

The Pathways to Resilience Project

Introduction to the Study

The Pathways to Resilience Research Project (PTR) is a series of studies that began in Canada in 2007 with funding from the National Crime Prevention Centre, and will continue until 2014 with funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the International Development Research Centre and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The project integrates both quantitative and qualitative research methods to examine service use patterns, personal and ecological risk factors, and aspects of resilience of youth across different cultures, contexts, and with complex service histories. The PTR now includes partners in at least five countries: Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Colombia, and China.

We partner with communities and service providers in each of the above countries to help them identify:

- The culturally specific aspects of resilience (strengths and capacities) that young people in their community use to cope with problems.
- The psychological, social, and environmental risks that young people face.
- Young people's service use patterns, i.e. their use of mandated services like Child Welfare, Corrections, Mental Health, Addictions, and Special Educational Services at school, their use of informal supports from their family and communities, and their use of informal services provided by local not-for-profit community organizations.

The goals of the Pathways to Resilience Project are to identify pathways through mandated and informal services; the informal family and community supports available to youth; and which service use pathways and support networks are most predictive of positive psychosocial outcomes for youth who face significant levels of adversity. Furthermore, we hope to provide participating communities, schools, governments, and service providers a very detailed understanding of young people's ways of coping with adversity and the risks they face. We would also like to help service providers from many different organizations find ways to coordinate services, create new services young people say they need, and find ways young people can engage with community and family supports that can help them "grow up well" despite the challenges they face.

Methodology and Participants

Youth participating in the Pathways to Resilience Project are between the ages of 13 and 19. In each community where the research is done, we seek the following three groups of young people:

Youth using at least one mandated service. We ask for referrals from child protection workers, mental health counsellors, corrections officers, school guidance counsellors, as well as community groups working with youth. These are the Service User population. In most cases, we seek youth who are using more than one service or community support to ensure we reach the youth most at-risk and in need of intervention.

Youth who are known to face many risks but who are still doing well (resilient). We ask communities to identify these youth. Usually these young people are involved in arts or sports activities, attending school regularly, or learning traditional skills. Any young person community advisors say faces significant risk but is still doing well is ideal for the study.

Youth who are living in the community. We select youth living in the same community as the youth from the previous two samples. We have found it easiest to find these young people through their schools or by putting up posters in their community, or simply by going door-to-door and locating young people who are willing to be interviewed.

The Pathways to Resilience Project includes both qualitative and quantitative methods. All youth referred to the study complete the Pathways to Resilience Youth Measure (PRYM). Two sub-samples of youth are then invited to continue their participation in the study. When youth who are between the ages of 13 and 15 we follow their progress for up to three years, seeing if their pattern of service use, the risks they face, and their resilience, changes. We meet with them annually, asking of them to complete the PRYM again each time. This longitudinal data helps us understand how service use patterns change as young people make the transition from child to young adult.

We also conduct very detailed one-on-one qualitative interviews that let a second sub-sample of young people tell us, in their own words, about the risks they face, resources available to them, their coping strategies and what's helpful and unhelpful in their context.

When possible, and with the informed consent of participants, we review the service files of multiple service using youth in order to better understand the pathways they've traveled between services, and the full scope of all the services they have received from each provider. Using a grounded theory approach to data analysis, we look for common themes throughout the qualitative data.

Local researchers then hold focus groups with young people, their caregivers, and service providers to help analyze the data and make recommendations for new policies and interventions.

Finally, we support the development of pilot initiatives that reach out to vulnerable youth, help coordinate services better, or connect youth to informal supports. Anything that fosters resilience, and is relevant to a local community, can be supported by the PTR Project. Our role as researchers is to help each community establish an intervention and then use our multiple research methods to set up program and evaluate it to see if it is helping.

The design of the research allows us each community to own the data it generates. The PTR Project provides support with data collection, analysis, and dissemination of results. The information brought back to the community can be made available in any way that it will be useful. The only thing we ask the community is to share with the Resilience Research Centre data from the young people in a way that ensures they, and the community, remain anonymous. By comparing anonymized data from all the different research sites around the world, we are beginning to learn about patterns of resilience, risk and service use across many different youth populations in many different cultures.

All methods are designed to be adapted for use in local sites, ensuring cultural and contextual relevance. The PRYM comprises a collection of validated scales and explores young people's resilience, the risks they face, the supports available to them and their service use patterns. The measure takes approximately 50 minutes to complete and is ordinarily read through with the young person. The measure has also been designed for use with youth as young as nine years old, as well as an adult person who knows the youth well.



Investigators

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The Pathways to Resilience research is being conducted in the three Atlantic Canadian sites: Halifax, Nova Scotia; Fredericton, New Brunswick; and Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador.

To date, our international partners include: Palmerston North, New Zealand; Bethlehem, South Africa; Medellin, Colombia; and Beijing, China.

Publications

Following the first phase of the study, this article was published:

Ungar, M., (2005) Pathways to resilience among children in Child Welfare, Corrections, Mental Health and Educational Settings: Navigation and Negotiation. *Child and Youth Care Forum* 34 (6), 423-444

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