It’s Hard to Know Who to Turn to, If You Don’t Know Who is There: Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Social Support

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The Questions for Today

• What should we know about vulnerability and resilience?
• How do we tease them apart and put them together?
• Where do relationships fit in the nexus of vulnerability and resilience?
• What are the lessons from understanding the power of relationships?
In Conclusion

• It’s all about networks and networks are all about connections and connections are all about relationships.
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parents
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methodology
variables
neighborhoods
education
social
influence
support
neighbors
influences
collective
Knowing Who is there

- In neighborhoods where there is more fluidity than stability, more uncertainty than predictability, and more ambiguity than clarity, the odds of chaos increases. Knowing who to go to for assistance is very difficult because you do not know who is there.
Intermediate Results
- Sense of Community

Social Organizational Process
- Network Structure
- Social Capital
- Community Capacity

Community Antecedents
- Social Infrastructure
- Physical Infrastructure

Theory of Community Action and Change
(Mancini and Bowen, 2013)
Significance of Formal Systems

• Mission of providing support programs and services

• Are stronger when they are diverse and comprehensive, when outreach is a primary activity, and when specific formal support entities collaborate (solving “silos”-related problems)

• Key role in supporting informal networks

• Contributes specialized expertise to the community resilience mix
Functions of Informal Networks  
(Gottlieb and colleagues, 2000)

• Emotional (to deal with despair and worry)
• Instrumental (to accomplish practical tasks)
• Informational (to achieve better decisions)
• Companionate (to spend time in a context for support)
• Validation (to support feeling worthwhile, competent, and hopeful)
What Relationships Provide
(Weiss, 1974; Russell & Cutrona, 1984; Mancini & Blieszner, 1992)

- **Attachment**: feelings of intimacy, peace, and security as found in relationships with spouses and very close friends
- **Social integration**: a sense of belonging to a group with whom one shares common interests and social activities
- **Reliable alliance**: knowing that one can count on receiving assistance in times of need, a function often provided by kin
- **Guidance**: having relationships with persons who can provide knowledge, advice, and expertise
- **Reassurance of worth**: a sense of competence and esteem obtained typically from work colleagues
- **Opportunity for nurturance**: being responsible for the care of others, such as one’s children
Social Provision Scales: Sample Items

- **Guidance**: There is no one I can turn to for guidance in times of stress.
- **Reassurance of Worth**: There are people who admire my talents and abilities.
- **Social Integration**: I feel part of a group of people who share my attitudes and beliefs.
- **Attachment**: I feel that I do not have close personal relationships with other people.
- **Nurturance**: I feel personally responsible for the well-being of another person.
- **Reliable Alliance**: If something went wrong, no one would come to my assistance.
Transitions and Transformation

• Human development is awash in a sea of biology and heredity, of learning and socialization, of experience and opportunities, of failure and success, and of continuity and change.
The Complexity of Intersections
Layers and Levels of Human Development and Contexts (Lerner)
Places, Texts, and Meaning

• “It is appropriate to think of places as texts, layered with meaning. Every place has an excess of meaning beyond what can be seen or understood at any one time” (p. 17).

Resilience and Vulnerability

• **Resilience**
  – Process of successfully overcoming adversity
  – Family resilience: process by which families are able to adapt and function competently following exposure to significant adversity or crises

• **Vulnerability**
  – Experiences, situations, or characteristics that expose a person to additional negative experiences and results
  – Risk
  – Increase odds of poor results
  – Internal and external elements
  – Chronic and acute
Study 1: Homeless Veterans (UK)

- 2008 inquiry
- Interviews (30 minutes to one hour) plus questionnaire on affect and social networks
- n=37 homeless Veterans residing in an East London hostel
- Average age=47; in past year lived “rough” 3 months; average time at East London Hostel=9 months
- Range of time in military service (6 weeks to 22 years)
- Atlas.ti software used to organize narratives
Themes and Study Results

