



## The Role of Positive Youth Development Practices in Building Resilience and Enhancing Wellbeing for At-Risk Youth

Sanders, J., Munford, R., Thimasarn-Anwar, T., Lienbenberg, L., & Ungar, M. (2015). The role of positive youth development practices in building resilience and enhancing wellbeing for at-risk youth. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 42, 40-53. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.02.006

**SUMMARY:** It is important to discover the most effective methods for working with at-risk youth in youth development programs. This New Zealand-based study sought to discover whether the use of the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach among youth boosts resilience and yields improved outcomes for youth who have experienced chronic abuse and neglect. It also analyzed if resilience and well-being are affected by the quantity and quality of services received.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Positive Youth Development interventions (programs built on encouraging the strengths and competencies of youth) appear to have a strong positive influence on youth outcomes through the enhancement of youth resilience.
- Of the youth exposed to high levels of abuse and neglect, those who received empowering and respectful services demonstrated enhanced resilience, which was associated with greater well-being.
- Young people facing the highest risks had a greater likelihood of receiving more services but were less likely to experience empowering and respectful services (PYD approaches).

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONALS

Professionals could:

- Build the resilience of military youth through the use of PYD approaches, including emphasizing autonomy and building off of existing strengths, resources, and competencies
- Integrate examination of youth's strengths into interventions
- Identify areas in which resources are lacking in the life military youth, and help them fill those gaps

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS

Programs could:

- Increase holistic, collaborative responses to enhance resilience of military youth
- Implement specialized PYD programs based on analysis of unique risk factors in military communities
- Incorporate evaluations of the positive resources youth bring in order to build on those resources

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## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES

Policies could:

- Recommend increased attention to contextual risks in addition to individual risk to provide holistic responses for military youth and families
- Encourage training for practitioners who work with military youth that emphasizes providing a quality-over-quantity approach to service delivery
- Support collaboration among different service providers to ensure care of the whole person

## METHODS

- Participants were recruited through a community saturation approach in which researchers examined records to identify potential participants within organizations working with youth.
- Demographic variables, resilience, individual risk, contextual risk, service use history, and service use experience were measured through surveys.
- Data analyses were conducted to show the relationship between the measured constructs.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 605 at-risk youth from across New Zealand within the child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and mental health systems.
- All participants used more than one of the four service systems.
- 63% of the participants were male, 37% were female and the ages ranged from 12-17, 55% of whom were 15 and under.

## LIMITATIONS

- The data are correlational, so no conclusions about causation can be made.
- The study was based in New Zealand, so the results may not be generalizable to the US population.
- Because the sample was drawn from youth participating in programs, it may under-represent a certain subset of youth since some of the most at-risk youth might not be receiving any services.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Conduct a longitudinal study to examine the ways in which this relationship changes over time.
- Implement a random sample to ensure generalizability.
- Include youth not seeking services within the sample.

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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