlon M. is an example of social problem-solving skills:

When Marlon went to Cubao, a busy commercial district, he continued to earn by begging and watching cars. From his earning, he bought food and clothing. He slept almost always alongside a particular bank. When he needed to go to a restroom, he would go to restaurants. His friends also brought him to homes where street children would be allowed to use the toilet and bathroom for a fee.

Adaptive distancing, seen in most of the children, is an important trait that helped the street children in the study effect healthy separation from the immediate problems in their lives. The children with this trait managed to separate themselves physically and/or psychologically from the risk factors in their environment. Many street children interviewed, did not identify with dysfunctional parents and found healthy role model elsewhere. They did not feel responsible for their parents' problem. Some even felt compassion but detached toward their parents. Such is the case of Susan who, although disappointed with her mother continued to love her and exerted efforts to save her from abusive boyfriend. She preferred to live in a residential center that helped her go to school. In her words:

My problem has to do with my mother and her live-in partner. I cannot do anything to separate them. That is why I believe this problem will never be solved. I love my mother, and I will try to help her whenever I can.

Jerry also exhibited his capacity for adaptive distancing.

He would leave the house when his foster parents fought. Although he wished to stop the fight, he knew there was nothing to do. Mr. D (Jerry's foster father) was alcoholic. When drunk he would become violent, provoke fights, would shout a lot, and sometimes would physically abuse his wife. Whenever the couple fought, Jerry would just leave the house. He wanted to stop the fights but was afraid to do so.

Having a hobby or a creative talent as sport, singing, dancing, writing, and painting serves as a coping mechanism through which children can distance themselves from problems and at the same time foster in them feelings of competence, self-worth, identity, and a feeling of worth in the community. In some instances, in fact, the creative talents have served a purpose of "therapy" or self-healing because these activities allowed expression of conflicted feelings. A good example is the case of Rommel who had sublimated his conflicts into theater arts. Through his work in the street theater he also realized that he could be useful to the community.

Supported by Maryville Foundation, a community-based center, Rommel joined workshops in theatre arts. He took a 10-day live-in course in script writing. He discovered his great love for the performing arts, especially drama, acting, directing and script writing. He also realized that he could make himself useful to the community by directing plays,

acting, and writing drama with lesson for the audience to learn. His involvement in theatre arts meant a deeper involvement with his own self.

Marlon P., who represented his school in karate tournaments and at the same time taught it in his school, demonstrated the importance of a special talent.

In order to act effectively for themselves or for others, the street children need a *realistic view of their environment*. Most children showed a good capacity for appraising their situation realistically. These children seemed to know what was possible and attainable in their situations, allowing them to act on opportunities that could their long term goals. They also knew what they could and could not change in their life situations. Many of the children have learned to accept their dysfunctional parents for what they were. Others have accepted the limitations that their environments placed on their dreams.

Joel B. dreamed of becoming a computer scientist someday or a pilot “so I can visit other countries”. But he was aware these dreams were not readily within his reach. So he planned “to be an electrician after high school, then work, save money, and take up computer engineering.”

Self-monitoring skills and self-control are regarded by more than half the children as important factors in their lives. Self-monitoring, the ability to regularly assess one’s self and situations, makes for resilience through constant awareness of where one stands in his or her life. By monitoring the events in his life and the effects of these on the self, the street child is able to appraise his or her environment realistically. He or she is able to make good choices, and able to avoid options that can bring harm to him or her, like substance abuse. Self-control refers to the ability of individuals to control impulses and disengage from temptations and pressures. It involves an internal focus of control, thereby reinforcing their sense of self-efficacy. Obviously, the youngsters in this study who had been able to say “no” to drugs, street brawls, and early risky sexual experimentation and exploitation have illustrated adequate self-control; an illustrative case is Michael:

At 12 years old Michael was introduced to the use of marijuana and other substances like cough syrup and “shabu” (amphetamine) by the people he worked with at the market place. When told by a concerned adult of the harmful effects of the substances, Michael decided to stop using them. He left his work in order to get away from the temptations and company of the addicts. He figured that he could get another job by asking his friends in the streets.