- East London Hostel is a Staging Area for getting sorted out and for staying sorted out
- Fragility permeates early life and adult life
- Living rough begins years prior to experiencing life in the street or in a park
- Relationships, Connections, and Networks are primary elements in getting sorted out
- Vulnerability and Resilience are companions
- Community is a force for intervention and prevention
East London Hostel
Understanding a Context of Getting Sorted Out

• Life in East London Hostel as unique
  – Not easy to be admitted and not easy to be retained
  – Promotes social inclusion
  – Both caring and confrontational
  – Immediately shows value for the person
  – Provides support and expects responsibility
  – Promotes informal support among Veterans
  – Provides training and educational opportunities
  – Individualized according to needs
  – Prepares individuals for next steps; resource development
  – Sustains involvement with former residents
Understanding Living Rough

• “Rough sleeping” is a term used to describe living on the streets, in parks or in stairwells, or anyplace outside of a dwelling.

• For some men in our sample, rough sleeping and the disconnections it represents (from friends, relatives, employment, as examples) is but a present and visible example of other times in their lives when they have been in unstable, unpredictable situations.

• Dad in prison; watching Mom get beat up; both parents alcoholics; experiencing hunger; Father disappearing one night; repeated beatings both as a child and as an adult.

• In effect, disrupted development (example of respondent who maintained he had a normal childhood and then described alcoholism, abuse, and abandonment in his family, as well as substantial neighborhood violence)
A Life of Uncertainty

“I just remember seeing my dad walking down the road with a suitcase in his hand and then me too, calling him back, but he just walked away... after my father left my brother became like a father figure to me... then a year after he started abusing me... I didn't really understand... I didn't realize it was wrong or anything.”
A Life of Being in “Care”

“I was done with my training and I was waiting to be posted up, but in the meantime I had family problems. I lost a few members of my family and then I lost a friend in the Army and at the time I didn't realize what depression was and how it affects people, and I thought I was okay. And I obviously wasn't okay, and I was spiraling out of control. And then they said to me, well, uhm, we're going to let you leave, keep yourself together and if you want, you can come back in. I never had very good qualifications coming out of school. Uhm, I was fostered from a young age I got took away from family at four. Yeah, I've been in care all my life so.”
“My mom and dad were big drinkers. That sort of put blocks on everything because if I wanted to do something, they’d always be too drunk to sort it out. If I wanted clothes or holiday, I don’t remember any holidays with them, you know what I mean? They was always down at the pub, they was always in the pub.”
“Concentrating on the future. Where I want to be in a week's time, in a month's time. Or maybe an hour's time. Because I got to a point I was starting thinking about the past and that made me depressed and sad. Because a lot of bad things have happened. Yeah, a lot of things. This is what's got me now, this is my life, and I'm wandering the streets with no money, no prospects. No, no. I've got purpose.
“Yeah, that's it, yeah. And plus once you, once you clique with other people, you might see two or three in the park drinking. On the other end they see you with a can. What, it just starts with you [indiscernible]. And it just starts from there. Mates. You've got to be drinking though. If you're not drinking, they don't want to know you because they've been doing it for so long.”
Voices of Homeless Veterans

- “My mom and dad were big drinkers. That sort of put blocks on everything because if I wanted to do something, they'd always be too drunk to sort it out. If I wanted clothes or holiday, I don't remember any holidays with them, you know what I mean? They was always down at the pub, they was always in the pub.”
Resilience and Vulnerabilities

**Resilience Markers change**
- Positive memories of childhood
- Positive family connections now; sense of legacy
- History of occupational success
- Independent living track
- Management of mental illness and alcohol use
- Active friendships
- Connections with formal support systems

**Vulnerabilities Markers**
- Family disruptions, past and present
- Alcoholism in family of origin and in own life
- Violence in family and community
- Unresolved interpersonal conflicts
- Social isolation/exclusion
- Vague sense of future
Understanding Resilience

- Jason is an avid reader and intentionally focuses on improving his values and having positive beliefs; he considers himself very spiritual.

