EXAMINING STUDENT-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

DURING K-12 SCHOOL AGE YEARS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between dependent and independent variables and the effects relationships have on K-12 students as they struggle through life stressors. Thus, the research study was based upon this over arching question: How does having positive student-adult relationships impact a student's ability to cope with life stressors? Importantly, the study sought to determine the impact of adult relationships as students coped with their circumstances. Key issues included an understanding of resiliency, the importance of developing resiliency, and how adults can make a deliberate effort to build resiliency in youth. Through a twenty-two question survey, participants identified the family, friend, and personal stressor they have experienced during their K-12 school years. Life stressors were reported in the study and for each of the stressors participants identified the adult(s) who helped them cope with the experience(s) and the degree to which the adult(s) assisted them. Furthermore, the strength of the connections to the sources was measured and to what extent the sources of connectedness influenced the participant's degree of current resiliency was determined. Results revealed a very strong correlation between relationship strength and the ability to cope. In all cases, the relationship was highly significant. No matter what kind of stressful situation one experienced, the positive relationship observed for each correlation demonstrated that as relationships

improved, help with coping also improved. The results offer educators new information of the

important role adults can play in helping students cope with life stressors.

SIGNATURE PAGE

The Dissertation Committee for Drexel University certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

EXAMINING STUDENT-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

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<u>DEDICATION PAGE</u>

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my gram, Rachael Lappi (1932-2004) and my middle school/high school physical education teacher, Ms. Marya Pepoy. Both of these women served as the influential adults in my life who have made all the difference during my adolescent years when I experienced life stressors. They believed in me and supported me through very difficult transitions. My gram and Ms. Pepoy were my sources of strength and encouragement. They continuously reminded me that I could get through anything and that with faith, all things are possible.

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"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" Philippians 4:13. This verse has been my source of strength and has sustained me throughout this doctoral program. I want to thank my God for giving me the motivation and ability to pursue and successfully complete this doctorate degree.

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CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

Introduction

      Imagine growing up in a very small town in Michigan with a population of 1,200 people where everyone knows each other. Picture a family where the parents were upstanding members of the community. The mother was the only nurse practitioner within 50 miles of town and the father was a counselor and part-time pastor at a local church. Additionally, both parents were chair members on the child abuse prevention council for the town. Now, imagine their children, two boys and a girl, excelling both in school and in extracurricular activities; they were honor roll students, star athletes, and musicians. It was the picture perfect image of a very healthy and happy household.

      On the inside though, it was quite the contrary. This is the story of one young woman whose resiliency shines through in the face of childhood atrocities. Consequently, the reader will see how a positive relationship with one adult made the difference in the life of a child. This is her story.

      "I maintained the image as though my life couldn't be better for as long as I was able to. But at the age of 15 my ability to wear the mask finally broke. I began to speak out about the truth of my family. My parents were incredibly abusive and mentally ill. They treated my body and mind as if they were their possessions. On a daily basis they would practice aggression, hate, lust, and other evil acts on me. My case was the most severe child abuse case ever recorded in the history of our town. Because of my parents' impeccable reputation, almost everyone turned their backs on me and supported them. It was too hard for anyone to believe that his or her friend, doctor, pastor, or neighbor could participate in or perform such heinous acts. Most of my friends disappeared within a week and many embraced the theory that I was mentally ill.

Although I was left with a support network of caseworkers and detectives that knew the evidence and were encouraging, they were limited to having only a professional relationship with me.

My senior year of high school was one of the most challenging years of my life. I ate lunch alone, heard whispers in the hallways, and sat isolated in classrooms. I had an incredibly overwhelming feeling of loneliness! Somewhere in the midst of the chaos that had become my life, my math teacher surfaced. What started with an offer to help me with my pre-calculus work at lunchtime gradually turned into a safe atmosphere where I could escape from the nightmare that had become my reality. Those daily lunches with that teacher were the one thing that enabled me to stay in school. We had many different discussions during our times together, but the most influential reassurance for me during that time was the affirmation that I was not alone in the battle. He would listen to me. He was safe. He believed me and believed in me. He recognized that I needed encouragement and stability more than tips on how to solve math problems. He cared more about me as an individual and my emotional well being and state of mind, than he did my academic success; I'm so thankful for that!

I rarely visit my hometown, but on the occasions that I do, I make it a priority to see my former teacher. I am eternally grateful to him for being my safe haven and my refuge during the most difficult time of my childhood years. He taught me so much more than just math. I'll never forget him!"

Unfortunately, for various reasons, situations like this exist. This story is a real life example of how positive relationships and connections with adults can make all the difference in the life of a child during adversity. Connectedness is considered a key element in building resiliency. How connectedness is related to building resiliency was studied particularly in terms of how making positive connections early in life have helped contribute to resiliency later in life

and help one to bounce back from life stressors. Components of resiliency were discussed with a focus on the importance of connectedness, including the significance of building and sustaining positive relationships. These relationships sometimes start in the home, particularly with parents, but are not always the case. Many children do not live with their biological parents because the parent is unable to care for and provide for the child independently. According to the Children's Defense Fund (2011), in 2009, it was reported that 7,094,116 of America's children live with a grandparent or other relative as the head of the household. In the same report, 943,356 of these children live with their grandparents and are being raised by them because the actual parent is not living in the home. In 2008, it was noted that more than 1.7 million children had a parent incarcerated. In order for people to prosper and overcome disadvantages, educators need to understand the key role they play in establishing and fostering connections and how this can lead to developing more competent and successful learners, workers, and citizens.

According to Eccles and Goodman, (2002), connectedness is defined as "being close, attached, supported, or bonded to others." The Center for Disease Control and Prevention explains school connectedness as "the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals" (p. 5). Additionally, Libbey (2004) refers to connectedness as "feeling a sense of engagement and bonding, a belonging, and an attachment" (p. 2). Teachers have been identified as primary agents for developing resiliency in students; however, the literature does not examine the source(s) of connectedness that led to the resiliency in these teachers.

Some researchers argue that resiliency is not a genetic trait, an innate, inborn capacity that people have. Others declare resiliency is something that is developed over time. This

researcher believes resiliency can be a part of one's genetic make-up, but it can also be developed through connections. There are various factors that exist to add to one's potential to become resilient. One factor is connectedness.

There are many events that occur within a person's lifetime that can seem to be unbearable and inhibit a person from being able to cope or continue. For reasons unknown, these people are physically, emotionally, or socially unable to recover. When there is a connection or some type of bond with another person in their identified circle of influence (such as parents, siblings, teachers, mentors, coaches, school counselors, school administrators, other family members, and/or clergy), there is a greater chance of one becoming resilient. Positive connections contribute to resiliency.

When there is a sense of belonging in a caring relationship, one's ability to become resilient is enhanced. There is emotional support that exists through an attachment with others and a feeling of connectedness. These caring relationships are supportive through many unexpected changes or major transitions experienced in one's life. For many people, these connections are birthed during their school age years. When discussing school connectedness, it often refers to students' experiences, perceptions, and their feelings about school. According to the Division of Behavioral Health (2008), school connectedness includes feelings of being:

- A part of the school

- Cared about by adults

- Close to people at school and have strong relationships

- Treated with respect consistently by teachers and staff

- And, that their learning matters and is a high priority (p. 4)

Resiliency can be measured through supportive relationships. Often times, people who are resilient have supportive family and friends from which their strength is built. However, too often students are coming to school with little to none of these connections in place and their basic needs are not met. Many students do not feel a connection to school or to a single adult within the school, and sometimes not within their families or communities either. It is important for adults to create these caring and trusting relationships with students early on so the students can feel a sense of belonging and connectedness. Moreover, should students experience life stressors during their school-age years or later in life, they can draw strength from the previous connections established. When people are close to others and have a sense of attachment, emotional supports are nurtured.

Because there is an immeasurable amount of obstacles in home lives for many students, school may be the one constant in their lives and may be considered their only safe haven. Deliberate planning and effort by school personnel are imperative so that students are able to rebound from the adversity they face and so that students can develop resiliency. It is the responsibility of educators to provide and foster a learning environment where caring and personal connections can be established and nurtured.

Resiliency is also characterized as how children and adults bounce back from stress, trauma, and risk in their lives. It was noted, "more than any institution except family, schools can provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency into today's youth and tomorrow's adults" (Henderson et al., 2003, p. 2). There is high importance placed on increasing the bonding and connectedness that takes place in the school. A student who feels safe, cared for and accepted will engage in the learning and feel optimistic about personal school experience, thus contributing to one's development of resiliency. When a student feels trusting of even one

adult, this feeling helps the student to internalize the hope and belief of self-worth. These caring

and trusting connections are essential. Building positive relationships and a feeling of

connectedness is foundational for building resiliency.

Carson (2004) mentioned the importance of focusing on the attitude that children have

when going to school. Assessing and monitoring the emotional barometer is key. When

students do not feel connected to others, whether it is their family, friends, or adults in the

school, or have no positive relationships or mentors, they simply do not want to attend school;

thus, attendance declines and attrition rates rise. Providing opportunities for students to establish

and build one-to-one interactions and connections with mentoring groups is a positive approach

in overcoming this phenomenon, as well as building the characteristic of resiliency.

In human nature there is a basic need to want to feel a sense of belonging. People

naturally gravitate toward those who care for them and those with whom they have connections.

Comer (2004) concludes in his study that no significant learning occurs without a significant

relationship. Additionally, an environment that establishes a priority in caring and supportive

connections enhances the optimum for promoting pro-social moral development and ultimately

higher academic success (Battistich, 2003).   Others echo this belief. Sanchez (2008) in

particular supports this notion by stating, "The ability for schools to begin to successfully

promote the perceptions that students are safe, wanted, and can be successful is intricately linked

to the concept of relationship" (p. 38).

Students who grow up in poverty and live in underprivileged conditions are often the

students who are labeled at risk, as well as more often believed to be the population needing the

development of resiliency the most. Many Americans think of these children as disruptive and

aggressive. What needs to be understood is these children primarily function in survival mode

and care little about success in school or following rules of any kind–until they feel safe, loved, cared for, and ultimately connected. According to Blum (2004), "School connectedness is influenced through:

- Individuals - students and school staff

- Environment - school climate and school bonding

- The culture of the school - social needs and learning priorities" (p. 231).

When students lack a caring and positive connection with peers or adults, learning is less likely to take place. The need to build resiliency in the school setting becomes even more critical for student success. Sanchez (2008) states, "In many ways, resiliency provides a blueprint for increasing capacity. It is the identification of protective factors that provide insight into what specific change can occur in an individual's life that can improve one's opportunity for success" (p.83). In schools where students are apathetic, do not show respect, do not know how to problem solve or get along with others, quality teaching and learning are virtually non-existent and the need for building positive relationships with students and fostering resiliency become more of an urgency. It is essential that teachers begin to understand how critical it is to make deliberate efforts to allow opportunities for these positive connections to be made. Building resilient young people, and empowering them with courage, capacity, confidence, and the life skills necessary to be productive caring citizens in society, even when faced with the unknown, is a prerequisite to developing healthy responses to life stressors (Sanchez, 2008). Resiliency is perhaps the overlay to all we do in schools.

Problem Statement

There was a gap in knowledge about life stressors that students have endured during their K-12 school age years and which adults, if any, helped them cope with their difficult experiences. According to the social and cognitive development phases of Piaget and Erikson, one cannot properly reflect on the 13-18 year old stage of life, specifically the Formal Operational (Piaget) and Young Adulthood (Erikson). In the midst of the transitions from Concrete Operational to Formal Operational and adolescence (identity v. role confusion) to young adult (intimacy v. isolation), one's view of the situation remains egocentric concrete. Consequently, reflection in the midst of adolescence would not provide as great an insight as post adolescence for this study.   As a result, students enrolled in entry-level college courses were selected as the participants to survey for this study in an effort to gather information from those just recently completing their K-12 years. Having the participants respond to the survey with a retrospective view of their entire K-12 experience allowed the researcher to gain a comprehensive outlook of how an adult may have impacted their school age years during difficult times.

It was the researcher's intent that the results of this study demonstrated the need for educators to focus on developing resiliency in children, impress upon educators the need to take on the role of being a mentor, and establishing positive relationships with students. The desire was the results of the study would help educators know and understand the impact they have on building students' resiliency.   Additionally, the information would also be important to school leaders, in that they help to create a school climate that can also foster resiliency.

Resiliency is acquired and developed through sources of connectedness and positive relationships to varying degrees.   This connectedness includes relationships with parents,

siblings, friends, teachers, mentors, coaches, school counselors, school administrators, other family members, and/or clergy.

The study examined the responses of the surveyed population of students who were asked to identify and quantify a life stressor they have experienced sometime during their K-12 school-age years. These respondents were students enrolled in a community college in South Central Pennsylvania. The students were further asked to identify a source of connectedness to identified adults and the extent to which those adults affected the student's ability to work through the identified life stressors. The strength of the relationship was determined. Additionally, the self-reported degree of coping as they responded to the identified life stressors was also examined and whether or not this positive relationship contributed to the student's perceived level of current resiliency.

Null Hypothesis I: There is no significant relationship between the participant's positive student-adult relationships and one's ability to cope with life stressors experienced during K-12 school years.

Alternative Hypothesis I: There is a significant relationship between the participant's positive student-adult relationships and one's ability to cope with life stressors experienced during K-12 school years.

Null Hypothesis II: There is no significant relationship between the participant's positive relationship(s) with an adult and his/her current perceived level of resiliency.

Alternate Hypothesis II: There is a significant relationship between the participant's positive relationship(s) with an adult and his/her current perceived level of resiliency.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables that identify the life stressors the participants, who were students enrolled in a community college, have endured and identified with any adults, and if any helped them cope with their difficult experiences. The strength of the connections to the sources was measured and the degree of recovery the participants experienced was determined. Additionally, the study's intent was to indicate to what extent the sources of connectedness affected the resiliency. The results of this study are intended to provide educators with a knowledge base of the role adults can play in building resiliency in students.

Significance

Having an understanding of the various stressors in K-12 students lives and knowing what mechanisms they used to work through the difficult times has provided foundational thinking for proactive models of interventions in assisting future generations. The research has contributed to the field of education in that it revealed some factors that contribute to building resiliency in students. The researcher was able to identify whom the participants named as the primary sources of support during their time of need, determine the strength of the relationship, and explain how the identified adult helped them through the difficult situation.

The researcher's study results will provide K-12 schools with information to practitioners with supports they can provide students. South Central Community College, while gaining a retrospective view of the students' lives, can better provide support mechanisms at this level as students continue through their college years. Additionally, the results offered South Central Community College with information to better support students who are dealing with difficult situations. An intent of the study was to reiterate the importance of young adults having a

positive relationship with an adult to assist them in dealing with life stressors. The results from

the study provide a synthesis of the data offering considerations for how community colleges can

better support their students and set them up for success by giving them support systems:

including a mentoring program. Additionally, faculty and staff employed at South Central

Community College can use the results to collaborate with school counselors and share with

them the importance of teachers establishing positive relationships with students so that when

they experiences difficult times during their school age years, they have someone with whom

they can talk. The results add to the professional practice in that it leads educators to a greater

understanding of the importance of adults fostering positive connections with students. The

focus was the significance of building and sustaining positive relationships.

Educators must understand the key role they play in fostering and establishing

connections through positive adult relationships, and how this can lead to developing individuals

who can prosper and overcome disadvantages. The study may enlighten educators to the ways in

which nurturing positive relationships and having a sense of belonging, connectedness, and

bonding can contribute to resiliency and social emotional well being. Educators may then apply

information from this study to all educational disciplines.

Research Questions

Four key research questions framed this study. All four questions listed related to the

theme of understanding resiliency, the importance of developing resiliency, and how adults can

make a deliberate effort to build resiliency in youth. The central question was how do

participants value positive student-adult relationships with their ability to cope with life stressors

in South Central Community College. The researcher aimed to describe the relationships

between the different identified stressors and the adults who were named as supporting the

participant's ability to cope with the life stressor. In addition, the relationship between the adult identified and the participant's ability to cope with the life stressor was also analyzed to determine the strength of the association of these two variables.

1. What is the relationship between positive student-adult relationships and a student's ability to cope with life stressors that one experiences during K-12 school years? (Quantitative)

2. What is the relationship between the participant's positive relationship(s) with an adult and his/her current perceived level of resiliency? (Quantitative)

3. Who (what role) will each of the participants identify as the influential adults who helped them as K-12 students cope with the life stressors? (Quantitative)

4. What types of life stressors will the participants report as having experienced during their K-12 years? (Quantitative)

Figure 1.