Intellectual capacity was roughly gauged through academic achievement and responses shown by the street children during interviews. Very few of them had psychological tests. More than half of the children interviewed showed a notable degree of intelligence reflected particularly in their achievements in school. The street children who showed comparatively higher intelligence also placed a high premium on the importance of schooling. They saw formal education as a means of improving their situation in life. Nina, for example, viewed the completion of her education as the most important goal in life. Another street child, Eric had just graduated from high school and was employed as a décor painter in the furniture factory. Aside from the relative advantage that intelligence gives a person in order

to survive., the belief in the value of education as a possible means of improving one's condition had given the street children a firm anchor that kept them from engaging in self-destructive behavior. Joel is a good example of one who valued education

Joel never gave up on school. He wanted to complete his high school education because he planned to work and help his family. He admired a cousin who received academic honours in his school, and hoped to be like his cousins. He knew his classmates and friends had high expectation of him, and wanted to remain a good role model for other children.

There were six subjects who, prior to their inclusion in the study, had formal psychological assessments. It is interesting to note that these subjects had I.Q. measurements that were much lower than what one would expect, given their adaptive capacities. This raises the question whether the standard instruments used to measure intelligence are appropriate for special populations like the street children.

Ten of the subjects appeared to possess an *easy temperament and disposition*, allowing them to maintain positive relationships especially with people in a position to help them. They gravitated easily toward good connections. As cited in the earlier studies, an easy temperament aids in fostering good interpersonal relationships thus allowing other people to treat them in more positive manners. These relationships reinforce the children's sense of self-worth and at the same time open more opportunities for self-development. In Val's case, it was easier for him to empathize with friends who were in trouble. He tried to entertain them, to talk to them, or play with them. He considered himself to be humorous, "good at making people laugh and be happy."

Nine of the subjects showed the *capacity to recognize mistakes* they had made in the past and instead of succumbing to these or simply accepting them, they used the knowledge brought on by experience to create better, more positive lives. The subjects who had exhibited this trait were generally more *altruistic* and *emphatic*. They used their experiences to help younger children so that they could avoid making the same mistakes that they themselves had made in the past. Rommel, for example, having known the damaging effects of substance abuse now felt a responsibility to keep other children from committing the same mistakes he had made.

Rommel, whose talent in the theatre arts had been cited earlier, had been involved in drugs, alcohol and gambling. He worked in a gambling house as an errand boy. It was an easier job than collecting garbage. He also earned much more. He had more than enough pocket money for school needs, clothes, shoes, and food for his family. He began to neglect his school responsibilities. With the help of a social worker, he got connected with the Maryville foundation. He decided to stop working at the gambling den, and proceeded to graduate from high school. This became the turning point in his life.

Another boy, Eric, gave up life in the streets and drugs, concentrated on his studies, and had been steadily self-employed. He still occasionally would go to his old neighborhood trying to help pull his friends away from the streets.

Many studies identify *a sense of humor* as an important element of resilience. These factors came out clearly in eight of the subjects. Humor allows an individual

to cope with the situation that can threaten to overwhelm him or her. The ability to laugh at oneself, and see the lighter side of situations can open help in dealing with the stressful events in one's life. Humor reduces tensions and restores perspective. Rafael and Val, for example, attributed their ability to get along well with others to their sense of humor.

Leadership skills, altruism and empathy are attributes that are "others-oriented" allowing the individual to actively help other people. Seventeen of the subjects showed leadership skills and altruism. These attributes gave them a sense of purpose, worth, and self-empowerment, and allowed them to go beyond themselves in trying to achieve goals that would benefit others. Empathy, shown by 15 of the subjects, allowed the subjects to feel for others. Through their actions, the subjects in the study were recognized in their various communities. In some cases they acted as "*kuyas*" (older brothers) and "*ates*" (older sisters) for those younger than they. They became role models for the younger ones, using their knowledge and experience to help just as they themselves were helped in the past by others. Marissa was recognized and awarded by the Philippine National Red Cross as among the most outstanding junior health workers the year prior to the study. She had shown leadership skills by organizing seminars on health care for street children in KANLUNGAN (SHELTER), a community-based center for street children.

In her first year with KANLUNGAN, Marissa finished a three-week dressmaking course and became involved in helping the staff work with the children on the streets. Her work involved talking to street children and educating them about the dangers of harmful substances. At the age of 15, she was selected by the KANLUNGAN staff to represent the center at a training seminar for junior health workers sponsored by the Manila chapter of the Philippine National Red Cross. After her training, she organized seminars for street children at KANLUNGAN on health promotion. She assisted the staff in first aid, and helped bring the children to the hospital for emergency and out-patient treatment. A staff worker commented, "after the training, Marissa immersed herself in health work, showing efficiency and effectiveness in performing her duties. She knew more about hospital procedures than I did." That year she was voted as the "*Bantog na Junior Health Worker*" (Outstanding Junior Health Worker). A recognition given by the National Red Cross, Manila Chapter. She was cited for her organizational skills and leadership qualities.

