



Colombia

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I HAVE not lived a normal and easy life ... but I moved forward and I think that is the most important thing.

—Colombian male

Context and Risk Factors:

COLOMBIA is the third most populated country in Latin America (44 million); and Medellin, with a population of 2.2 million (3.2 in the greater metropolitan area), is the third largest city of Colombia. Medellin is an important industrial and university center, and is also considered Colombia's Ciudad de la Eterna Primavera (Everlasting Spring City) and Ciudad de las Flores (City of the Flowers).¹ Violence in Medellin, increased dramatically during the 1970's and 1980's due to Colombia's internal armed conflict, which was strengthened by relationships between drug traffickers, guerrillas, and paramilitaries. For the past 15 years Medellin Municipal Authorities (in coordination with National Governments, Communities, NGO's, and the Catholic Church) have been developing important violence prevention programs. Medellin has seen the rate of homicides decrease 90% in the last twelve years, the largest decrease in the western hemisphere. But the homicide rate is still high (30 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2005). The city houses one of the most sophisticated drug trafficking operations in the world and has been the victim of its influence (ex-



periencing corruption, violence, insecurity, murdering of public leaders and policemen). But perhaps the most important heritage left by drug traffickers is a dramatic change in attitudes, practices, and laws and social norms respected in the community. Increasing inequity in Medellin over the past two decades is an important factor influencing social dynamics. Some of the adversities experienced by youth in Medellin include violence, kidnapping, corruption, lack of working opportunities, unequal access to health and higher education, domestic violence, increasing unwanted adolescent pregnancy, and weak social support.²

Participants: Of the 82 youth that participated in the study from Colombia, 50% (41) were female and 50% (41) were male. The average age of the participants was 17 years, ranging from ages 13 to 21. The average education level of Colombian participants was grade 9, with education levels ranging from grades 1 to 14. The communities of the participants saw the youth as coping well, based on culturally appropriate norms for their behaviour.

What does resilience mean in Medellin?: Qualitative interviews, consisting of nine 'catalyst' questions, were conducted with youth considered by the community to be 'coping well with adversity'. Two girls and two boys spoke with us about what it means to be resilient in Medellin. The IRP discovered that despite poverty, stigmatisation, violent lifestyles, and drug trafficking young people in Colombia are steadfast in their will to prove their current capabilities and potential.

Colombian youth told us for example: "Sometimes I look back and I know that it was not easy to live all that, but I am not ashamed of having lived all that, but rather I should feel proud of being where I am; because I also grew up in an environment influenced by drugs, alcohol, the fashion of going to parties every weekend to drink and to be with women - then it makes me feel proud to say that I survived in spite of everything what I have lived. Because I have not lived a normal and easy life; in fact even now it is not easy, but I know that I moved forward and I think that is the most important thing. So that pain is overcome for that happiness and for that pride that I feel!" (Colombian male)

"When you desire to move forward it does not matter that you are poor, the important thing is that you have that desire. The fact of to think and to analyze what it is what you want, to visualize yourself, and to know how you can overcome the possible problems, of any type, that you are experiencing. To know what you are and what you can be if you make an effort. The most important thing is to begin knowing what it is what you want, where do you go; to imagine that road, and do not care about the stones and the bad things this road can have, to fight until reaching it." (Colombian male)



WHAT is the International Resilience Project (IRP)?:

The IRP is a mixed-methods, culturally sensitive approach to understanding how youth around the world effectively cope with the diverse challenges they face. The IRP now has partnerships with researchers and community-based organizations on six continents in over 25 communities. The IRP is currently bringing to a close the first three-year phase of research, in which data was collected with over 1500 children in 14 communities worldwide. Medellin, Colombia was one of those communities. Youth in Medellin told of how their difficult life narratives provide the incentive to better themselves in a community marked by violence and political struggle.

For further information:

For a full discussion of the *International Resilience Project*, please see the accompanying Project Report contained with this package or visit us at our website www.resilienceproject.org

For copies of this report, please contact:

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Studying Resilience:

An international team of researchers created the content for the **Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM)**, a 58-item instrument administered across all 14 research-sites. Local research teams also added 15 contextually and culturally specific questions to the CYRM during its administration in their communities. Questions were scored from 1 (do not at all agree) to 5 (agree a lot) by the youth themselves.

Sample of Colombia CYRM Mean Scores

(Highest, lowest, and largest variance when compared to overall CYRM mean)

Order	CYRM Question listed by Mean Score	Site mean	Global mean	Variance	Color codes
1	Is getting an education important to you? (CYRM 10)	4.4	4.4	0	
2	Do you think non-prescription drugs and/or alcohol will help you when you have to deal with lots of problems? (CYRM 33) Reverse scored	R4.4	3.9	0.5	
3	Do you keep going even when life gets difficult? (CYRM 3)	4.2	3.8	0.4	
4	Are you comfortable with how you express yourself sexually? (CYRM 18)	4.2	3.3	0.9	
5	Are you aware of your own strengths? (CYRM 45)	4.1	3.7	0.4	
6	Do you have people you look up to? (CYRM 6)	4	3.6	0.4	
7	Do you feel that your parent(s) watch you closely and know a lot about you? (CYRM 20)	2.5	3.4	-0.9	
8	Are you comfortable asking for help? (CYRM 36)	2.4	3.1	-0.7	
9	Does the older generation understand and tolerate the ideas and strong beliefs of people your age? (CYRM 5)	2.3	2.9	-0.6	
10	Do you talk to your family about how you feel? (CYRM 29)	2.2	3.1	-0.9	
11	Does your family have a ritual or routine around mealtimes? (CYRM 19)	1.8	2.9	-1.1	
Overall Mean across 58 CYRM questions		3.4	3.4	0	