Conceptual Framework

Resiliency

Student-
Adult
Relationships

Life Stressors
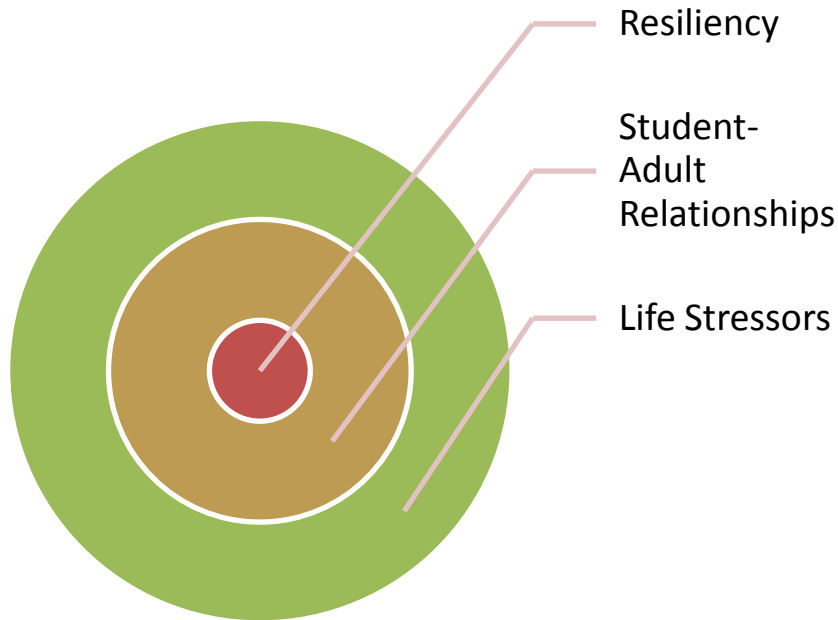
The researcher's own personal life experiences led to a passion for advocating for

students and empowering students to be confident and self-reliant in an ever-changing world.

The strength of having faith, family, and friends connects to both the research and to personal

experiences and demonstrates the significance of supportive adults in the lives of students

particularly when faced with life stressors. Furthermore, the researcher believes these

relationships afford students with an opportunity to develop their own sense of resiliency. The

existence of a supportive student-adult relationship may make a difference in the success and

achievement of today's youth.

As an educator for 14 years, both as a teacher and administrator, observations and

experiences with regard to student-adult relationships have raised interest in the study for the

researcher. More specifically observed is the lack of students having adults in their lives with

whom they can count on, trust, and go to when the problems of life occur. The researcher recalls

only a few teachers in her own K-12 schooling experiences who made lasting impressions or

with whom she could comfortably talk when she experienced life stressors. However, having a

few adults was undoubtedly better than having no one. As an educator, these experiences were

further confirmed as being more common in the school setting where students do not have

positive relationships established with their teachers or other adults in the school. The

importance of developing the whole child continues to get lost with the demands of the

curriculum and increasingly high stakes testing and accountability.

It has been the researcher's experience that there are insufficient connections taking place

between teachers and students or students and other adults in the school setting. The National

Association of Secondary School Principal (NASSP) recommends that every high school student

have a Personal Adult Advocate (1996, 2002) and that all students need to know that at least one

adult in the school continually cares about them and their future after high school. These

advocates can be teachers, counselors, principals, or other school staff members who are

committed to mentoring and guiding students. Also, an awareness of how school climate can

foster positive relationships is often lacking. When students are present in a nurturing and caring

learning environment and have positive relationships with their teachers or other adults within

the school setting, the lasting repercussion for one's social development is improved and a

potential outcome is the development of resiliency (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Teachers

spend a lot of time with children, approximately 5 to 7 hours a day for almost 10 months (Jones,

1981). What an opportunity to invest in the lives of young people and to be an advocate: an

adult who can be a constant in one's life!

Relationships start with a form of communication, whether between parent and child or

between student and teacher. This communication can serve as a connection between the two,

which in turn offers a better atmosphere for a classroom environment and provides opportunities

for positive relationships to be built.   Consequently, during difficult times when students

experience adversity, they can call on a particular teacher to help them through it. It is not

required of teachers to have all of answers for all the problems students are facing; however, they

can be a source of support for students during times of struggle. There is a significant body of

research that indicates "academic achievement and student behavior are influenced by the quality

of the teacher and student relationship" (Jones, 1981, p. 95). The more the teacher connects or

communicates with his/her students, the more likely the teacher will be able to help students

learn at a higher level. It can be inferred that without the relationship component, the learning is

hindered.

According to Rose, (1989), times when students felt they really mattered were when they

had positive relationships established with their teachers. These relationships were nurtured and

provided guidance to students who felt insufficient, inadequate, or vulnerable. It can be

concluded there is a need for more positive interactions between students and teachers (Rose,

1989).   The researcher conceptualizes this thinking in terms of resiliency at the core of one's

being, surrounded by well-built relationships with trusted adults; thus as life stressors surface,

the established relationships can help to mollify the impact. (See Figure 1).

It is the researcher's belief that students must be respected as individuals before trust can

be built. It appears this kind of thinking is sometimes lacking in our schools. It is also the

researcher's experience that there are seemingly too many teachers who have a dictatorial and

authoritative style within their classrooms without making any real connection or bonding to

students and without the development of a significant relationship. To the contrary, when the

researcher has observed positive relationships between students and teachers in learning

environments and classrooms where trust and rapport is established and where personal

investments were made in the lives of the children, they thrived socially and academically. The

researcher has concluded that children often wish to talk about their problems, uncertainties,

insecurities, and doubts, but are unable to do this without having an adult in their lives with

whom they trust and feel comfortable. Schools are a place where students build positive

relationships with adults. Feeling valued and respected is a basic human need. Students need to

feel a sense of purpose and that they matter: Teachers can lead the way in being an advocate for

students in this capacity. Consequently, when students are faced with life stressors, there are

adults with whom they can talk.

       There are many adults who can be instrumental in building positive relationships with

children. The researcher specifically inferred about the teacher's role as a forerunner to the

interest in this study because of her experience as a teacher and her current position as an

administrator in a public school. However, individuals such as parents, coaches, youth pastors,

grandparents, other family members, mentors, school counselors, etc. can also be that adult who

makes the difference in the life of a child. What is crucial is not necessarily whom the adult was,

but more importantly, was there an adult the child could name as having helped him/her cope

with life stressors. It is the researcher's view that in order for a child to have an adult to call

upon during difficult times, positive relationships need to have been previously established. It

has been reported that helping children develop resiliency begins with positive, meaningful

connections between teachers and students (Benard, 1993).

       Building resiliency often starts with developing and sustaining positive relationships.

This study focused on the importance of establishing relationships and how these relationships

help students cope with adversity. Through examining family, friend, and personal stressors that

have been experienced during one's K-12 school years, the researcher was able to determine how

positive relationships with adults impacted the participants' ability to cope with life stressors.

Life stressors are considered difficult times that people face which may include changes in

family structure or relationships, employment, living conditions, personal experiences, health,

death of a parent, and/or loss of immediate family member or friend.   Each of these potentially

traumatic circumstances can cause a person to feel stressed (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

This researcher advocates for students to cultivate the establishment of positive

relationships with adults. These relationships need to be strengthened so that as difficult times

occur, students have a trusted adult with whom they can seek support. In doing so, students may

begin to feel empowered and confident in facing unexpected life stressors. No child should have

to carry burdens alone. It is immensely important for adults to begin to take action in promoting

their roles as role models and nurturers.

Literature for this study was presented in three streams: connectedness, teachers' role in

fostering resilience, and the effect of school climate. Research has continually indicated the

importance of students having connections with others such as mentors, peers, parents, and

teachers. Schools have an important role in fostering resiliency due to the large amount of time

students spend there. Studies were reviewed showing that this supportive relationship is so

powerful that it has even helped students to get through more severe hardships such as war and

natural disasters. Researchers are becoming more aware of the quality of the school environment

and its affect on positive growth, development, and building positive relationships. This includes

a teacher's perceived ability to be there for students and to support them as they go through

difficult times in their lives. The level of preparation the teacher has received through

undergraduate school or professional development affects the teacher's confidence when

working with students in a variety of challenging situations. In order for teachers to promote the

well being of their students, they must first feel a sense of personal belonging and connectedness

among their colleagues. An environment of reciprocal respect is required. During these times of

high stakes testing and heightened accountability, it would be easy for educators to lose sight of

the need to develop and care for the whole child.

Definition of Terms

Resiliency –1. The ability to successfully cope with family, friend, and personal stressors (Lappi,

2011). 2. The capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity

(Jensen and Fraser, 2005).

Connectedness – A feeling of being close, attached, supported, or bonded to others

(Benard, 2004).

Relationship– The state of being connected or related; a way in which two people are connected.

Life Stressors: family, friend, personal (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

   a. Family Stressors – Include, but are not limited to the following:
      - death of parent, divorce, parent/family member in jail, death of family member,
        parent substance abuse, serious health problem of family member, gain a new
        family member (new baby, parent remarries, or adopts), conflict with family,
        parents' financial status (loss of job and/or no money), other

   b. Friend Stressors – Include, but are not limited to the following:
      - relationship breakup or conflict, death of a close friend, conflict with
        boyfriend/girlfriend's family, friend struggling with substance abuse, serious
        health problem(s) of close friend, other
      -
   c. Personal Stressors – Include, but are not limited to the following:
      - puberty, pregnancy, serious health concerns, illnesses, or issues, juvenile
        probation or in trouble with the law, drug and/or alcohol use, entering
        college/beginning next level of school, change in amount of responsibilities, In
        trouble at school, working while attending school, change in friends' circle,
        sexual adjustment problems (confusion of sexual orientation or identity), lack of
        sleep at night, need for outstanding academic achievement (grades, awards, etc.),

change in living conditions (visitors in the home, single parent, etc.), change to a new school, change in religious activities

Assumptions

The instrument used to collect data was first used in a pilot study before it was implemented on the participants in the study. It was assumed that every participant answered every question to the best of his/her ability and responded with honesty. Participants were able to understand the questions that were asked.

Limitations

The population that was surveyed was community college students ages 18-30. This sample size was considered to be one of a sample of convenience and was approximately 75-100 students enrolled in entry-level writing classes at the South Central Community College during the spring semester of 2012. The data was not generalized, was limited to this population, and did not necessarily reveal what was discovered of all community college students enrolled in entry-level wring courses. The researcher was unable to make generalizations or inferences about the entire population of students who were enrolled in a writing class at community colleges. Consequently, there may be a low external validity of the study (Castillo, 2009).

Delimitations

The surveying participants were selected based on availability of enrollment during the time the data was being collected. The students were given the single survey in hard copy form to complete and it was collected at the end of the class period.

The Researcher

From 1993-2004, the researcher began her teaching career as a 3rd grade teacher in Prince George's County, just south of the city of Baltimore. This was a challenging position as the majority of the students were impoverished and minority students. Many of the researcher's

students came to school hungry, tired, unkempt, angry, and often operated in what is considered

survival mode. The students had much difficulty getting along with each other and lacked

relationships with peers as well as with their family and other adults. This experience is the

foundation for the researcher's passion and desire to make a difference in the lives of children,

particularly those facing hardships. In 2005, the researcher continued in the role of education by

taking on a position as a speech-language therapist. Many of the students on the caseload were

students who were identified as needing emotional support. Again, the researcher worked with

students facing adversity. There were valuable lessons learned during these experiences.

From 2004-2006, the researcher worked in a primarily suburban school district teaching

5th grade. From 2006-2008, the researcher served as an assistant principal in an urban school

district where she was responsible for over 700 students in a K-6 environment. The primary role

of the assistant principal involved the handling of student discipline. This experience was

challenging, yet proved to be extremely beneficial in the researcher's ability and capacity to

recognize the life stressors that many people experience. This provided the possibility of making

positive connections, thus contributing to the development of resiliency. The years spent

working with the urban population were foundational in the researcher's ability to fully

understand and grasp the conditions of city living and the potential hardships experienced.

Following that experience, in 2008 the researcher accepted an assistant principal position in a

primarily suburban area and currently holds this position. Although the current position is unlike

the urban experience, it is not absent of the mindset that building a sense of connectedness and

belonging with the population is essential to developing resiliency.

All of the experiences mentioned were contributory to the researcher's ability to learn

about and understand the many challenges that people of all ages, races, and genders face. There

is a continual belief that establishing and nurturing connections with others, early on, is important and will serve as a foundation later in life, especially when faced with adversity and unexpected life stressors.

Summary

The study helps the reader to see the larger system and the lifetime impact that establishing and nurturing relationships early in life has upon individuals. Building resiliency helps one to overcome obstacles and enhances the chance for success. Further research has better defined how connections play a critical role in developing resiliency and what strategies support the concept of fostering resiliency. Schools have a mandate to focus on student achievement. They also need to produce socially and emotionally capable citizens to function effectively in our 21st century democracy. As previously mentioned, resiliency is perhaps the overlay to all we do in schools. It is essential that schools empower students with courage, capacity, confidence, and the life skills necessary to be productive, caring citizens in society. "Locate a resilient kid and you will also find a caring adult—or several—who has guided him" (Shapiro, Friedman, Meyer, & Loftus, 1996). People need to feel a sense of connectedness. It is critical that educators be an early resource in this development.

CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

There was much literature and research available that explains the importance of understanding resiliency. Discussion of life stressors that people experience, ways to develop resiliency in others, and how having positive connections with others are key components to developing resiliency. The literature examined resiliency in terms of its definition, importance of developing it early in life, and the ways educators can make a deliberate effort to build resiliency in students and help them to recover from life stressors. The literature further looked at reasons why people overcome adversity and determine how important it is to build and sustain connections with others. When educators have an understanding of resiliency and how to foster it, they can begin to look for opportunities to do so. Additionally, the literature reviewed what is considered the 7 Crucial C's of Building Resiliency, with a focus on connectedness and the significance of building and sustaining positive relationships. In order for students to prosper early and later in life, they need to be taught how to demonstrate resiliency in the face of adversity; thus developing into more competent and successful learners, workers, and citizens. Six factors for building resiliency were also briefly discussed. The factors are increasing bonding, setting clear and consistent boundaries, teaching life skills, providing caring and support, setting and communicating high expectations, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation. Educators need to empower students with courage, capacity, confidence, and the life skills necessary to be productive caring citizens. Establishing connections is an essential starting place.

Too often students are coming to school with little to none of their basic needs being met and they live in continual adversity with little hope. Both researchers Benard (1995) and

Noddings (1988), indicate schools serve as a protective shield to helping children withstand unfortunate events and situations and that caring and positive teacher-student connections serve as a source of support. Students are forced to overcome immeasurable amounts of obstacles in their home lives in order to even attempt to find success in school and in life. For many of these students, school is the only constant in their lives and is usually considered a safe haven. This is often where positive connections begin and relationships are built. For students to rebound from the adversity and for schools to develop resiliency in its students, deliberate planning and effort are imperative.   It is the responsibility of educators to provide and foster a learning environment where caring and personal relationships exist (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

The American Academy of Pediatrics review illustrated what they consider to be the 7 Crucial C's of building resiliency. The 7 C's are: Confidence, Competence, Connection, Character, Contribution, Coping, and Control. Connection will be discussed in depth. It is necessary to have close ties to family, friends, school, and community in order to give children a sense of security and values that prevent them from seeking destructive alternatives to love and attention. Baumeister and Leary (2005) mentioned the desire to belong and to form attachments with family and friends is considered a fundamental human need. A sense of belonging not only contributes to positive health, but also contributes to building self-esteem, self-efficacy and developing resiliency (Werner, 1993).   Researchers Masten and Coatsworth (1998) articulated that when children have positive connections established with family, peers, and adults, their ability to adapt to life stressors is improved. School connectedness also is known to protect against wide ranges of negative outcomes and it gives students a positive feeling and sense of belonging to a school community. There is an emphasis on promoting the protection of all students, not just those believed to be at risk (Brown, 2001).

