

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Resilience and Protective Factors in a Midwestern Community: A Participatory Action Approach

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Resilience is a systemic process between a person and his/her environment (Ungar, 2005), whereby a person demonstrates a pattern of “good outcome despite serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten, 2001, p. 28). Despite much research, the resilience research field lacks consensus on specific definitions of resilience factors (Ungar et al., 2005). Therefore, it is recommended that research prioritize specific resilience variables (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003) while attending to contextual and systemic factors (Ungar, 2005).

The study took place in a community center in a low SES, predominantly African-American neighborhood in the Midwest. Neighborhood residents worked with research team members to co-construct a local definition of youth resilience through focus groups. Children meeting this definition were nominated by staff and participated in interviews about resilience factors. Children, parents, and staff also completed rating scales measuring resilient youth’s academic, behavioral, social, and emotional functioning. Qualitative examinations of data resulted in an ecosystemic

model of resilient youth in the community. Resilience was found to be influenced by interactions between individual, familial, and community factors. Individual perseverance and adult involvement and awareness, as well as community cohesion were important protective factors identified by participants. Results of the study were shared with community center staff with plans to utilize them at the center to help promote positive youth functioning.