- Highest Site Scores on CYRM
- Lowest Site Scores on CYRM
- Largest Variance Below Global Mean (-)
- Largest Variance Above Global Mean (+)

Colombia Site Specific Question Mean Scores

Across all 58 measures of the CYRM, Colombia's mean (3.4 out of a possible 5) was equivalent to the global sample mean across all sites. Within the Colombian sample, youth placed particular importance (or scored themselves highest) on CYRM statements: 10 'Is getting an education important to you?'; 33 'Do you think non-prescription drugs and/or alcohol will help you when you have to deal with lots of problems?'; 3 'Do you keep going even when life gets difficult?'; and 18 'Are you comfortable with how you express yourself sexually?' It is important to note that CYRM question 33 is reverse scored. A high score indicates that youth **do not** think non-prescription drugs and/or alcohol will help when they have to deal with lots of problems.

Colombian youth gave the lowest scores to questions 36, 'Are you comfortable asking for help?'; 5 'Does the older generation understand and tolerate the ideas and strong beliefs of people your age?'; 29 'Do you talk to your family about how you feel?'; and 19 'Does your family have a ritual or routine around mealtimes?'

When compared to the global sample, Colombian youth showed the most **positive variance** (scoring higher than the overall mean for youth globally) on questions: 3 'Do you keep going even when life gets difficult?'; 18 'Are you comfortable with how you express yourself sexually?'; 45 'Are you aware of your own strengths?'; and 6 'Do you have people you look up to?'

When compared to the global sample, Colombian youth showed the largest **negative variance** (scoring lower than the overall mean for youth globally) on questions: 20 'Do you feel that your parent(s) watch you closely and know a lot about you?'; 36 'Are you comfortable asking for help?'; 29 'Do you talk to your family about how you feel?'; and 19 'Does your family have a ritual or routine around mealtimes?'

Colombia Site Specific Question Mean Scores

Site Specific Questions	Mean/5
SSQ 6: Does your mother show you, or has she shown you, love and affection?	4.2
SSQ 3: Do you think you will be able to reach the educational level you want?	3.9
SSQ 10: Do you think you will be able to get the type of job you desire?	3.8
SSQ 11: Does your mother encourage you and orient you to solve life's problems?	3.8
SSQ 13: Do you think you will be able to provide your family with the living conditions you think they need?	3.7
SSQ 12: How likely is it that there may be gunfights, killings, or robberies in your neighborhood?	3.5
SSQ 5: Do your family members end up accepting things that did not seem acceptable at first?	3.1
SSQ 7: Do your parents put into practice the recommendations they make to you?	3.0
SSQ 8: Has your father, mother, or uncles or brothers been involved in fights with physical violence (in or out of home)?	2.8
SSQ 9: Has your father, mother, or any of your uncles or brothers been accused of any kind of crime?	2.5
SSQ 14: Do you think the neighborhood you live in is the right place to rear children and young people?	2.5
SSQ 2: Are problems in your family solved with yelling, insulting, and/or threatening to hit?	2.4
SSQ 4: Does your father show you, or has he shown you, love and affection?	2.3
SSQ 1: Does your father encourage you and orient you to solve life's problems?	2.0

Colombian youth scored a mean of 3.1 out of a possible 5 across all site-specific questions, which was slightly lower than their mean score of 3.4/5 on the 58 globally administered CYRM questions.

Understanding the Results "Ecologically":

The IRP team reached a consensus that the 58 global CYRM questions could be separated into four unique and important aspects of resilience: *individual traits and characteristics, relationships factors, community contexts, and social and political aspects of culture*. Of the 58 CYRM questions, 23 related to individual traits and characteristics, 7 related to relationship factors, 15 to community contexts, and 12 related to aspects of culture. Focus on these four areas of resilience shows which aspects are most relevant to children's success in difficult contexts. One can see from the chart below which aspects of resilience are more or less important to Colombian youth when compared to youth across all 14 research-sites.

Four-part Ecological Model:

Gender Comparison of Colombia Site Means with Overall Sample Means (All Sites)

Ecological Model (Aspects of Resilience)	Site	Global	Girls		Boys	
			Colombia	Global	Colombia	Global
Individual Aspects	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.4
Relationship Aspects	3	3.4	3	3.5	3.0	3.3
Community Aspects	3.3	3.6	3.3	3.6	3.4	3.5
Culture Aspects	3	3.3	3	3.3	3.0	3.3

Endnotes

- 1 Medellin, Colombia. Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved November 4, 2005 from Wikipedia Website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medellin%2C_Colombia
- 2 Context information and risk factors obtained from IRP Site Partners in Colombia: School