Promoting resiliency in schools includes the importance of increasing the bonding that takes place between students and adults in the school. One way to cultivate resiliency is to establish connections. A sense of security, safety, and acceptance can support one's feeling of connectedness and engagement in the learning. The confidence of trusting even one adult raises the level of hope, assurance, and a sense of belonging (Werner, 2005). These caring and trusting relationships are essential for building resiliency. "An attitude of caring rather than punishment should be the foundation of these boundaries" (Henderson et al., 2003, p. 27).

Another component to fostering resiliency is to teach life skills. These skills could be incorporated in the daily lessons and routines. A cooperative learning approach is needed to teach students how to get along in groups, get along with others, set goals, express one's opinion in respectful ways, and the ability to make decisions and solve problems (Henderson et al., 2003). Continuing with the ways to foster resiliency, providing caring and support was another factor mentioned. Building positive relationships is the foundation for this component. It is important to intentionally take time to get to know the whole child and build relationships: Intervene when students are dealing with difficult circumstances.

Research on resilience give educators guidelines and an understanding that schools are a place where basic human needs such as support, respect, and belonging are met (Benard, 2001). Students who exhibit a sense of self-efficacy in taking on new challenges have a better chance of demonstrating resiliency when the unexpected occurs. When students participate in the classroom and feel connected, they help others in their learning. Essentially, it is often where resiliency can be developed. Much research emphasized the importance of developing resiliency early in life and having positive connections established with others. These connections can include a parent, teacher, friend, family member, clergy, mentor, counselor or coach.

In the 21st century, schools are leading the way for making various changes and alterations to traditional ways of teaching and learning. Consequently, administrators, teachers and students must adjust and adapt to these changes. Also, with the economy being turbulent and unpredictable, developing resiliency is a necessary component to overcome the challenges and uncertainties of education and the economy.

Figure 2.

Conceptual Framework 2
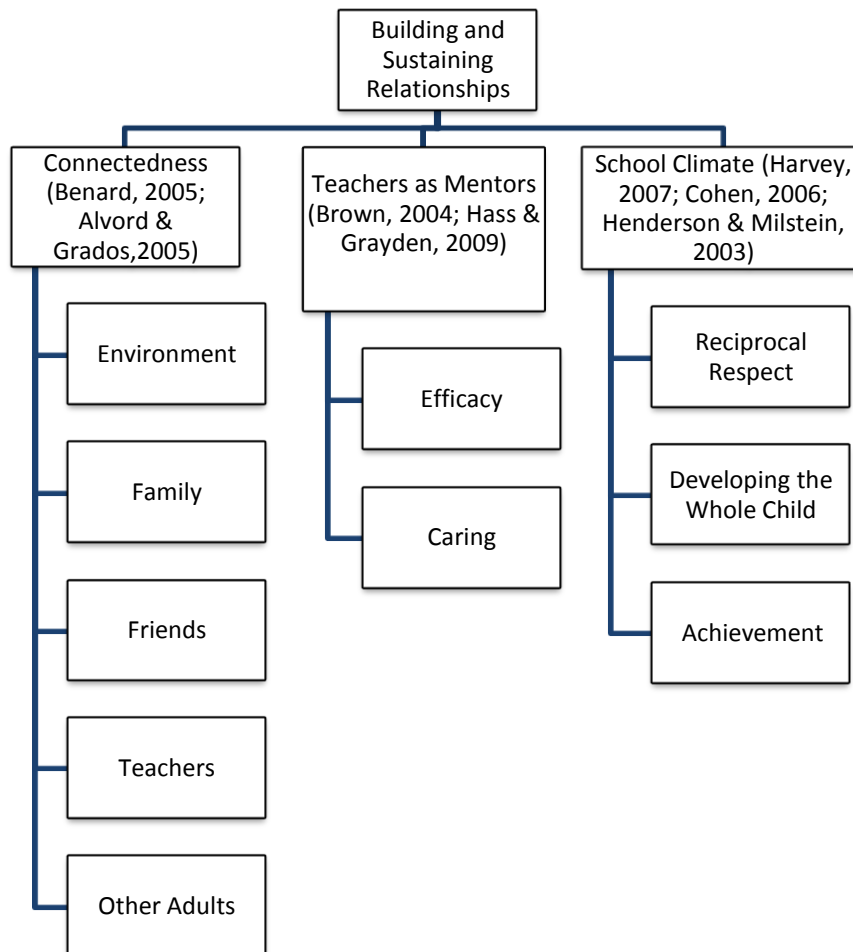
Literature Review

Relationships are considered to be a guiding premise in developing one's resiliency (Werner, 1995). This researcher concurs and believes relationships are at the core in beginning to build resiliency in students. The literature supported this belief as one factor of resiliency; however, it was not given the importance the researcher believes it deserves. The review of literature discussed three themes with an emphasis on the role of positive relationships between adults and students. A graphic representation of how the literature review was organized is illustrated in Figure 2. The three themes highlighted from the literature were connectedness,

teachers, and school climate.   The horizontal and vertical lines represented the first stream of

connectedness. Without the connectedness piece, the model would not function successfully; it

would be fragmented. Studies continued to show how important it is for students to feel some

sort of connection whether it is in their homes, schools, or communities. The school climate and

the teachers were two major components. The teacher was proven in a variety of studies to be the

one significant adult present in a child's life who has helped to make a difference in getting

through a difficult situation.

       The environment in a school setting needs to be positive and one in which mutual respect

is evident. Teachers need to be united in their beliefs and convictions so that they can resist

misguided pressures from outside forces (Pulley & Wakefield, 2001). Teachers need to have the

tools and resources necessary that help them to feel equipped and prepared to assist students in a

variety of situations.   Equally important is that teachers demonstrate a sincere compassion and

care for their students (Sanchez, 2008).

Connectedness.

       Resiliency is often characterized as how children and adults recover from stress, trauma,

and risk in their lives. Furthermore, resiliency is used to describe one's ability to recover and

successfully overcome challenges and problems faced. Pulley and Wakefield (2001) defined

resiliency as the "ability to recover quickly from change, hardship, or misfortune" (p. 7). More

recently, Jenson and Fraser (2005) defined resiliency as "the capacity to adapt successfully in the

presence of risk and adversity."

       A study conducted by Holmes and Rahe (1967) involved 10,000 Canadians, over the age

of 15, who were asked a series of questions about several key life changing experiences. The

study focused on the top five most stressful events identified on what is known as the Social

Readjustment Rating Scale. The top five events listed were the following: death of spouse, divorce, marital separation, death of a close family relation, and illness, wounds or injury to self. The purpose of the scale was to determine the amount of effort it would take for a person to adapt to the situation and the ability to bounce back. The development of resiliency was essential. The study reported women being more likely than men to cope with the various distresses over the years. This was believed to be due to their role as caregiver earlier in their lives (Holmes & Rahe, 1967).

There were a variety of studies that link resiliency with connectedness. Schools can be the early source for contributing to the development of resiliency. It was noted, "more than any institution except family, schools can provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency into today's youth and tomorrow's adults" (Henderson et al., 2003, p. 2). According to Alvord and Grados (2005), resiliency is not a once and done establishment, but rather it is developed over time and through varied experiences. Resiliency skills are many and can be strengthened and learned: They are often referred to as protective factors. There are protective factors that come from within a child, the family, extended family, and the community (Werner, 1995). Additionally, there are internal strengths noted such as the ability to make friends successfully, self-regulate behavior, and one's intelligence all of which advance resiliency. At times, these skills overlap and are interrelated. Connections and making friends are made easier when the ability to self regulate is demonstrated (Alvord et al., 2005).

Establishing student adult relationships and the idea that when students feel a connection to school, ultimately contributes to fostering resiliency. Teachers have a powerful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of children. They can be instrumental in establishing school to be

a place where students can spend their days in a positive learning environment and have a feeling

of being connected to school.

Benard (2001) articulates the value of developing resiliency:

>   All students need to be given the opportunity to build resiliency—to develop social
>
>   competencies, like caring and responsiveness, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a
>
>   sense of purpose and a future, we must work to build linkages between families and
>
>   schools and between schools and communities (p.6).

In their study on ways students can be more connected to school, McNeely, Nonnemaker, &

Blum (2002) examined the relationship between school connectedness and the school

environment in order to identify ways to increase students sense of feeling connected to school.

Data was collected from the in-school and school administrator surveys of the National

Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which included 75,515 students across 127 schools.

Hierarchical linear models were used to estimate the involvement between school characteristics

and the average level of school connectedness in each school. The following was concluded:

positive classroom management climates, participation in extracurricular activities, tolerant

disciplinary policies, and small school size were associated positively with higher school

connectedness.

Stewart, Sun, and Patterson (2005) conducted a study in Australia for the purpose of

evaluating a whole school approach to promoting resiliency in children in school, family and

community settings. They explored the concept of a "health promoting school-based"

intervention that focuses on the significance of organizational structure and educational

programs that provide opportunities for children. The goal of this was to promote increased

well-being, quality of life, and resilience in school aged children. Questionnaires were

completed by students (to measure resiliency), parents/caregivers (data about school and family climate), and school staff (organizational factors). Results showed that the level of relationships formed by school, family and community is determined by whether the school adopts the health promoting school approach. Furthermore, student resiliency partly depends on social support available to a family, family functioning, and school environment. All of these combined gives the student a sense of connectedness, which in turn contributes to the resiliency.

Additional research summarized by Benard (1995) discussed the environmental characteristics individuals should have in order to help to develop the range of personal and coping skills needed to overcome adversity and further emphasized teachers and schools play a key role in developing protective factors. Among the three main categories was the importance of establishing caring and supportive relationships. Additionally, there were several researchers who have studied the important role peers play in offering support, care, and attachment needs (Glasser, 1965; Kohn, 1993; & Myrick, 1997). Student to student connections contribute significantly to the development of resiliency. The results from interviewing teachers and students found peer relationships and connections were of high importance and a main factor of contributing to resilience. Students mentioned positive relationships with their friends first and often when discussing protective mechanisms (Johnson, Howard, & Oswald, 1999). The environmental factors or stressors are what help a person to recover or bounce back and to maintain emotional health. Rutter (1987) terms these environmental factors as protective mechanisms. This researcher, along with Werner and Smith (1988) further indicated that schools are significant contributors to fostering the external protective mechanisms. Such schools would be identified as offering caring and stable environments.

Novick (1998) examined resiliency on the level of the child's emotional development. Helen Baller Elementary School, named Primary Intervention Program, focuses on emotional intelligence and gives children the opportunity to develop these essential skills. The Comfort Corner, the foundation to this program, provides a safe and stable school environment in hopes of building resiliency in the child's home environment and enabling conflict control skills in future experiences. The research on resiliency demonstrates the need for children to have a positive mindset during their early learning years of education and how every effort needs to be made to make this possible for children. High expectations for children in the school system, along with providing support and tools to reach those goals, result in academic success. When resiliency is worked upon through various techniques, along with developing meaningful relationships in the child's life, such as the role of teacher, emotional resilience is increased.

Research conducted by Murray (2002) illustrates the differences in elementary, middle, and high school education, and the time spent in developing relationships between students and teachers. Studies cited within the research target children's development in transitioning from childhood to adolescence and how they are influenced socially and emotionally.

A study conducted by Werner (2005) investigated the impact of a variety of biological and psychological risk factors, stressful life events, and protective factors on a multi-racial cohort of 698 children born in 1955 on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. This Kauai longitudinal study is the only known study that followed participants from birth through midlife (ages 1 to 40). The study includes protective factors within the individual and the family, and protective factors in the community and the recovery in adulthood for the children in the study. The factors that contribute to the recovery of teenagers were also discussed. The author noted adults in their 20s and 30s took positive turns and were resourceful when there were positive interactions

between the child and a caregiver at a younger age. There has been as much research conducted

on students who have experienced difficult times during their childhood years and the

relationship sources that may have helped them get through the experience, and whether or not

the individual developed an ability to become more resilient as a result of the relationship and the

hardship.

Whether it is a friendship, mentorship, or other kinds of relationships, having personal

connections is important at any stage of development. According to Rubin (2002) and Hartup

and Stevens (1997), being part of at least one best friendship can improve adjustment periods in

children. It is foundational for children to make friends and connections. There is a need to have

successful peer relations individually and in group settings. These connections offer support

systems that contribute to social, emotional, and education adjustments and have been noted as

protectors of children when experiencing a family crisis (Rubin, 2002). Connections need to be

developed, nurtured, and maintained over time; this is not a one-time event. When there is a

caring adult in a child's life who seeks to understand the whole child and shows an attitude of

care and compassion, while providing support for learning, it contributes to resiliency and

healthy development (Rubin, 2002).

Teachers as Mentors.

Mentors can play an important role in the lives of adolescents and contribute to their

development of resiliency. According to Brown (2004), objective researchers may not fully

understand the concept of resiliency and the role of mentors. The study focused on personal

experience of the author, who was a former at-risk youth, and the role three mentors played in

his life. Brown (2004) expressed how he did not acknowledge or appreciate the impact these

mentors had on his life. Surveys and information that were exchanged by other at risk youths

who have overcome their difficulties were examined in the study. Mentors and role models were

a constant theme in the recovery process. However, it was unknown exactly how they helped to

facilitate change. It is thought that perhaps mentors help counterbalance negative experiences in

the at risk youth, thereby assisting to build confidence, optimism and resilience.

Hass and Graydon (2009) carried out a study of 44 former foster youth from the

Orangewood Children's Foundation (OCF) in California responding to open and closed survey

questions about factors that helped them build resiliency. The goals of the study were to

determine what worked for the youth who made it to post-secondary education and then use this

information to help develop programs that work with foster youth. Results showed that a vast

majority of participants were able to name a person who provided social support during their

time in foster care. Therapists, biological family members, and people from Orangewood were

among the most frequently mentioned. Seventy percent of the respondents agreed or strongly

agreed that they had a supportive, caring adult outside of home or school. The result of the study

showed that mentors were the most common social support for the foster youth. These results

suggest that the focus should be on what already works—supportive relationships with adults in

the community and schools. The importance of naturally occurring relationships with mentors is

important, but it is often very difficult for youth. This is why getting involved with a youth

program or agency is very helpful in facilitating positive relationships between youth and adults

(Hass & Graydon, 2009).

Another critical connection is the relationship between the teacher and the student. Few

studies have been done on the role teachers play in building resiliency and protective factors in

children. However, Werner and Smith's (1989) study of children in Kauai has shown that in all

of the mentioned adults with whom resilient children had connections, adults who were

identified outside of the family structure were students' favorite teachers. Teachers were named

as those with whom strong positive connections were made. Noddings (1988) adds "A caring

relationship with a teacher gives youth the motivation for wanting to succeed" (p. 12).

Furthermore, for resilient children, teachers are not just considered teachers of academic content,

but also rather seen as a confidant and role model (Benard, 1990).

The following study reiterated the importance of teacher and student connections.

Moskovitz' 30-to-40-year follow-up study of childhood survivors of the Nazi Holocaust who

were sent from concentration camps and orphanages to a therapeutic nursery school in England

at the end of World War II further documents the power of a caring teacher: all of the resilient

survivors…"considered one woman to be among the most potent influences in their lives—the

nursery school teacher who provided warmth and caring, and taught them to behave

compassionately" (cited by Werner, 1990). Students need their social, ethical, and intellectual

development fostered and this can happen in schools that create environments that are caring and

supportive and have a deliberate emphasis on developing and sustaining positive connections and

relationships.

Resilience and the ability to recover after experiencing life stressors, hardships or

misfortunes has been gaining momentum in interest, more recently in children, adolescents and

even young adults. However, lesser attention has been given to adults and how they may have

developed resiliency after having been through extremely hard or traumatic times (Green, 2007).

Researchers have explored the concept of resilience and have specifically studied the risk factors

that exist and the protective factors that shield someone from making adaptations later in life.

The primary focus was determining how children become competent, and as adults, how they

maintain healthy functioning, despite overwhelming or disruptive events (Green, 2007).

According to Henderson et al. (2003), educators, as primary role models, must demonstrate resiliency if they expect their students to follow. Furthermore, there is research that discusses teachers' views and how they perceive their ability to develop resiliency in students. Woolfolk (1993) described the opportunities teachers have to positively influence their students and impact their lives early on.   Benard (1995) paralleled this thinking when she discussed how much time children spend with their teachers; particularly compared to other members in the circle of influence. With parents being the exception, teachers are in contact with children for a considerable segment of their lives. This measure of contact equips teachers with opportunities to observe, relate, and exercise influence over students' learning and development, as compared to any other connections a child may have.