- Sean was thrown out of East London Hostel several years ago for being drunk, angry, and violent. He returned five months ago, has stopped drinking and says he is committed to making something of himself.

- Dave recently “graduated” from East London Hostel and has his own flat. In his own words, “I mean to see me now you wouldn’t have recognized me two years ago.”

- Chris was living in a park and was a heavy drinker. What pushed him to stop drinking was a return to the park while at the hostel: “I sat there and I thought I couldn’t go back to this. I couldn’t go back to being like this.” It took him seven weeks at the hostel before sleeping in his bed. “The floor felt safe to me.”

- James recognizes that his continued well-being starts with consistently taking his medication prescribed for mental illness. “Because if I don’t do that I find it very hard to get through the day.”
Understanding Resilience

• Christy claims that East London Hostel is a Godsend. “You know, all I want to do is get a job and get back into work because sitting around is, you know, just sitting like tearing things apart.”

• Michael has a history of getting into fights. He has a son he has not seen for eight months but is working with the East London Hostel social worker to prove his paternity and be a Father to his son.

• Adrian, now employed in the construction industry and in the process of transitioning from East London Hostel, is involved in a positive intimate relationship, and says of his life today, “Yeah, now it’s completely different. One, because I like myself, but you know, I do genuinely like myself, yeah.”
Relationship Functions Results

• Relatively lower scores on Nurturance and Attachment
  – *Nurturance* reflects roles a person would have as in caring for a child or a dependent adult; also the feeling of being needed in that relationship.
  – *Attachment* reflects a more generalized sense of intimacy and emotional connections/security.

• Relatively higher scores on Reliable Alliance
  – *Reliable Alliance* reflects having relationships in which people provide tangible support and instrumental assistance.
Conclusions: Connections Among Homeless Men

- A situation of social exclusion
- Connections and relationships as pathways toward social inclusion
- Intersections between formal systems and informal networks primary
- In the face of vulnerabilities, what relationships provide can turn hopelessness toward hopefulness
Study 2: Adolescents and Deployment (2004)

- 2004 Focus Groups
  - 14 focus groups; 107 youth, all Services
  - Access via NMFA

- Participants:
  - 107 adolescents between ages of 12 and 18
  - ~61% Caucasian; 17% African-American
  - ~46% Females
  - ~56% Active Duty military parent (39% Army)
  - ~36% National Guard or Reserve military parent (23% Guard)
  - ~100% Experienced parental deployment

- Analyses: Atlas.ti software
Study 3: Adolescents and Deployment (2008)

- Focus groups conducted with National Guard and Reserve Teens at OMK camps summer 2008
  - Florida; Ohio, Maine, North Carolina
  - 11 focus groups
  - Participants:
    - 85 adolescents between ages of 11 and 18
    - ~73% Caucasian; 11% African-American
    - ~51% Females
    - ~48% Active Duty military parent (26% Army)
    - ~46% National Guard or Reserve military parent (23% Guard)
    - ~79% Experienced parental deployment (24% multiple)

- Atlas.ti software accessed to develop themes
Themes and Study Results

• Adolescents demonstrated a great deal of **resilience** when it comes to dealing with changes in their daily lives.

• Demonstrated **great maturity** as they willingly took on more responsibilities at home. Many referred to becoming another parent for younger siblings.

• **Family support** for the parent as evidenced by their remaining at home is important.

• Adolescents exhibited a great deal of **variability in asking others for support** when they felt stressed. Some confided in others, while others isolated.
Themes and Study Results

• Many adolescents were wary of the type of support offered by others. They were quick to point out incidences of insincerity and feigned experience with deployment from others.

• Adolescents are very aware of the dangers associated with deployment and the ways their lives are changed as a result of it.

• Adolescents’ daily routines usually changed as a result of deployment.
Themes and Study Results

• Many adolescents reported behavior changes, including changes in school performance.

• Adolescents have a great deal of access to their deployed parent. Most reported having contact via e-mail or phone at least once a week (some more).