Another subject, Teresa, showed similar traits:

Teresa demonstrated her leadership skills and altruism as a student leader. In grade school, she was always voted as class president. She had a soft heart for children like her, poor but deeply committed to studying. Her capacity for empathy had led her sometimes to make mistakes in the past. In grade school, she remembered feeling sorry for a friend who had lost a book. She took a book from the library to replace the one her friend had lost. She was caught and was heavily reprimanded. She never forgot the mistake she made.

Eleven of the 25 subjects took special note of how a *sense of morality* guided their actions and choices in daily life. They attributed to their sense of right and wrong their capacity to avoid the use of illegal drugs and the use of sex for money. A sense of morality reinforces self-control, and contributes to feeling of efficacy.

Marissa claimed her friends in the streets engaged in sex for money. She refused to engage in such activity because she thought of it as morally wrong. She would rather beg.

Religion or faith in God was regarded to be very important by 10 of the subjects.

They cited prayers and going to church as sources of support that helped them through difficulties. All ten had expressed the belief that the power of faith had helped them stay away from trouble. Some of these children admitted that they did not go to church regularly. Nevertheless their behavior showed that they had a personal relationship with God. Marlon had a good relationship with God and would go to church frequently when feeling troubled; he also prayed before each meal. Marissa claimed that she generally turned to God first whenever she encountered problems or felt downhearted.

Ronnel, though young in age, had developed a philosophical attitude about life. He believed that given the right time, things would fall into their proper places. He felt a personal relationship with God. Though he did not attend church regularly, he believed that God had a special mission for him.

The last resilience factor identified among street children is “*pakikisama*.” This is a very common Filipino trait that can be loosely defined as “going along with a group to avoid confrontations.” It may also be seen as an individual’s attempt to seek attachment or to belong to a group. This trait can have either positive or negative effects depending on the kind of group that the individual attaches himself to. Therefore, it is important for the street children to connect to a good group that can offer them access to positive involvement. Michael, after he left his work in the market to avoid the “addicts” was able to connect himself to the “Scout Ranger Brotherhood,” a fraternity that he described as “a group of upright, stable, and supportive young men who avoided violence.” Here he felt a sense of brotherhood and belonging that strengthened his own sense of self-worth.

Joel B. showed this trait when he joined a residential center for street children and readily became part of it. When admitted to MASIGLA, Joel had scabies all over his body. He was very thin and evidently malnourished. He adjusted quickly to life in the center. He related easily to the staff and other residents.

The individual resilience traits identified in this study, and demonstrated in the vignettes, are not mutually exclusive. Many of the traits, in fact, are closely related to each other and were clustered accordingly. The subjects in the study registered an average of eleven individual resilience traits. Some showed a minimum of seven traits while others showed considerably more. These traits appear to have interplayed with one another in each child in a manner that is empowering.

9.3.2 Individual Traits and Environmental Factors

Individual traits, while very important, are not always sufficient for the development of resilience. Resilience involves interaction between the individual and environmental factors, not just fixed attributes or traits within the individual. This observation is especially true among children and adolescents. Young people need elements in their environment that will not only reinforce but also protect

the individual traits which help them become resilient. In the study, a search for family, community, and peer protective factors, was made in order to show the dynamic interaction of individual resilience traits with protective factors in the individual's environment resulting in positive adaptive outcomes.

9.3.2.1 Family Protective Factors

The family is the single institution that can respond to the basic needs of children on a long term basis. It exerts the most powerful influence over the child's emotional, social, psychological, and physical development. Whether it is a two-parent, single-parent, adoptive or foster family, it normally provides significant protective factors that help build resilience in the individual. In some instances, as in a dysfunctional family, it may be a source of significant risk.

In the study, the most commonly cited protective factor was that of *having family responsibilities*. Twenty-three of the twenty-five subjects mentioned this factor as being important. This factor included not only household chores and taking care of younger siblings, but also earning extra income for the impoverished family. In many instances, this sense of responsibility implied firm and clear parental discipline and supervision. Bleuler (1978) has a partial explanation for the effect of this factor on the individual. Bleuler found that "youth whose families need them to do tasks will feel that they have something to contribute and will feel valued and empowered." This empowerment can be seen in the life of Teresa.

Teresa learned to do her chores at home such as cleaning washing dishes, and throwing the garbage without question or resistance. To help earn for the family, she began working in the streets when she was 8 years old. She learned how to be resourceful in the streets. After school, she sold barbeque and "kakanin" (rice cake) in the streets. She usually came home from school at 2:00 p.m. and during *merienda (snack)* time she would make her rounds at the Pandacan market. On a fine day, her goods would be sold out. At times, she would have some left over that she took home for the family. She would earn enough for the day which augmented the family income and her school expenses.