Apart from the family, teachers play a significant role in the lives of resilient children. Werner and Smith (1988) further emphasized the critical role teachers and schools play in developing and sustaining resilience for coping with stressful situations.   Positive relationships between teachers and students also foster decreasing amounts of misbehaviors (Sanchez, 2008). The concern for an early adolescent with" high incidence disabilities" is expressed in relation to success in academics and mental health. Murray (2002) acknowledges that research on the relationships between teacher and student in high incidence disability is just starting to be explored by educators. Several suggestions and recommendations were given to teachers in working with this student population.

The research conducted by Howard et al. (1998) suggested teachers lack understanding of their powerful role in developing resiliency. Teachers reported viewing academic success as being a component toward building resiliency, rather than establishing and maintaining positive relationships and connections with others. This same study mentioned that teachers contribute

resilience building to predispositions and character strengths combined with the role of the family. Educators need to be aware of the significant contributions that can be made in developing and fostering resiliency during the school age years. The research further inferred that teachers tended to undervalue their potential for how essential their role is in contributing to the development of resiliency in students. Dryden, Johnson, Howard, and McGuire (1998) reported interview data on students perspective noting they are very aware of the critical role teachers play in the development of student resiliency. In this study, students fully understood the critical role teachers played in their lives. These students conveyed a powerful response in the survey. Many reported that during their toughest and most challenging times, it was a teacher who was a key influence in being connected and making a difference in their resilience development.

Research summarized by Ross (1994) articulates:

Clearly, teachers hold diverse personal beliefs concerning their own perceived potential to 'make a difference.' However, a teacher's sense of personal self-efficacy and degree of acceptance of responsibility for promoting children's learning and well-being has been found to be of critical importance in making a difference in children's lives" (cited in Oswald et al., 1999).

School Climate.

Not only are relationships and positive connections between teachers and students crucial to fostering resiliency in students, but the school climate plays an important role as well. Harvey (2007) explored how the school as a whole can play a role in building resiliency in its students by providing a positive environment for both students and teachers. Teacher-student relationships often reflect administrator-teacher relationships. It is mentioned that resilience is

built by many contributing factors, including positive social relationships, positive

emotions/attitudes, self-control, and feelings of competence. Strategies were detailed on how

this can be attained in the school setting. It drew in examples from an inner city middle school

where the principal was very mindful of creating a supportive school environment for his

teachers and students, in hopes of raising resiliency school-wide.

According to Henderson et al. (2003), there are environmental factors that inhibit

resiliency: changing expectations about what schools should do and how they should do it,

global economy, changing composition of the student body, and ever-increasing negative

community-based criticism. The internal factors that deter resiliency are the significantly older

work force, veteran teachers resisting change, and structural constraints within the system that

limit individual and organizational efforts to build resiliency. However, teachers can foster

resiliency in schools in the following ways: increasing bonding, setting clear, consistent

boundaries, teaching life skills, providing caring and support, setting and communicating high

expectations, and providing opportunities for meaningful participation (Henderson et al., 2003).

Cohen (2006) stated, "School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life

and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and

organizational structures" (p. 180). Interpersonal relationships involve a feeling of being

connected. Students often vividly remember experiences during their school years and people

they related to and with whom they felt the most comfortable.   Children remember positive and

negative experiences, the effect of teachers and peers actions, and these early established

connections. Common themes throughout the literature emphasize the importance for schools to

create positive connections (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Schools are promoting the student and the adult when school communities are purposively engaged in the improvement process of establishing connections. School leaders have an ethical and professional responsibility to ensure a positive learning environment (Cohen et al., 2006). Educators are the role models for students and have the unique opportunity to model the importance of resiliency.

As described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, (CASEL), social emotional learning is "The process of acquiring and effectively applying the knowledge, attitude, and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions; developing caring and concern for others; making responsible decisions; establishing positive relationships; and handling challenging situations capably" (Zins & Elias, 2004, p.1). It is essential that schools have practices in place that are systematic and create safe, caring, and equitable school opportunities. With these practices in place, especially establishing positive relationships, the educational playing field can be leveled for all young people to develop resiliency, and ultimately succeed in school, life, and be contributing citizens in society. Social emotional learning emphasizes and promotes the skills necessary for students to acquire to be successful in school and in life. Carson (2004) mentioned the importance of focusing on the attitude that children have when going to school. Assessing and monitoring the emotional barometer is key. When students do not feel connected or have no positive relationships or mentors, they simply do not want to attend school; thus, attendance declines and attrition rates rise. Providing opportunities for students to establish and build one-to-one interactions with mentoring groups is a positive approach in overcoming this phenomenon.

Henderson et al. (2003) emphasized students need to know and believe others care about them and their learning and that what they are doing matters. Students are challenged to

contribute to their fullest capacity and to recognizing the value of participating and cooperating. Students treat each other with respect. Billingsley (2005) suggested the idea that successful pedagogy starts with an awareness of fundamental strategies for building resiliency. Schools need to be a place where students take an active role in their own learning, and view mistakes as opportunities to learn and challenges as a chance to increase flexibility, enhance durability, and more importantly, develop resiliency.

When students are empowered and have a sense of belonging; feel connected in some way; feel they are in an environment where they can clearly see there is comfort, trust, and mutual respect; true learning begins and grows. Without this kind of environment, building resiliency is hindered and students are robbed of learning and nurturing these types of life-long, necessary skills (Billingsley, 2005). There are eight key traits suggested by researchers to identify children who are resilient. Benard (1993) identified having stable relationships with peers and possessing a strong attachment or connection with at least one adult as considered of high importance. Also, teachers who were surveyed identified a strong connection and attachment to an adult as most important for developing resiliency in students (Benard, 1993).

Students deserve to experience a sense of belonging and attachment. The learning environment should embody the fundamental value of appreciation of inclusion and diversity. Additionally, this place is viewed with clear and consistent boundaries that ensure a safe, sustainable, academic venue (Benard, 1993). This kind of culture builds an appreciation of sophisticated multiple perspectives on complex intellectual and moral issues: Focus should be on the importance of celebrating everyone and denigrating no one. Students need to experience the marvelous paradox of human diversity in that we are all the same but in different ways (Billingsley, 2005).

Schools are an excellent forum for advocating diversity. Schooling influences a student's chance for developing resiliency and the social and moral development. In many schools, this is called the hidden curriculum. It is unfortunate that sometimes it becomes so hidden that it is essentially nonexistent. In many schools, administrators and teachers tend to emphasize classroom academics and content over any kind of character building, connectedness, developing resiliency, and a maintaining a sense of community and belonging (Battistich, 1998). The rising pressure of No Child Left Behind and state standards reinforce this kind of thinking. However, Chauncey (2005) states, "Preparing school leaders, who understand the critical role of a school climate that promotes collaboration and learning communities, and teachers who understand the importance of such a climate, has implications for teacher education" (p. 7). Further reinforced by Goodlad (1994) as cited by the School Climate Challenge Presentation (p. 8), "Understanding school climate is largely absent in teacher education efforts and that it is an often overlooked factor in explaining student achievement" (p. 5). He continued "In fairness, beginning teachers do not see themselves as playing a significant role in school climate" (p. 5). School administrators can change this way of thinking. Teachers are already feeling pressured to raise test scores; consequently building relationships, establishing and nurturing connecting with students, and fostering resiliency is often less important.

Traditionally, teachers are very concerned with teaching students basic skills and teaching the curriculum thoroughly, and the age of accountability to demonstrate such learning is on the rise. However, what teachers often fail to teach students are the essential skills that they will need not only to succeed within the walls of the classroom but more importantly, the critical skills they will need in order to adjust to the unexpected, overcome adversity, and be successful citizens in society (Noddings et al., 2005). Mastering the curriculum and all that it entails are

important; however, learning how to establish and maintain positive relationships, make connections and foster resiliency, demonstrating a mutual respect, and engaging in appropriate approaches to problem solving are equally important. These positive connections serve as a vehicle for active engagement in the academic arena as well as building the confidence to succeed and overcome hardships. Research confirmed what teachers and parents have claimed for decades: "A safe and supportive school environment, in which students have positive social relationships and are engaged in their work, and feel competent, matters" (National School Climate Center, 2009, p. 5).

Far less attention is given to the implications of the practices for students developing an understanding of themselves, other people, and society—all of which are characteristics of emotionally healthy and caring schools. The unfortunate truth is that if schools do not offer a place for students to feel valued, accepted, and connected to others, little or no learning will take place (Battistich, 2003). There are numerous studies to support the thinking that when school climate is positive, there is an increase in achievement and better socio-emotional health, thus contributing to building resiliency. There is a compelling body of research that underscores the importance of establishing positive connections. Establishing connections promotes student learning, academic achievement, school success, and healthy development. Additionally, positive connections effectively promote risk prevention and youth development, as well as increased teacher retention. With a safe, caring, and emotionally healthy learning arena, everyone benefits (Cohen et al., 2009).

In schools when there were positive connections established, increases in attendance, higher grades, and self-esteem were noteworthy: Anxiety, depression, and loneliness decreased (Nelson, 2000). Students demonstrated a caring for themselves and others as they related to their

day-to-day lives.   Students learn and practice the interpersonal skills, as well as the intellectual skills, and this is true when learning takes place and sustainable resiliency and competence is built.

Children who are surrounded by adults who model positive relationships tend to become responsible and considerate adults. Noddings (2003) argued that a commitment to care is the basis of morality, and children learn how to become caring by participating in relationships in schools with caring climates.   Literature also supported the thesis that children grow up to be characterized by morally mature parents who are warm, trusting, and responsive to their needs. Similarly, the few studies that have been conducted have found that students of teachers who are considered warm and supportive are more helpful and cooperative than those of teachers who are both more business-like and task-oriented or who are harsh and punitive.

It is human nature and a basic need to want to feel a sense of belonging. Students gravitate toward those who care for them. One might conclude that no significant learning occurs without a significant relationship. Additionally, an environment that establishes a priority in caring and supportive relationships enhances the optimum for promoting prosocial moral development and ultimately higher academic success (Battistich, 1998).   Others echo this belief. Sanchez (2008) in particular supports this notion by stating, "The ability for schools to begin to successfully promote the perceptions that students are safe, wanted, and can be successful is intricately linked to the concept of relationship" (p. 38).

In many instances, children are apathetic about learning of any kind until they feel safe, loved, cared for, and connected. When schools lack a caring, calm, and safe climate, learning is less likely to take place, particularly with the at-risk students; thus, building resiliency in school becomes even more critical for student success. Sanchez (2009) stated, "In many ways,

resiliency provides a blueprint for increasing capacity. It is the identification of protective factors that provide insight into what specific change can occur in an individual's life that can improve the opportunity for success (p.83). In chaotic schools, where students are apathetic, do not show respect, do not know how to problem solve or get along with others, quality teaching and learning are virtually non-existent and the need for fostering resiliency becomes more urgent.

Nelson (2000) explained in detail how to significantly involve the students in creating safe and caring learning communities where a sense of belonging is evident. The collaborative learning environment that Nelson described is not something taught in isolation; rather, it is infiltrated throughout the day, every day, and it is part of the way the cooperative classroom is designed and exercised on a regular basis. Other research underscores the impact of a sense of belonging and a feeling of being connected and its effects on student motivation and building resiliency (Wentzel & Watkins, 2002). When activities are presented in a supportive and collaborative learning environment, students are encouraged to build upon one another's ideas in productive and engaging ways. When students learn and begin to exhibit these kinds of skills, in harmony with gaining self-confidence and esteem, their academic ability and mind-set of resiliency begin to develop. Students feel good about themselves and their environment, and begin to develop resiliency. As a result, closing the achievement gap becomes a reality. Through caring relationships and establishing connections, students know they belong (Nelson, 2000). Life stressors exist. It is important that educators are aware of these changes and differences and help students learn not only how to cope, but also how to exercise their rights and responsibilities to accept the differences and deliberately work to accentuate each other's strengths.

Schools not only have a mandate to focus on student achievement; but also the imperative need to produce socially and emotionally capable citizens able to function effectively in our 21st century democracy. Resiliency is perhaps the overlay to all we do in schools. It is essential that schools empower students with courage, capacity, confidence, and the life skills necessary to be productive caring citizens in society. The need for students to make positive and lasting connections with caring adults during their school age years is essential. Master and Reed (2002) concluded with stating that the best-documented source of developing resiliency is a strong bond to a competent adult. Teachers have a critical responsibility in fostering resilience. The teachers and the school climate together must provide a caring community for all students to nurture the development of the whole child. It is the commitment to be there for children and their care givers that ultimately recreates the connection and helps them become more resilient.

CHAPTER 3 – Action-Oriented Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with an understanding of the design, rationale, and methodologies specific to the study while also giving the reader an understanding that connectedness is considered a key element in building resiliency and to equip the reader with a better understanding of how positive adult connections with students early in their lives can help contribute to the development of one's resiliency. The chapter illustrates in detail how one study of student-adult connectedness is conducted and accomplished. The research in this study consists primarily of quantitative data collection methods with an explanatory approach. A single survey was administered to the participants, which included quantitative questions. Each of the three sections included Likert scales and checklists. There was one open-ended question at the end of the survey in the demographics section.

The research questions are identified in this chapter, as well as an explanation of the research design, methodology, and rationale. Additionally, the specific survey site and population are included and discussed in depth within this chapter. The methods utilized are acknowledged for the reader, along with the data collection methodologies, rationale, and the analytical process. Also included is a timeline and description of each method used. This chapter also includes the ethical considerations and how the participants were protected during the study. The researcher's purpose in this study is one of examination using four research questions.

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the dependent and independent variables that identify the life stressors that the participants have endured and to identify which adults, if any, who helped them cope with their difficult experiences. The study

examined a particular area more thoroughly; perhaps in order to develop a different hypothesis or prediction that could be tested in future research. The data contributes knowledge to the field of education. Furthermore, the intentions of this study are to determine the role, if any, that positive student-adult relationships play in a child's life during one's K-12 school age years: to what extent the relationships contributed to one's ability to cope with life stressors: and if the life stressor experienced earlier in life aided in the development of resiliency later in life.

Resiliency is often characterized as how children and adults cope with stress, trauma, and risk in their lives. Furthermore, resiliency is used to describe one's ability to recover and successfully overcome challenges and problems faced. Pulley and Wakefield (2001) defined resiliency as the "ability to recover quickly from change, hardship, or misfortune" (p. 7). Resiliency is also defined as "the capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity" (Jensen and Fraser, 2005).

This information is categorized around the concept of the importance of relationships, connectedness, and ways to foster resiliency. Resiliency can be a part of one's internal protective factors, but it can also be developed through positive connections (Rutter, 1987). In order for people to prosper and overcome disadvantages, educators need to understand the key role they play in establishing and fostering connections with students and how this can lead to developing more competent and successful learners, workers, and citizens, in spite of one's circumstances (Sanchez, 2008).

Site and Population

Population Description

The population for the study was a select group of students enrolled in an entry level writing course at community college located in South Central Pennsylvania. The population was

considered to be a sample of convenience. The participants were chosen because they were

easier to recruit for the study and because of their availability. There were 89 students that

participated in the research. The researcher recognized the sampling bias and that the

participants would not be representative of the entire population (Castillo, 2009). The data

collection was conducted through the use of a single survey. The data provides valuable

information in determining how the existences of relationships positively impact students early

and later in life. The researcher did not choose school-age students for the population to be

studied. There is no evidence to determine how the life stressors affected the student's resilience

later in life. The data would be limited to how the students felt at the time of the survey and

would not inform the researcher of the long-term outcome.

Another goal of the research was to establish whether or not the participants were more

resilient later in life as a result of the relationships with adults they experienced early on, and

how the positive relationships they developed with adults during their K-12 years impacted their

ability to cope with life stressors. Current K-12 students would not be able to provide this

information. If the study was conducted on current K-12 students, the data collected would only

inform the researcher of how resilient the student reported as being during that identified life

stressors: It would not provide information of the long term effect.

Site Access and Description

The site location for the research was South Central Community College. This

community college has become one of the largest undergraduate community colleges in

Pennsylvania, with nearly 20,000 students enrolling in credit programs and courses each

semester. South Central Community College has many strengths: well-equipped laboratories and

studios, modern, well maintained campuses, and quality programs and services. Its reputation

reflects the quality and dedication of its faculty and staff and its commitment to meeting the

needs of the communities and students it serves. South Central Community College now has

nearly 200 associate degree, certificate, and diploma programs. There is a growing number of

Internet courses and study abroad opportunities to provide alternatives to classroom instruction.