• Although they report watching television and reading newspapers, adolescents were wary of media coverage of the war. Many adolescents relied on their deployed parent to provide them with accurate information about the war.
"When I was younger, I didn’t understand why he was leaving. I just didn’t understand the whole concept of the Army and, you know, your dad has to be deployed."

“When my father got deployed, I was the only kid in my neighborhood whose dad got sent to that. So no one really knew besides just me and my sisters how we were feeling.”
Interrupted Relationships

“I didn’t think that…I just kind of blew it [the deployment] off and didn’t really know it was going to be that long. And then when it started happening, started sinking in, it was hard.”

“...I know my dad understands how I feel because before he left, like I don’t know, a couple of days before it, he sat down with us and talked with us, you know….Just, you know, he loves us and he’ll try and get back as soon as he can...”

“I was such a (expletive) to my mom before she left. And all summer I said that to her—I said that, “I hate, I hate you!” And the next thing you know she’s packing up her bags and going...”
Competing Feelings and Responses

“I used to hate my dad. I used to despise him or I didn’t…he was the worst person to me. And then he was…and then like I find out that he’s leaving and I really didn’t care at first. But then when I see him packing up his bags and getting all his stuff ready, I felt, I felt like a (expletive) myself because I didn’t help him through anything and I wasn’t nice to him through like everything else.”
Location in the Family

“When my dad was deployed I felt the same as I always do. Once you...if you’re born into the military, you get used to it.”

“...I feel like I can’t relax. I’m always stressed and worried about something—my brother and sister, my mom, my dad, my friends. When I finally get one thing right, something else always seems to go wrong. And I’m always trying to like help my mom and stuff and be helpful, but there’s only so much a 13-year-old can do. And it’s just hard without my dad there to kind of help and stuff. And I like it when he’s home because then I can just act normal and stuff and just have fun.”
Sad and Mad

“Well, see I’m sad because I didn’t want him to go but he had to, so I am kind of mad. But then he’s done this a lot so it doesn’t really matter.”

“I was angry at everybody. I’m like a big daddy’s girl, so I was really sad he was going away. And I was scared something bad might happen to him.”

“I didn’t think anything at first. I just kind of blew it off and didn’t really know it was going to be that long. And then when it started happening, started sinking in, it was hard.”
Managing Stress

“When I normally get stressed out I ask if I can go to the gym or something, to lift weights…It’s like lifting up all that metal puts a lot of strength to your to be…and makes you all tired so when you go home, you don’t have to worry about anything. You just go to sleep.”
What do I do with Him?

“...Like when they come home is that like awkward bonding phase all over again, like you’re starting from scratch.”

“Well when my dad left, everything’s going one way when he come back, and he’s starting off right where he left so...There’s just a big clash and that starts a lot of problems...Like he forgets that he’s been gone for like a year or six months. So he still thinks we’re a lot younger and while he was gone we matured a lot over the year. And he’s still trying to treat us the way we were treated a year ago.”
“Sometimes it would be like we’d have people that bring weird stuff and then sometimes it would be a good thing. Other times it felt like they were just doing it out of pity. You know, sometimes you have that neighbor who wouldn’t talk to you because someone’s gone, you know, they’re just doing it out of pity.”

“And so I sort of feel like my best friends and their families become part of my family, and we treat each other like our extended family.”
Looking Inward and Moving On

“...I’d rather have a, you know, like just bond and talk about it. But like honestly, I don’t want to just sit here and, oh, my dad’s gone. I don’t want to talk about that 24-7. I want to go out, have fun, get together, eat you know? I don’t want to just talk about deployment and stuff because there’s other things happening in our lives you know...like occasionally talk about it but no like every time—so how do you feel?’ because it just gets annoying and it’s like numbing..”
Voices of Youth in Military Families

• “...I feel like I can’t relax. I’m always stressed and worried about something—my brother and sister, my mom, my dad, my friends. When I finally get one thing right, something else always seems to go wrong. And I’m always trying to like help my mom and stuff and be helpful, but there’s only so much a 13-year-old can do. And it’s just hard without my dad there to kind of help and stuff. And I like it when he’s home because then I can just act normal and stuff and just have fun.”
Voices of Youth in Military Families