Family traditions and rituals cited by the subjects in the study included the celebrations of recognition days or achievements, social and family gatherings, meals together, and most commonly going to church together. Rituals and traditions serve as powerful protective factors, even in the face of family dysfunction and chaos. The family can begin to see itself as somehow enduring even if it is not always cohesive. Traditions and rituals often act as recognition of one's place or position in the world and enhance a sense of belonging to a group. No matter what else is going on, if the family could eat together on special days or hear Mass together on Sunday, the children will internalize a routine around which they can build their identity. The family praying together also enhances the child's religious feeling and faith in God, which as shown earlier, many of the street children interviewed regarded as important in facing up to adversity.

Susan, for example, related how much she appreciated her mother's efforts to keep family rituals despite their poverty. When she was much younger, her mother would prepare a modest meal to celebrate her birthday with the family and friends.

Among the street children interviewed, eight mentioned having *positive family environments and bondings*. This relatively low item was not surprising when one considers that the very reason many street children are out in the streets is their desire to escape their dysfunctional families. Many of the children interviewed experienced positive family environments with substitute families that had adopted them. Jerry, for example, found a home in Mr. D's family who accepted him as one of their own. Marlon P. continued to live with his foster family. Moreover, most of the eight subjects who mentioned having positive family environments no longer had such families at the time of the interview. The subjects were actually looking back at their lives when their families were still intact and deriving strength from these memories.

The family of Norma, while unusual in its extremely positive nature showed the importance of a positive family environment. Her parents raised their children sharing the household chores that included dish washing, laundry, and cleaning. Despite their poverty, they always emphasized the importance of education. No matter how little they had in life. Norma's parents always made sure that all their children went to school. Norma described her family as being close-knit. They always celebrated special days like Christmas and other holidays at home. During birthdays her mother would fix something special for the family. When the children were much younger, the family always attended Mass together.

Another highly expressed protective factor was that of *a warm, positive relationship with a parent*. Considering the frequent observation that many street children fail to establish close and effective bonds with their parents, the scope of this definition was made to include various adults in the street child's life such as foster parents, relatives, and other adults who show interest and concern for the street children.

Rommel, known for his stage work described his father as a "family man" working hard all day and going straight home on time for supper. The father had no vices and was close to the children. Rommel strongly identified with him in his disposition, especially in his father's love for the arts. His father wrote plays and poems and influenced Rommel towards this inclination.

Some of the street children related how having a warm bond with a sibling was important to them. It is not uncommon for the sibling of street children to be street children themselves and the shared experiences of living in the streets often cause siblings to turn to one another. Such bonding obviously provides a protective element for each of the siblings.

Among his siblings, Antonio was closest to the eldest, Mary Anne, who used to take him along to the market. He also looked up to his brother, Anmar, with whom he identified in terms of work and study.

A warm, positive relationship with an adult fosters feeling of importance in street children, making them feel that someone does care for them. An older person to whom they can run for support or advice serves as a positive adult model.

Positive adult models acted as guide in life for many of the street children. Early parental modeling was expressed by 15 of the 25 respondents as a guiding factor even if the parent was no longer involved with them in some instances. This can be seen in the case of Jerry. Although his father had died when he was five years old, Jerry wished to complete his education because he believed his father had wanted that of him. According to Jerry, he had taken after his father both in personality traits and physical attribute. He wished to become a soldier, as his father had been. Many of the subjects mentioned foster parents as their role models. Such parent substitutes were common in the lives of the streets children studied. Jennifer, for example developed a strong bond with her caregiver (Ate Glo) in the center where she stayed. Jennifer described Ate Glo as being patient and caring and a source of inspiration for her.

Twelve of the subjects felt special affection from the members of their extended families. In some cases, an aunt or an uncle had cared for the children in lieu of a mother or father. In other instances, a grandparent had taken over parenting even for only a brief period in the child's life, an experience that the child could remember for years to come. A member of the extended family toward whom the subject felt particularly close became role model. The extended support system provided the protective factor at critical points in the child's life. In a number of cases, the affectionate bond was established with a sibling rather than with the parents.