Noncredit programming for students includes courses in personal enrichment and lifelong

learning, while also offering public safety training for volunteers and professionals, and

workforce and employee development training for business, industry, health care, and the human

services fields.

The exact location on campus where the survey was administered is considered to be one

of the major buildings. The researcher provided South Central Community College with the

following criteria prior to conducting the research: background and purpose of the research,

description of the research plan, population at South Central Community College to be impacted,

how the students and/or staff will be approached, how the students and staff will provide input,

samples of communications to students and staff and survey instruments, how the data will be

utilized, and the benefit of the research to South Central Community College. The researcher

was in communication with the instructors, dean, and provost of the college. It was discussed

with them the specific details of this research study. The researcher also shared with the provost

of the college the instrument she would be using to collect the data, and the provost of the

college gave final approval.

Research Design and Rationale

The researcher conducted a descriptive correlational methods approach to data collection

and analysis (Creswell, 2007). Responses were numbered and reported anonymously.

Community college students who were enrolled in an entry-level writing course who were of

ages 18 to 30 were administered the survey. The purpose of this study was to determine which

adults, if any, were present and supportive in the student's life in his/her K-12 school age years

during a time in which a specific life stressor was experienced. Additionally, the study

determined to what extent the relationship affected the participant's ability to successfully cope

with the identified experience. The study illustrated the impact that positive student-adult

relationships have on students during their K-12 school age years in dealing with life stressors

and also in developing and fostering resiliency.

A single survey was the primary instrument used and source of data collection. The

researcher believed the questions asked on the instrument collected the necessary data to answer

the research questions. The data was analyzed quantitatively by running a variety of statistical

measures such as Descriptive Statistics (mean, median, mode), and a Correlational Coefficient

Analysis. The researcher looked for differences within, between, and among groups. The data

collected in the open-ended question was analyzed qualitatively. The researcher coded the data

and identified themes and trends that emerged.

Research Questions

Four key research questions framed this study. All four questions listed relate to the theme of

understanding resiliency, the importance of developing resiliency, and how adults can make a

deliberate effort to build resiliency in youth.

1. What is the relationship between positive student-adult relationships and a student's
   ability to cope with life stressors that one experiences during K-12 school years?
   (Quantitative)

2. What is the relationship between the participant's positive relationship(s) with an adult and their current perceived level of resiliency? (Quantitative)

3. Who will the participants identify as the influential adults who helped them as K-12 students cope with the life stressors? (Quantitative)

4. What types of life stressors will the participants report as having experienced during their K-12 years? (Quantitative)

Research Methods

List of Methods

The study consisted of collecting data using a single survey. The purpose of the survey was to gather data on the life stressors (family, friend, and personal) the participants experienced during their K-12 school age years and to determine if there was an adult present in their lives that helped them cope with the difficult situation. Furthermore, the strength of the relationship was determined as well as the perceived current level of resilience.

Stages of Data Collection

Many of the stages began in the fall of 2011. The first stage in the researcher's data collection was to participate in the Institutional Review board (IRB) exercise. Also, during the fall of 2011, the researcher identified participants and sought necessary permissions. During this time, the researcher talked with the personnel involved in the study about the study and their role in it. The administration and collection of the surveys also took place during this time. Data analysis took place in the winter of 2012 and continued into the spring.   The dissertation writing began in the winter of 2012 and concluded by the spring of 2012. The timeline in Figure 3 details the progress of the work to complete the study.

Figure 3

Timeline

	Fall 2011	Winter 2012	Spring 2012	Summer 2012
IRB Certification Process	✓			
Participant Identification/Permission	✓			
Study Explained to Participants	✓			
Survey Administration/Collection	✓	✓		
Analyze Data		✓	✓	
Discuss & Review Findings		✓	✓	✓
Dissertation Writing of Findings			✓	✓

Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation Methods

Instrument Development –The researcher developed a single survey called *The Value of Positive Adult Relationships (VPAR)*. A survey was selected because it is one of the most common methods used in psychological research of this nature. In this method, a sample of convenience replaced the more desirable random sample of participants to complete the questionnaire that relates to the variables of interest in this study.

The questionnaire was validated in this study and used to support the possible development of a new resiliency instrument. The results of this study offer knowledge towards the development of a scale to measure the *VPAR* during one's K-12 school age years *(VPAR Scale)*. In future expansion of this research, the survey results could potentially be used to create a new resiliency scale that could be used to measure the value of positive adult relationships (VPAR) and a student's ability to cope with life stressors. Based on the researcher's review of the literature, no scale exists to measure the effects of positive student-adult relationships on a student's ability to cope with life stressors for the 18-30-age range population, which is a high growth adult student group in post-secondary education.

The reliability, validity, and internal consistency of the newly designed survey in this study requires further testing with a larger population and random sample, possibly under experimental or quasi-experimental conditions to further demonstrate sound psychometric properties and factor analysis for all factors measured by the survey and the scale. The scale would have potential usefulness in practical educational, clinical, and research settings. This study was not conducive to that level of extensive research or data analysis.

Instrument Description- The instrument elicited various specific responses from the participants, which enabled the researcher to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The instrument was developed as a result of identifying the research questions, determining specifically what the researcher was attempting to learn, and determining what specific data was going to be collected. The instrument question types included checklists and Likert scale ratings. The survey was divided into four sections: demographic information, family stressors, friend stressors, personal stressors, and one open-ended question. The identified stressors were adopted from Dr. Inan and his "Stress Scales of Adults and Youth", which have been adapted from the "Social Readjustment Rating Scale" by Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe. This scale was first published in the Journal of Psychosomatic Research, ©1967, vol. II, page 214.

There was an introduction at the beginning of the survey that informed the participants the purpose of the survey and what it was designed to do. This was followed by an agreement statement, where the participant checked yes or no indicating whether or not they agree to participate in the survey. The next part of the survey was the demographic section. Demographic questions addressed age, gender, schooling experience, and family structure. These were check-off items. Next, the main content of the survey began. There were three main sections of the survey. The sections were Part 1: Family Stressors. Part 2: Friend Stressors, and

Part 3: Personal Stressors. Each of the first three sections of the survey had seven questions of various types. The first section is identified as Section 1: Family Stressors. The participants were given a checklist that asked the participants to identify stressful situations they encountered with family. These identified situations have occurred sometime during the participants' K-12 school-age years. The second question asked the participants to identify the most severe stressor they experienced that were taken from the stressors identified in the first question. The third question gave the participants a list of sources (roles of individuals) to choose from with whom they received support during the time of experiencing the life stressor(s). Next, the participants were asked to identify the most significant source of support then rated the strength of that relationship on the Likert scale. They also stated whether the relationship was established before the participant experienced the life stressor(s). Finally the last two questions asked the participant to determine to what extent the individual identified helped in coping with the life stressor(s) and to what extend the relationship with this individual contributed to their perceived level of current resiliency. One open-ended question concluded the survey.

These questions continued in the same manner for the remaining two sections that pertained to friend stressors and personal stressors. The only question that changed throughout each of the three sections was the list of the identified stressors, which was the first question in each of the three sections. The scales used for measuring the responses of non-checklist questions included a five point Likert scale with the following indications: Not at all, slightly, somewhat, moderately, and extremely. The content validity of the survey was established through Face Validity, which was received thorough review of the instrument by the dissertation supervising professor and the other committee members. Additionally, the instrument was implemented during a pilot study, as well as peer reviewed by the researcher's colleagues. This

was done to evaluate it for clarity, format, directions, and response time, as well as to collect any

other feedback regarding the instrument.

     Participant Selection and Invitation - The selected population for the study was a

sampling of students enrolled in entry level writing courses, specifically described as a Rhetoric

and Composition course at South Central Community College. The population was considered

to be a sample of convenience. Since random sampling was not a vital part of this design,

ensuring the generalizability of the survey results did not occur as a result of this study. There is

no formula to determine the size of a non-random sample. The researcher carefully considered

the characteristics of the target student group and believed the group was representative of the

general age population since the age range is typical of beginning college students. The entry-

level writing course was a common course required for many students during the first and second

semesters of college, and the students take such classes on a typical college campus. The

researcher believes the advantages of utilizing a sample of convenience outweighed the

disadvantages because it was economical and efficient in enabling the researcher to collect large

amounts of data in a relatively short period of time, and it was more flexible than some other

known methods. However, the researcher acknowledges there were additional limitations. The

sample was unrepresentative of all students enrolled in an entry-level writing course, the

questionnaire was limited with having mostly closed-ended questions, and the participants

affected the outcome with their ability to remember, recall, and/or willingness to share specific

information from their childhood and adolescent years.

     The researcher worked with the provost of the college and the course instructors to

determine the best date and time to administer the surveys. When the specific classes, date, and

times were established, the researcher visited each of the classes at the beginning of each class

and explained the details and purpose of the study, and invited the participants to complete the survey. The design aimed to examine relationships between two or more variables in a single group. The researcher made no attempt to control or manipulate the situation. Participation was not mandatory. As mentioned previously, the researcher did not choose school-age students as the participants because there was no way to determine if or how the positive relationships affected the student's resilience development later in life. The data would be limited to how the students felt at the time of the survey, and also would not inform the researcher of the long-term outcome.

Data Collection – The researcher followed the requirements set forth by South Central Community College and completed the IRB Process for research involving South Central Community College students. Communication between the researcher, instructors, and the provost was done predominantly through phone calls and emails. The researcher developed a single survey and shared the survey with the dean and provost of the college for review. IRB from Drexel University was acquired and the researcher obtained the exempt level of approval. The researcher worked with the course instructors and scheduled specific dates and times for the researcher to attend the classes to administer the survey to the individual participants. During that time, the participants were assured of the anonymity and full protection of their identity. The surveying population participated in completing the survey during their writing class, per the instructor's permission. The researcher administered the surveys in January during a time the instructors suggested and permitted. The researcher was present in the room during the completion of the surveys. The length of time to complete the survey took approximately 15-20 minutes. After the students completed the surveys, each placed his/her survey in a folder.

   *Data Analysis –*The dependent variable identified in this study was the participants'

perceived current level of resiliency. The independent variables in the study were the life

stressors and the adults who were named as supporting the participant's ability to cope with the

life stressor. The descriptive correlational method of research was utilized in describing the

relationships between the different identified life stressors and the adults who were named as

supporting a select group of students as they coped with life stressors. The researcher employed

the use of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS 19) data analysis tools to conduct the

test and analysis described. The data collected from the survey was entered into SPSS and

analyzed using Descriptive Statistics and finding the measures of central tendency (mean,

median, mode), and two levels of association: Pearson's r and Kendall's Tau. They where used

to determine overall trends and distribution of data. Correlational studies are used to look for

relationships between variables. There were three possible results of a correlational study: a

positive correlation, a negative correlation, or no correlation. The two measures of association to

be reported have indicated correlation strength and range from -1.00 to + 1.00. Figure 4 provides

a summary of how the two correlation statistics have been interpreted.

Figure 4

Pearson's Correlation Interpretation Guide

r Range	Interpretation
$^{+}$1.00	perfect positive correlation
$^{+}$0.76 $^{+}$0.99	very high positive correlation
$^{+}$0.51 - $^{+}$0.75	high positive correlation
$^{+}$0.26 $^{+}$0.50	moderately small positive correlation
$^{+}$0.01 0.25	very small positive correlation
0.00	no correlation
$^{-}$0.01 $^{-}$0.25	very small negative correlation
$^{-}$0.26 $^{-}$0.50	moderately small negative correlation
$^{-}$0.51 $^{-}$0.75	high negative correlation
$^{-}$0.76 $^{-}$0.99	very high negative correlation
$^{-}$1.00	perfect negative correlation

Note: The value of r is such that $-1 \leq r \leq +1$. The + and – signs are used for positive linear correlations and negative

linear correlations, respectively.

Explained in Figure 4 is Pearson's r providing a summary of the level of association

between two interval-level variables. It is calculated as the covariance between two variables

over the product of their individual variances. The Pearson correlation coefficient is probably

the most widely used measure of association. However, because it is based on co-variances, it is

most appropriate for interval-level data. This study analyzed variables that were measured on an

ordinal scale, and hence a measure of association based on ranks was more appropriate.

Kendall's tau, like Pearson's r, ranges from -1 to +1, and so it can be interpreted according to the

rules in Figure 4. However, it is calculated on the basis of how similar the orders of ranks are

between the two variables. Hence, it was more appropriate for variables that can only take on a

small number of discrete values. For completeness, this study reported both measures (Ravin,

2011).

The researcher examined the outputs to identify correlations between and among the

different identified stressors and the adults who were named as supporting the participant's

ability to cope with the life stressor. The correlation between the participant-adult relationship and one's ability to recover from the stressor was also analyzed. While correlational studies can suggest there is a relationship between two variables, they cannot prove that one variable causes a change in another variable. Correlation does not equal causation. Although this correlational study suggested there was a relationship between the different identified life stressors and the adults who were named as supporting the student, it could not indicate if the student's ability to successfully cope with the life stressors increased or decreased as a result of the relationship between or among the variables. Other variables could have played a role, including gender, kind of school attended, family structure, and numerous other factors. Furthermore, the results from this study were indicative to only this group of participants and cannot be used generalize.

Reliability and Validity - According to Creswell (2009), mixed methods research is a research design or methodology in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and integrates the data. Quantitative and qualitative data is collected in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry. Triangulating data is a common bi-product of this type of research. Triangulation combines independent yet complementary research methods (Jager, 1997). Denzin (2009) first outlined triangulation methods and defined triangulation as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (p. 291). According to Morse (1991), simultaneous triangulation represents the simultaneous use of qualitative and quantitative methods. In this manner there is limited interaction between the two sources of data during the data collection stage; however, the findings complement one another when the data are interpreted. Consequently, triangulation in a mixed method design allows the strengths from both quantitative and qualitative to be used, thus creating a more valid instrument design. Advantages are that each method of collecting data complements the other resulting in a stronger research

design, and more valid and reliable findings. Inadequacies of individual methods are minimized

and threats to internal validity are recognized and addressed. Moreover, quantitative design

strives to control for bias so that facts, instances, and phenomena can be understood in an

objective way (Morse, 1991). Conversely, a qualitative approach attempts to understand the

perspective of participants or a situation by looking at actual experience to provide meaningful

data (Nowaczyk & Underwood, 1996).

There are additional benefits to triangulation. For example, qualitative research, which

emphasizes exploration, understanding, contextualizing, introspection, and theory construction,

provides a strong base for wider quantitative measures, scaling, and generalization. Quantitative

research emphasizes large samples and can provide an overview of an area that can reveal

patterns or inconsistencies that can be further investigated with qualitative methods (Jager,

1997). In this study, the qualitative data helped to further explore and explain the results of the

quantitative results.

Morse (1991) outlined two types of methodological triangulation: simultaneous and

sequential. For this study, the researcher collected data simultaneously. In simultaneous

triangulation, the goal is for the qualitative data to support the quantitative data while collecting

both kinds of data at the same time. The study included a questionnaire with 21 Likert scale and

checklist responses, five demographic questions, and one open-ended question to conclude the

questionnaire. The qualitative open-ended response was used to supply context around the

quantitative questions that were asked throughout the questionnaire. The data collected from the

questionnaire combined with the literature was used to help triangulate the data as shown in

Figure 5. However, the data obtained from the response question was not necessary to answer

the research questions, but rather was used support and clarify. The data from the responses

were transcribed, coded, interpreted, explained, and discussed. The results were reported as a

narrative description after identifying the themes that have emerged, including a graph. The

themes were integrated with the quantitative findings as an explanatory design. This enabled the

researcher to triangulate the data using the questionnaire, the open-ended response, and the

literature.