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Study 4: Connections and Social Provisions among Youth in Military Families (2012)

- Study of 1,034 youth ages 11-18
- All in families of active duty personnel
- Located within and outside of the coterminous United States
- Web-based survey
- Families familiar with transitions, including relocation, and parental absence
Measures

• Predictor: Cumulative Risk

• Outcomes
  – Depressive symptoms (CES-DC)
    • “During the past week, I felt like crying:
  – Grades: Self-reported grades on record card
  – Self-efficacy (General Self-Efficacy Scale; Sherer et al., 1982)
    • “When unexpected problems occur, I don’t handle them very well.” (reverse score)
Measures: Mediators

– Internal
  • Measure of Family Support
  • “(Someone in my family) listens to me when I have something to say.”

– Community Context: Informal networks
  • Social Ties (Social Provisions; Cutrona & Russell, 1987)
  • “I feel part of a group who share my attitudes and beliefs.”
  • “I have a strong bond with at least one other person.”

– Community Context: Formal systems
  • Involvement in community programs
  • Index of involvement in youth programs, military sponsored events, & religious activities
Cumulative Risk: Conceptualized as:
1 = Minority Status
1 = Non-married Parents
1 = Perceived Isolation
1 = Parent Currently Deployed
1 = 2+ School Transitions in 5 Years
1 = Parental Rank (Enlisted)
1 = 2+ Military Parents,
1 = Living Outside the US
1 = Living 30+ Minutes from Base

Mental Health: Depression
Cognitive Outcomes: Grades
Mastery: Efficacy (Persistence)

Influence of Cumulative Risk on Adolescent Outcomes

Multiple Dimensions of Adolescent Outcomes

Note. Standardized coefficients
Cumulative Risks

Depressive Symptoms

-147***

-240***

-131***

-258***

-.080*

Community Context:
Social Ties

-.019

.106**

.212***

.150***

.254***

Cumulative Risks

-258***

-.080*

Community Context:
Program Engagement

.005

CFI = .93;
RMSEA = .06;
χ²/df ratio = 4.40

Mediators at the Family- and Community-level

Note. Standardized coefficients. Solid lines are significant paths. Direct effects not shown.
Conclusions: Connections Among Youth in Military Families

- Cumulative vulnerabilities (risks) are related to more depression, less success in school, and lesser ability to deal with and master situations.

- The influence of social provisions: Even when an adolescent comes from a challenging family context, the influence of positive support ties (i.e., having someone to turn to, feeling connected) is related to positive adolescent outcomes. Having healthy ties to others is related to lower levels of depression, better grades, and higher levels of self-efficacy.

- In the face of vulnerabilities, relationships function to turn hopelessness to hopefulness.

- Data were collected from participants (N=273 military families) in the continental United States. Research criterion included: (1) families have at least one adolescent between the ages of 11 and 18, and (2) all eligible family members come to the youth center on the installation to take the survey at the same time (e.g., in two-parent families, both parents and the adolescent were required to come).

  - **Adults:** 233 (85.7%) males and 45 (16.5) of females were active duty military personnel. 161 (65.5%) males and 185(69.0%) females were 31-40 years of age. 109 (44.1%) of males and 98 (36.6%) of females reported “some college” education.

  - **Children:** Equal split of males (n = 135) and females (n = 138). Ages ranged from 11-18 (M = 14.04, SD = 2.08). Most attended public schools off post (n = 153, 56.3%).
Influence of Social Provisions on Child Outcomes

Social Provisions

Anxiety - Child report
R² = .07
-0.257***

Anxiety - Father report
R² = .01
-0.082

Anxiety - Mother report
R² = .05
-0.231***

Dep. Symptoms
Child report; R² = .18
-0.429***

Dep. Symptoms
Father report; R² = .02
-0.155*

Dep. Symptoms
Mother report; R² = .07
-0.263***

Self-Efficacy
R² = .31
0.554***

Personal Well-being
R² = .28
0.525***

Academic Performance
R² = .05
0.228***

Note. X²/df = 1.30; RMSEA = .03; CFI = .99. Standardized coefficients
Influence of Social Provisions on Child Outcomes