Although many of the street children interviewed did not maintain frequent contact or involvement with their families, nine respondents said that their *families were morally supportive of them* in their struggle to attain their goals. Some mentioned that their parents had high expectations of them. Supportiveness of the child's ability and high parental expectations enhance a child's resilience. The child enhances his belief in his abilities when he knows his parents have faith in him and have high expectations of him. Parents who expect a child not to take drugs and make that expectation known have tremendous influence in the child's decisions not to abuse substances. Similarly, parents who have high but realistic expectations of their child's performance in school can inspire their children to strive well. For example, Antonio's father stressed the need for him to finish college in order to liberate himself from their poverty. This has sustained Antonio's efforts in his studies. Support and belief in the children appear to be positive protective factors only as long as these are realistic. Parents who have high expectations beyond the children's abilities may instill feelings of inadequacy and failure in their children.

9.3.2.2 Resilience and Community Factors

The protective elements identified in the peer group, school, and community at large, like individual and family resilience factors are not exclusive of one another. There is a constant interplay among different categories of resilience factors. For example, leadership skills are fostered and bolstered by family support but need a

community that allows positive involvement that can sustain these skills. A community where there is a sense of caring, mutual protection, and nondrug use norms is likely to foster resilience in the young people.

Together with the protective factors in the family, community protective factors had been identified to be critical in the lives of street children in the study. Among these community factors, *agency intervention* or the help provided by street children organizations was the single factor consistently mentioned by all subjects as having positive effects in their lives. A certain bias toward this finding, however, is to be expected because all the respondents interviewed were accessed through various nongovernment organizations (NGO) that had identified them as being resilient. All these organizations, except two, are community based. They supported the children while they lived in their families and worked and go to school. Two of the NGOs are center-based, i.e., the children lived in the centers. According to the street children, the agencies acted as foster families from whom they could receive the warmth, care, and support that their own families were unable to provide effectively and continuously. These agencies facilitated opportunities for schooling, involvement with peers, and basically functioned as surrogate families to which street children could turn in time of need. All the 25 subjects in the study attributed the adaptive outcomes in their lives to the protective influence provided by the agencies.

An opportunity for involvement with the community was mentioned in 15 of the 25 cases. These opportunities—like street theater, working as junior health educators, teaching martial arts, participating in extracurricular activities—allowed positive personal growth and instilled feelings of adequacy and self-worth, as well as a sense of belonging to a community.

School experience was regarded by many of the subjects as a powerful element in the community. Thirteen of the subjects mentioned the importance of having a *caring and supportive school climate*. Seven mentioned that *high expectations from the school* with regard to their performance inspired them to work hard. The support and expectations generally came from a particular teacher or one's peers in the school setting with whom the bonds of friendship had been formed. These factors fostered in the street children feelings of self-efficacy, the belief that they themselves had some power over their circumstances and therefore could work toward attaining their dreams and aspirations. Being in school also lent a sense of purpose to these children, at the same time providing a structure and guidance in their lives. The effects of a supportive school climate can be seen in the example of Antonio.

Antonio took more interest in subjects taught by teachers who were warm, concerned and supportive. He was nine years old and in fourth grade when one such teacher learned from his classmate that his father was an innocent stabbing-victim in a street brawl. She asked Antonio in class how his father was and he tearfully narrated what happened. Antonio was afraid that his father would die and he felt consoled by her concern and his classmates' silent support. It inspired him to carry on with his studies and his work in the midst of the family crisis.

9.4 Conclusion

The street children included in this study have been identified as resilient by NGO involved in helping them and their families. These are the children who have been able to maintain a steady and productive development despite the adversities of working in the streets. The search for what makes each one of them resilient shows a pool of traits universally shared by resilient people. In many cases, street children have dysfunctional families that, to begin with, push them to the adversities of life in the streets. Understanding the resilience of many of these children should help create interventions that should not only focus on supplying what is deficient in their lives but should equally emphasize efforts at enhancing their resilience. There is need for further studies on how helping agencies, the schools, the families and the rest of the street children's community could interact in a manner that can facilitate the development and strengthening of resilient traits among these children.

There is evidence in research literature that adverse life conditions breed a host of maladaptive behaviors among which is substance abuse. On the other hand, studies of resilient individuals demonstrate good adaptive outcomes in the face of adversities. Furthermore, there is evidence that resilience can be systematically enhanced and nurtured, especially during the developmental years of childhood and adolescence, through proactive interventions. Examples of such interventions include the life skills program and effective parenting training. Resilience—a product of dynamic interaction between individual vulnerabilities and positive traits, between risk and protective factors in the environment—empowers the individual to make sensible choices during critical moments in life. Such resilience may be the important element in changing the trajectory of the lives of street children.

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