Figure 5

Triangulation of Data Analysis
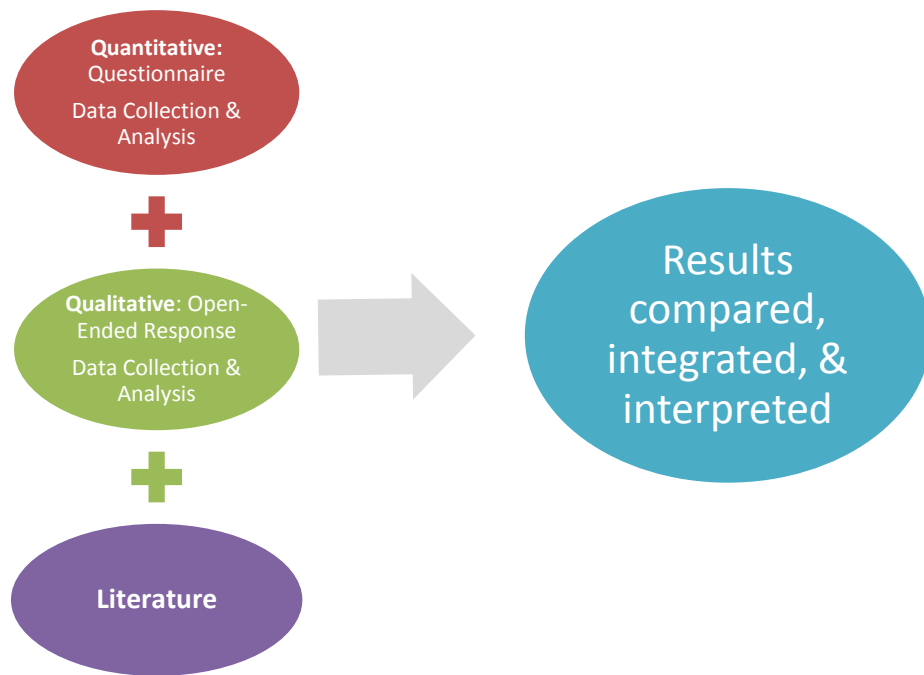
Ethical Considerations

The researcher obtained IRB approval from the participating college, as well as Drexel University. The researcher thought comprehensively about the study and how it would impact the participants (young adults) who were taking the survey and participating in interviews. As a result, the researcher reflected on the potential negative effects versus what the positive impact of the research would be. In maintaining compliance with IRB approval, there was need to investigate any other risks that may have been present, such as confidentiality or emotional distress. The researcher required Exempt Review Level 1 Category 2, which was for educational tests, surveys, or questionnaires. Contact information for support on the college campus was provided had there been a need for participants to discuss their feelings further. When research is properly managed, it can be a rewarding experience for both the researcher, and most importantly, the participant. This research project carefully planned so that the possibility for

misleading results was minimized. Additionally, the project was designed to meet ethical

acceptability. The researcher directly involved in this study has completed the appropriate

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) training modules and is certified in human

subjects' protections. Participation of subjects was voluntary.   Informed consent was obtained

from each subject and was documented. Adequate provisions were made for ensuring the safety

of subjects, monitoring data collection, and maintaining privacy and confidentiality of subjects

and data.

Any doubts, questions, or concerns the researcher had regarding questionable ethical

procedures or methods were resolved through peer review or through consultation with

appropriate parties such as the supervising professor who was named principal investigator in

this research project and IRB. Most importantly, steps and procedures were properly followed

and implemented to protect and ensure the dignity and welfare of all participants, as well as

those who may be affected by the results of the research project. The researcher has an

obligation to protect the participants from risk, unnecessary harm, physical or mental discomfort.

The benefit of the research must outweigh all risks. Data was not falsified or fabricated.

CHAPTER 4 – Findings and Results

Demographics

Table 4.1 summarizes the demographics for the sample. There were a total of 78 subjects

who fully completed the survey. Of these, 27 (34.6%) were male, while 51 (65.4%) were

female. The bulk of the subjects, 54 (69.2%), were in the 18-20 year-old range. Fourteen

(17.9%) were aged 21 to 23, nine (11.5%) were 24 to 26, and the last respondent was older than

26. In terms of ethnicity, the majority of subjects, 43 (55.1%), were non-Hispanic white. The

second largest category was African American with 12 (15.4%) subjects. There were nine

(11.5%) subjects who self-identified as multi-racial; eight (10.3%) who identified themselves as

Hispanic; five (6.4%) who identified as Asian/Pacific Islander; and one subject who wrote in the

survey that his ethnicity was Middle Eastern.

Table 4.2 provides more information on the background characteristics of the sample.

Sixty-one (78.2%) subjects attended a public school; eleven (14.1%) subjects attended a private

school; and three respondents (3.8%) listed both public and private schools in their backgrounds.

Two respondents (2.6%) were home schooled, while the remaining respondent attended a

parochial school. In terms of family structure, 46 (59%) came from families with married

parents. Nine (11.5%) listed their parents as divorced. Eleven (14.1%) were more specific,

listing a single parent household as their primary family structure. Three (3.8%) stated they were

raised by a guardian; seven (9%) said that they were raised in a blended or remarried family; and

the remaining two (2.6%) were raised in foster care settings.

Table 4.1

Summary of Sample Demographics

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	27	34.6
Female	51	65.4
Age		
18-20	54	69.2
21-23	14	17.9
24-26	9	11.5
27-30	1	1.3
Ethnicity/Race		
Asian/Pacific Islander	5	6.4
Black (Non-Hispanic)	12	15.4
Hispanic	8	10.3
White (Non-Hispanic)	43	55.1
Multi-Racial	9	11.5
Middle Eastern	1	1.3

Note. Total N = 78.

Table 4.2

Summary of School Types and Family Structures in Sample

	Frequency	Percentage
School Type		
Public	61	78.2
Private	11	14.1
Both Public and Private	3	3.8
Home School	2	2.6
Parochial/Christian School	1	1.3
Family Structure		
Married Parents	46	59.0
Divorced	9	11.5
Single Parent Mother	11	14.1
Raised by Guardian	3	3.8
Blended Family/ Remarried	7	9.0
Foster Care	2	2.6

Note. Total N = 78.

Findings

The participants were given a survey and within it they were asked to list their most

stressful experience in the context of their family, their friends, and their own personal lives.

Figure 6 displays results for the family question. Of the respondents, 20% could not

name any stressor in their lives that they could recall within the context of their family. Of the

remaining subjects who answered the question, two (2.6%) listed the death of a parent; six (7.8%) named divorce; one (1.3%) listed a parent in jail; twelve (15.6%) named the death of another family member; seven (9.1%) named a parent's substance abuse; nine (11.7%) named a severe health problem in the family; five (6.5%) named the addition of a new family member; eight (10.4%) named conflict with other family members; seven (9.1%) named parents financial status; and five (6.5%) chose to name a stressor that wasn't on the list.

Figure 6

Biggest Family Stressors

Most Difficult Experience: Family
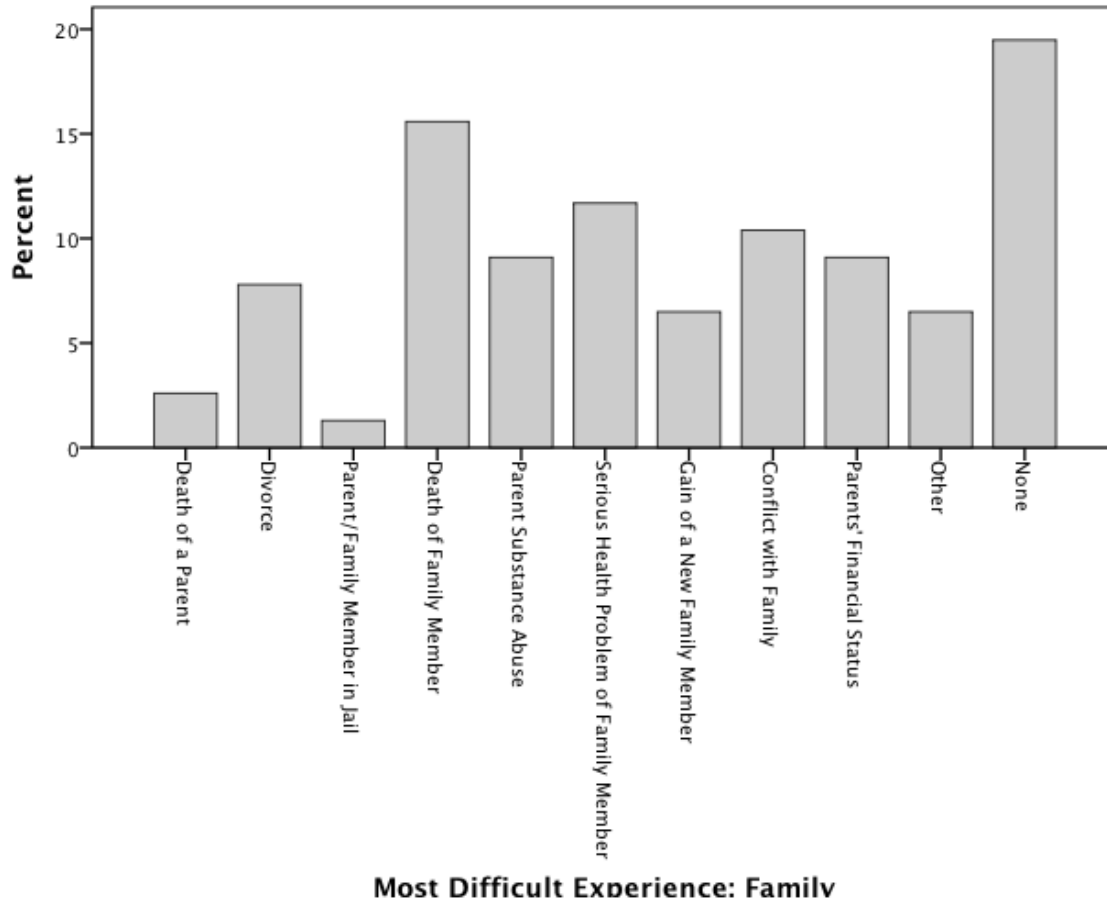
Those who picked the "other" category were invited to name the specific stressor. One named the death of a family friend; another named the death of a personal friend; two listed the fact that the family frequently moved; and another listed his or her own hospitalization. The last subject in the "other" category listed "conflict in the country," though she also listed family health status and serious health problem in the family (she didn't choose just one).

Figure 7 summarizes the stressors among friends. Of the subjects 20% did not volunteer any stressful situation. Twenty-two subjects (28.9%) named a relationship conflict or breakup; three (3.9%) named a conflict with a boyfriend or girlfriend's family; seven (9.2%) named the

death of a close friend; 21 (27.6%) named conflict with friends; three (3.9%) listed a friend's

substance abuse; one (1.3%) named a friend's serious health problem; while three (3.9%) chose

to list another issue.

Figure 7

Biggest Stressors Among Friends
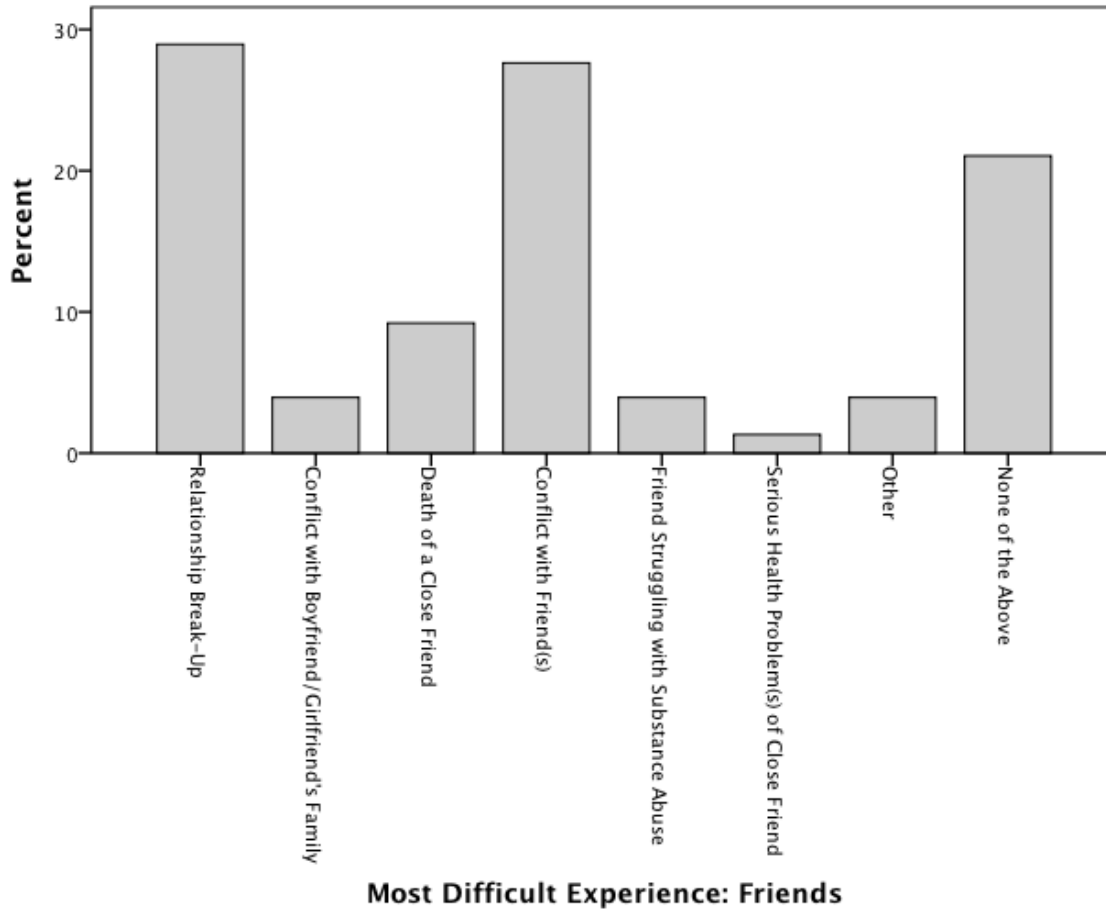
Of those who listed "other", one complained of not having any friends, another listed problems with making friends at a new school, and another listed moving away from friends. There were also two other subjects who chose to name multiple stressors rather than list just one, as the survey had requested. One of these chose to list both conflict with boyfriend and a friend's substance abuse. The other chose conflict with friends and additionally added the stress of moving away from her home country.

Figure 8 lists responses concerning personal stressors. One subject (1.4%) named puberty; two subjects (2.7%) named pregnancy; five (6.8%) named a personal health concern;

one listed trouble with the law; five (6.8%) listed personal struggles with substance abuse; eleven

(15.1%) listed entering the next level of school, such as college; eight (11%) listed a change in

the amount of responsibilities; five (6.8%) listed trouble in school; eleven (15.1%) listed working

while attending school; two (2.7%) listed a change in friends; two (2.7%) listed problems with

sexual adjustment; three (4.1%) listed sleep problems; three (4.1%) listed a need for outstanding

academic achievement; five (6.8%) listed a change in living conditions; three (4.1%) listed a

change to a new school; and one (1.4%) named a change in religious activities.