Social Provisions

Anxiety - Child report
$R^2 = .07 / .25$

Anxiety - Father report
$R^2 = .01 / .03$

Anxiety - Mother report
$R^2 = .05 / .12$

Dep. Symptoms
Child report
$R^2 = .18 / .44$

Dep. Symptoms
Father report
$R^2 = .02 / .06$

Dep. Symptoms
Mother report
$R^2 = .07 / .13$

Personal Well-being
$R^2 = .28 / .39$

Self-Efficacy
$R^2 = .31 / .42$

Academic Performance
$R^2 = .05 / .18$

Controlling for:
Child reports of mother and father’s parenting,
Child reports of warm interactions with mother and father,
Child’s Sex/Gender,
Observing parental conflict

Note. $X^2/df = 2.80$;
RMSEA = .08; CFI = .96.
Standardized coefficients

The University of Georgia
Department of Human Development and Family Science
Influence of Social Provisions on Adult Outcomes

Male Social Provisions

- .474***
- .449***
.381***
.425***
-.151*
-.301***
-.240***
.365***
.364***

Female Social Provisions

Anxiety - Male
R² = .22

Dep. Symptoms - Male
R² = .20

Self-Efficacy - Male
R² = .14

Personal Well-being
Male; R² = .19

Anxiety - Female
R² = .09

Dep. Symptoms
Female; R² = .06

Self-Efficacy - Female
R² = .14

Personal Well-being
Female; R² = .13

Note. X²/df = 1.28;
RMSEA = .03; CFI = .99.
Standardized coefficients
Influence of Social Provisions on Adult Outcomes

Male Social Provisions

Dep. Symptoms - Male
$R^2 = .22 / .25$

Self-Efficacy - Male
$R^2 = .14 / .19$

Personal Well-being
Male; $R^2 = .19 / .25$

Anxiety - Male
$R^2 = -.474*** / .386***$

Dep. Symptoms - Male
$R^2 = -.449*** / -.432***$

Self-Efficacy - Male
$R^2 = .381*** / .350***$

Personal Well-being
Male; $R^2 = -.151** / -.172**$

Anxiety - Female
$R^2 = .301*** / -.264***$

Dep. Symptoms - Female; $R^2 = -.240*** / -.182**$

Self-Efficacy - Female
$R^2 = .365*** / .342***$

Personal Well-being
Female; $R^2 = .364*** / .304***$

Female Social Provisions

Note. $X^2/df = .96$;
RMSEA = .00; CFI = 1.00.
Standardized coefficients

Controlling for Males’ and Females’ Reports of:
Males’ and Females’ reports of marital quality and
adverse childhood events
In Conclusion

- It’s all about networks and networks are all about connections and connections are all about relationships.
The Questions for Today

• What should we know about vulnerability and resilience?
  – They vary over time; they are developmental
  – Vulnerabilities are not created equal; some more amenable to change than others
  – Understanding the human condition requires a concurrent look at vulnerability and resilience
The Questions for Today

• How do we tease them apart and put them together?
  – Examining the contexts in which vulnerability and resilience appear is significant
  – We must account for “usual” development and circumstance prior to attributing effects to certain vulnerabilities
  – Research must include what appear to be clear indicators of vulnerability and of resilience
The Questions for Today

• Where do relationships fit in the nexus of vulnerability and resilience?
  – As a gateway for understanding how vulnerability and resilience co-occur
  – Relationships are primary since humans are essentially social entities
  – Relationships can be the turning point for mitigating effects of vulnerability
The Questions for Today

• What are the lessons from understanding the power of relationships?
  – Explore relationships as “leverage points” for change
  – Parse and suss relationship nuances

• What do relationships provide? And which relationships seems to be associated with particular social provisions?
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