Figure 8

Biggest Personal Stressor

Most Difficult Experience: Personal
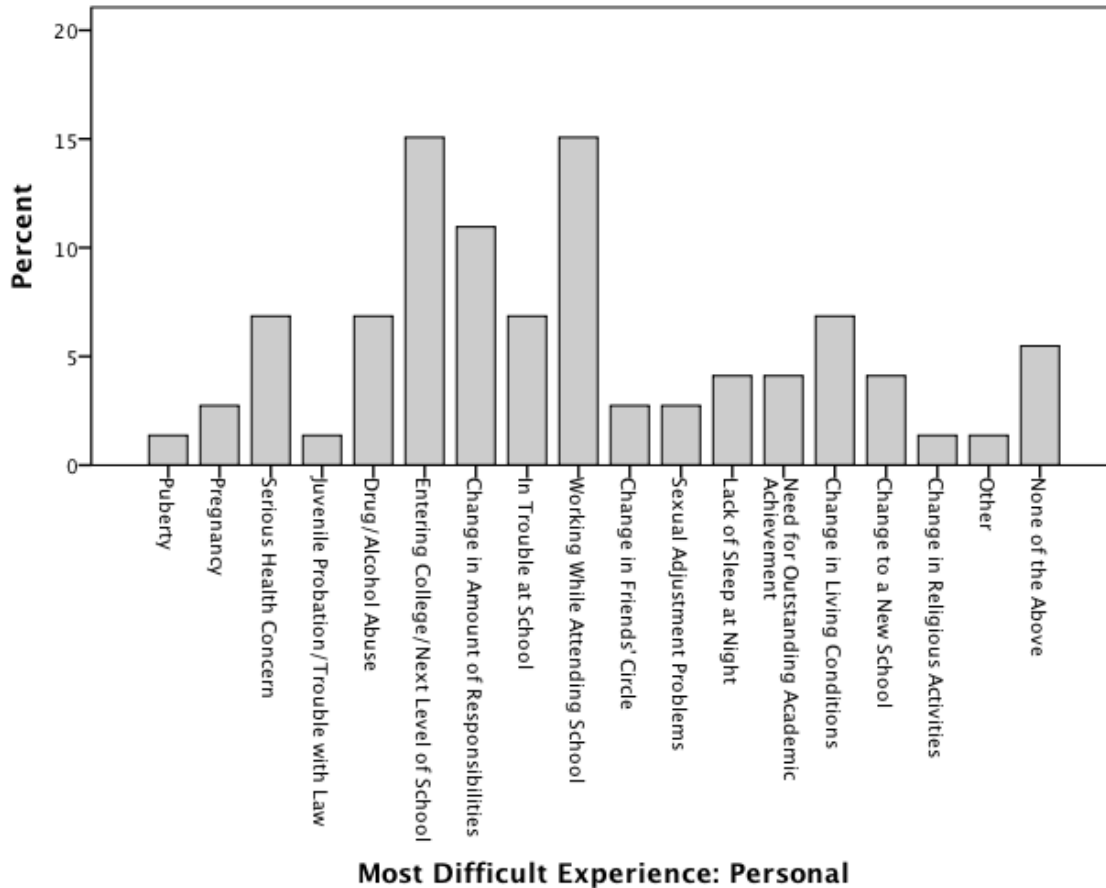
Only one person chose to list a stressor that was not on the list, simply writing "growing

up" as the stressor. Two chose multiple stressors. One listed entering college, change in amount

of responsibilities, working while attending school, change in friends, and change in religious

activities. The other listed pregnancy, health concerns, and change in responsibilities as "equally

important."

One of the research questions was to determine which events were most stressful. On the

basis of these results, it appears that death and illness are the biggest family stressors insofar as

they were named most frequently. Among friends, conflicts with boy/girlfriends and conflict

with other friends are the most stressing events. Entering college, working while attending

school, and a change in responsibility levels are the biggest stressors at the personal level.

Another research question asked which adults the respondents turned to during different

stressful situations. Figure 9 displays the results for family stressors. By far the most commonly

chosen adult was a parent, which 31 (46.3%) selected. Eight respondents (11.9%) named a

sibling; two (3.0%) named a teacher; one (1.5%) chose a mentor; two chose a coach, and two

chose a school counselor; one chose a clergy person; five (7.5%) chose another family member;

and six (9%) selected nobody. Two (2.6%) subjects listed multiple adults. One (1.3%) chose

parent and teacher, and another one (1.3%) listed parent, teacher, school counselor, and a

grandparent.

Figure 9

Person Helping With Family Stressor

Who Was Most Helpful Getting you through Family Stressor?
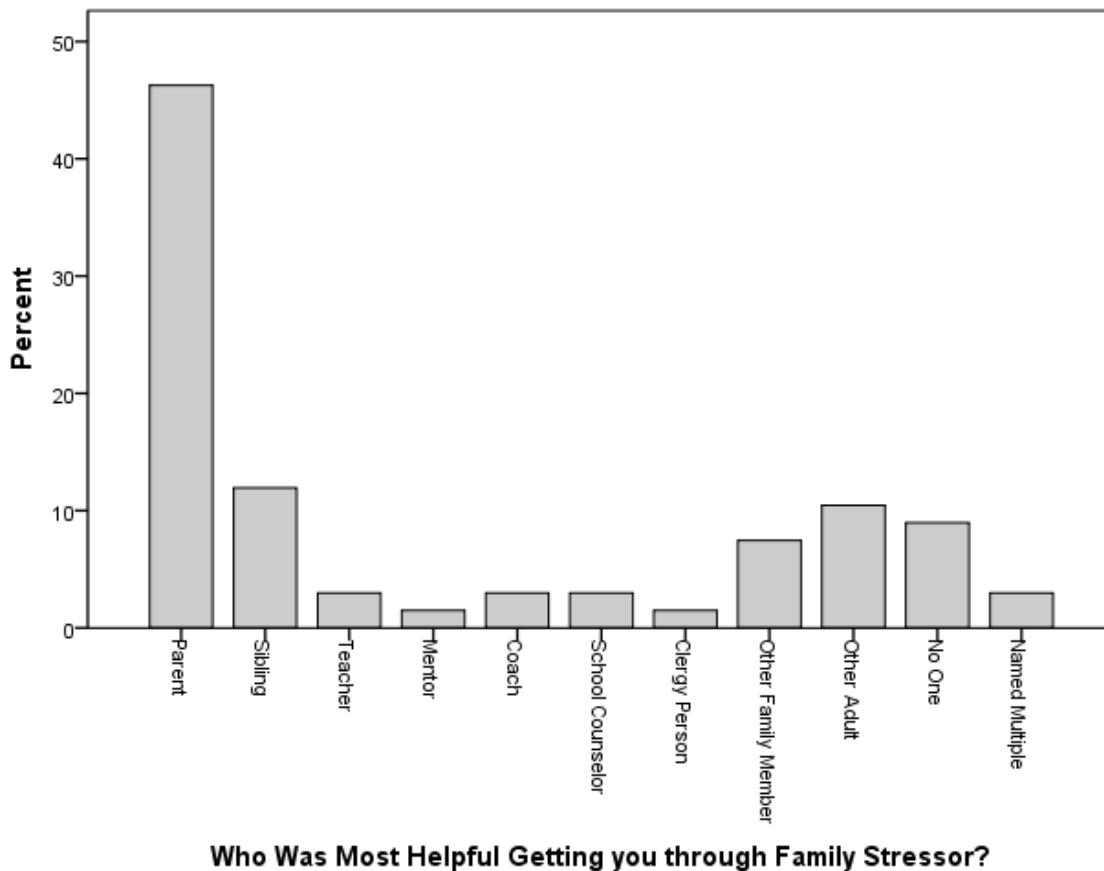
The remaining option that subjects were given was to choose an "other adult";

however, each of the seven respondents that picked this category listed one friend, multiple

friends, or a boy/girlfriend for their other "adult." Assuming that friends are of a similar age, this

suggests that several respondents were not comfortable choosing an adult as someone who

offered support during a difficult time.

Figure 10 displays the results for finding an adult to help with friend stressors. Once

again, parents were chosen more often than the other categories. Sixteen respondents (25.4%)

opted to choose a parent. Eight subjects (12.7%) named a sibling; one (1.6%) named a teacher;

one (1.6%) respondent named a coach; two (3.2%) named a professional counselor; school

administrator, clergy, and other family member were each picked by one (1.6%) of the subjects; and four respondents (5.1%) named multiple adults. Each person in the last category listed a parent plus at least one other. Three picked a sibling, two chose a teacher, one added a counselor, and one also added friends.

Figure 10

Person Helping with Friend Stressor

Who Was Most Helpful Getting you through Friend Stressor?
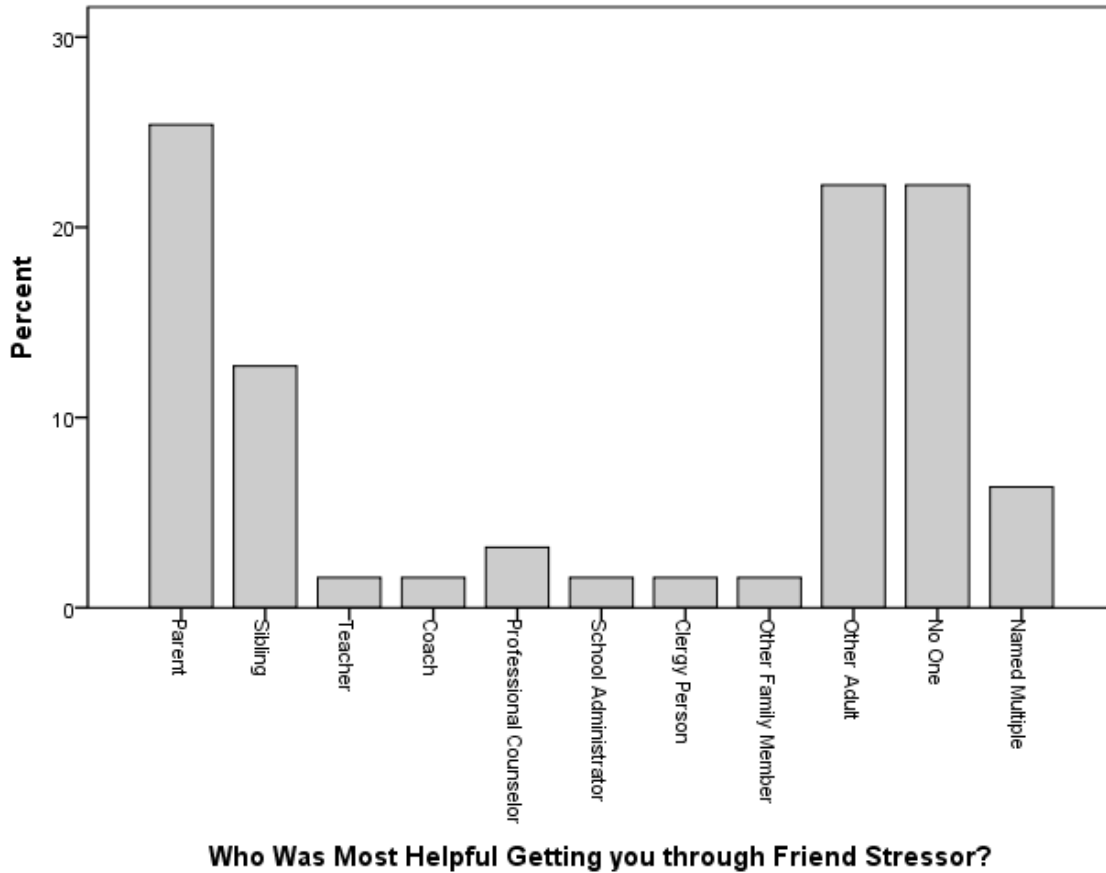
Fourteen subjects (17.9%) opted out of choosing anyone to list as helpful for dealing with their stressors. Another fourteen subjects opted out of choosing an adult and instead listed a friend or boy/girlfriend, as was the case for family stressors. Note that the number of subjects listing friends over adults was much larger for friend stressors than it was for family stressors.

Figure 11 displays adults named as helping with personal stressors. Again, parents are the most commonly chosen category, having been picked by 31 (42.5%) of the subjects. Six (8.2%) chose a sibling; one (1.4%) chose a teacher; two (2.7%) chose a coach; two (2.7%) chose a professional counselor; two (2.7%) chose a school counselor; one (1.4%) chose a school administrator; one (1.4%) chose a clergy person; two (2.7%) named another family member; and

three (4.1%) choose multiple adults. Each of these latter three named a parent; two named a

sibling; and one also named both a teacher and a counselor.

Figure 11

Person Helping With Personal Stressor

Who Was Most Helpful Getting you through Personal Stressor?
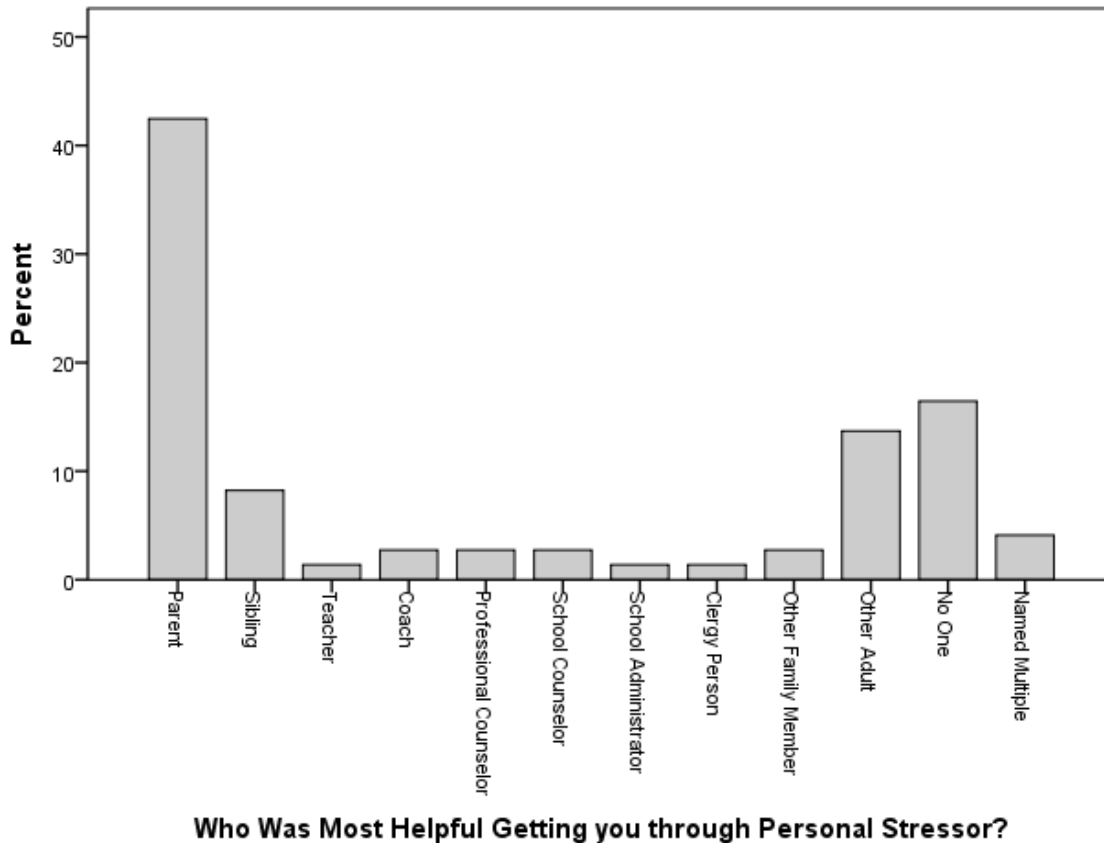
As before, several subjects opted to choose the "other adult" category and then wrote in their friend or boy/girlfriend. Nine subjects (12.4%) did so. Only one person chose "other adult" and actually listed an adult—this person listed his boss.

Overall, to the extent that subjects turned to an adult to deal with difficult times, they most often preferred a parent. Next to parents, they preferred friends or siblings. Not surprisingly, most respondents also stated that they turned to someone with whom they already had a relationship before experiencing the difficult time. Every person who listed a family stressor indicated they knew their adult supporter before the event. For friend stressors, only four respondents (8% of cases with a friend stressor) said this relationship was not already

established prior to the event. Five of the 61 respondents who named a personal stressor (8.2%) said their relationship did not develop until after the event.

Figure 12

Summary of Qualitative Data

Adults Most Often Chosen to Help Cope With Life Stressors

Category	Value
School Counselor	2
Coach	2
Teacher	2
Friends	1
Siblings	7
None	10
Other Adults	26
Parents	28
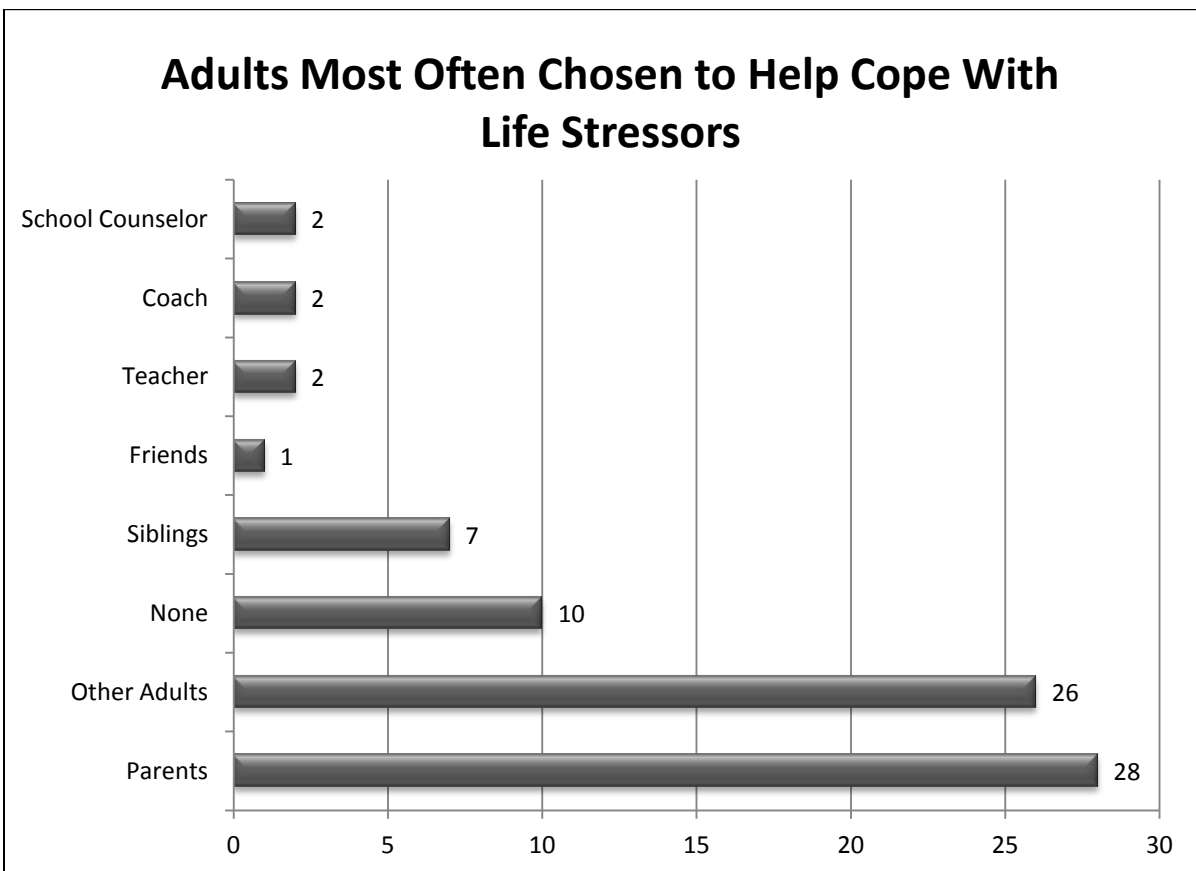
Twenty-eight (35.8 %) respondents explained that parents impacted their ability to cope with life stressors. Figure 12 illustrated the results of the qualitative data indicating parents were the adult identified across all three types of life stressors: personal, family, and friends. Responses from the open-ended question at the conclusion of the survey asked how having positive relationships with adults helped in coping with life stressors, and it offered some possible reasons why participants often highlighted their parents across all three identified stressors. Many participants expressed that parents were often those individuals with whom they "sought advice, asked for direction, and guidance." Parents were described as being "understanding, motivating, trusting and nonjudgmental." The majority of the participants who

chose parents expressed the dependability factor and how "parents were always there, were wise and experienced." They expressed that parents "gave clear direction and helped with becoming better problem-solvers." More than half of the participants described parents as being "empathetic, influential, and good role models;" mentioning that parents "provided structure and discipline and were known to give hope in desperate times."

"Other" adults were also one of the top choices as demonstrated in the quantitative data. Specific individuals were not named within the responses of the open-ended question; however, twenty-six (33 %) of the responses echoed many of the characteristics described as those of parents. Participants found "support and dependability" within other adults in their lives. Additionally, it was noted that the other adults "provided experience and wisdom." Participants described other adults as "offering coping strategies and comfort" to the participants. Much like parents, participants portrayed other adults as helping them "to motivate and guide them during times of trials and stressors; they offered stability and direction."

Specifically in the quantitative data, siblings were named by 11.9 % of the participants as the source of support during their experience of family stressors; 8.2 % in helping with personal stressors; and 12.7 % as helping with friend stressors. The qualitative data showed that seven (8.9 %) subjects expressed that a sibling impacted their ability to cope with life stressors, in general. To further explain why participants identified siblings as one of the sources of support, participants consistently shared that siblings were "dependable, helpful, and always there for them."

The results of the quantitative data illustrated that during personal stressors, 16.4 % of participants chose to seek support from no one; 9 % of the participants did not have anyone named as helping them cope with family stressors; and 22.2 % denoted having no adult to help

them with stressors that had to do with their friends. To further explain this, the qualitative data

indicated (12.8 %) of respondents declared there was no relationship with an adult that impacted

their ability to cope with life stressors. Furthermore, participants expressed adults "added to the

participant's stressors and that often times there was a feeling of judgment and a fear of possible

consequences." A few participants mentioned "there were not any adults in their lives who

listened, cared about them, and who were available." Of the remaining participants, 2.6 %

expressed how their relationships with a coach, teacher, and/or counselor were those

relationships that impacted their ability to cope with life stressors. One participant identified a

friend.

Of the four hypotheses, the latter two relate to correlations between the strength of the

adult relationship and 1) ability to cope with life stressors or 2) perceived level of resiliency.

The purpose of the study was to look at relationships with adults; however several respondents

opted to mention relationships with friends. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 present two types of results. The

first is the correlation (Kendall's tau) taking into account all subjects for which there was data on

the particular type of stressor. The second is the correlation considering only subjects that

clearly named an adult; that is, they did not name friends as their strongest source of support.

The latter results ensure that the inferences drawn relate to the actual theory and motivation

underlying this study and are not contaminated by responses that did not adhere to the intent of

the survey.

Table 4.3 presents the correlations between the strength of the relationship and the extent

to which the person helped the respondent cope. Both variables were measured on a five-point

Likert scale, so Kendall's tau is used as the measure of association.

Table 4.3

Kendall's Tau for Relationship Strength and Coping

	All Subjects		Subjects that Named Adult	
	T	p-value	τ	p-value
Family	.736***	<.001	.708***	<.001
Friend	.615***	<.001	.589***	<.001
Personal	.712***	<.001	.689***	<.001

Note. *** p< .001.

Results

The results indicated a very strong correlation between relationship strength and coping for each kind of stressor. This association is only slightly weaker when limiting the sample to respondents that explicitly named an adult (rather than friends). In all cases, the relationship is highly significant. Considering all subjects first, the Kendall's tau is .736 (p < .001) for family stressors, .615 (p < .001) for friend stressors, and .712 (p < .001) for personal stressors. Limiting the analysis to just those that named an adult, the Kendall's tau is .708 (p < .001) for family stressors, .589 (p < .001) for friend stressors, and .689 (p < .001) for personal stressors.

Overall, no matter what kind of stressful situation one experiences (family, friend, or personal), it is possible to reject the null hypothesis that relationship strength has no relationship with coping. The positive relationship observed for each correlation means that, as relationships improve, help with coping also improved.

Table 4.4 turns to the measure of association between relationship strength and resiliency. The Kendall's tau estimates are again presented for both the whole sample as well as the subsample that clearly named an adult. Once more, all of the estimates turned out to be significant.

Table 4.4

Kendall's Tau for Relationship Strength and Resilience

	All Subjects		Subjects that Named Adult	
	T	p-value	τ	p-value
Family	.422***	.004	.453***	<.001
Friend	.495***	<.001	.512**	.001
Personal	.662***	<.001	.650***	<.001

Note. *** p< .001. ** p< .01.

Considering all subjects first, the Kendall's tau is weakest for family stressors ($\tau = .422$, p < .001). It is stronger for friendship stressors ($\tau = .495$, p < .001) and largest for personal stressors ($\tau = .662$, p < .001). The same pattern holds when limiting the sample to subjects that named an adult. The measure of association for family stressors is .453 (p < .001); it is .512 for friend stressors (p = .001); and it is .650 for personal stressor (p < .001).

Kendall's tau is an appropriate measure for variables—such as those considered here, that are measured on an ordinal scale. Pearson's correlation is a perhaps more common measure of association, though it is more appropriate for variables measured on an interval scale. Nonetheless, Pearson's r was also calculated for each of these relationships and, as Tables 4.5 and 4.6 indicated, produced similar inferences.

Table 4.5

Pearson's r for Relationship Strength and Coping

	All Subjects		Subjects that Named Adult	
	R	p-value	R	p-value
Family	.778***	<.001	.755***	<.001
Friend	.656***	<.001	.632***	<.001
Personal	.702***	<.001	.682***	<.001

Note. *** p< .001.

Table 4.5 indicated that taking all subjects into account, the correlation between relationship strength and coping was always positive and significant. The correlation was .778 (p < .001) for family stressors, .656 (p < .001) for friend stressors, and .702 (p < .001) for personal stressors. Limiting the analysis to those who named an adult, the correlation was .755 (p < .001) for family stressors, .632 (p < .001) for friend stressors, and .682 (p < .001) for personal stressors.

Likewise, as shown in Table 4.6, Pearson's r produced similar inferences to Kendall's tau for the relationship between relationship strength and resiliency. Table 4.4 shows that, taking all respondents into account, the correlations were always positive and significant. The correlation for family stressors was .509 (p < .001), .555 (p < .001) for friend stressors, and .681 (p < .001) for personal stressors. The correlations were very similar when limiting the analysis to subjects that only named an adult. The correlation was .506 (p < .001) for family stressors, .549 (p = .001) for friend stressors, and .673 (p < .001) for personal stressors.

Table 4.6

Pearson's r for Relationship Strength and Resilience

	All Subjects		Subjects that Named Adult	
	R	p-value	R	p-value
Family	.509***	.004	.506***	<.001
Friend	.555***	<.001	.549**	.001
Personal	.681***	<.001	.673***	<.001

Note. *** p< .001. ** p< .01.

It is possible to say that, no matter what kind of stressful situation one experiences (family, friend, or personal), it is possible to reject the null hypothesis that relationship strength has no relationship with resilience. The relationship is again positive, meaning that resiliency increases as the strength of the relationship increases.

As illustrated in the data, as well as mentioned in the literature, relationships are important and play a significant role in developing and fostering one's resiliency (Werner, 1995, Rutter, 2005, Benard, 2001). Researchers Masten and Coatsworth (1998) articulate when children have positive connections established with family, peers, and adults, their ability to adapt to life stressors is improved.   The confidence of trusting even one adult raises the level of hope, assurance and a sense of belonging (Werner, 2005). These caring and trusting relationships are essential for building resiliency. Building positive relationships is the foundation for this component and intervening when students are dealing with difficult circumstances. The data suggests that no matter what kind of stressful situation one experiences, it is possible to conclude there is an association between the strength of relationships and how one copes. As noted, the positive relationship observed for each correlation in the results

indicated that, as relationships improve, help with coping also improved. Similarly, there is

research that emphasized the importance of developing resiliency early in life and having

positive connections established with others (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). As noted in the

findings and results of the data, these connections can include a parent, teacher, friend, family

member, clergy, mentor, counselor or coach.   The existence of a supportive student-adult

relationship may make a difference in the success and achievement of today's youth.

According to Alvord and Grados (2005), resiliency is developed over time and through

varied experiences and relationships. Parents were the adults most reported as influential in the

lives of the participants during stressful times and this is not to be ignored. However, according

to Werner (1995), teachers have a powerful opportunity to make a difference in the lives of

children too and can do this in conjunction with parents and families. Teachers can be

instrumental in establishing school to be a place where students can spend their days in a positive

learning environment and have a feeling of being connected to school, family, and the

community (Werner, 1995).

Although the research focused on student-adult relationships, as demonstrated in the data

from this researcher's study, several participants identified friends as those who helped them

cope with life stressors. There have been several researchers who have studied the important

role peers play in offering support, care and attachment needs (Glasser, 1965, Kohn, 1993, &

Myrick, 1997).   Student to student connections contribute significantly to the development of

resiliency. The results from interviewing teachers and students found peer relationships and

connections were of high importance and a main factor of contributing to resilience.   Students

mentioned positive relationships with their friends first and often when discussing protective

mechanisms (Johnson, Howard, & Oswald, 1999).

There has been research conducted on students who have experienced difficult times during their childhood years and the relationship sources that may have helped them get through the experience, and whether or not the individual developed an ability to become more resilient as a result of the relationship and the hardship (Werner, 2005). Whether it is a friendship, mentorship, or other kind of relationship, having personal connections is important at any stage of development. According to Rubin (2002) and Hartup and Stevens (1997), being part of at least one best friendship can improve adjustment periods in children.

As a result of the data, it can be suggested that children need adults in their lives. According to Rubin (2002), adults who seek to understand the whole child and show an attitude of care and compassion, while providing support for learning; contribute to the development of resiliency and healthy development. In this study, seventy percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed they had a supportive, caring adult outside of home or school. These results suggest that the focus should be on what already works—supportive relationships with adults in the community and schools. The importance of naturally occurring relationships with mentors is important, but it is often very difficult for youth. This is why getting involved in schools, with a youth program, or agency is very helpful in facilitating positive relationships between youth and adults and can be instrumental in assisting students in coping when faced with difficult times (Hass & Graydon, 2009).

Figure 13

Summary of Quantitative Data

Adults Most Often Chosen to Help Cope With Life Stressors

FRIENDS STRESSSORS: Parents 25.4, Sibling 12.7, Other Adult 22.2, No One 22.2

PERSONAL STRESSORS: Parents 42.5, Sibling 8.2, Other Adult 13.7, No One 16.4

FAMILY STRESSORS: Parents 46.3, Sibling 11.9, Other Adult 10.4, No One 9
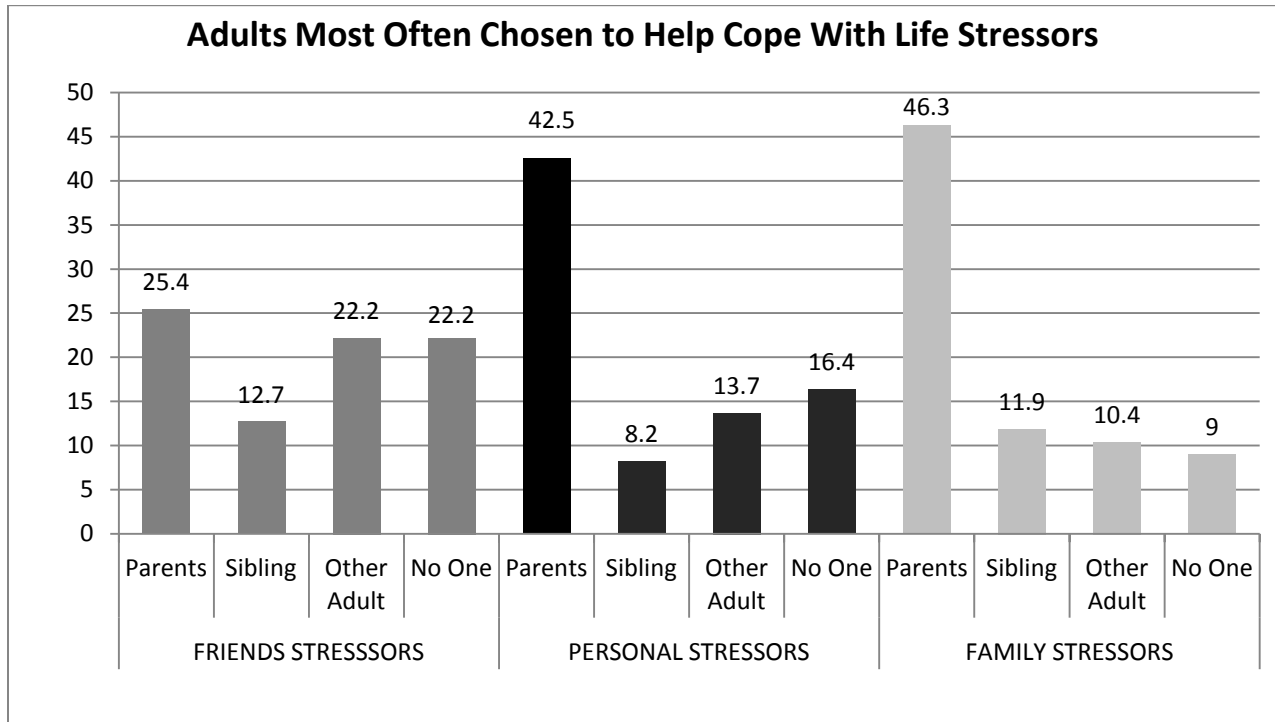
Summary

As indicated in Figure 13, adults were most often called upon for each of the stressors. In summary, the results in the data demonstrate that students more often than not called on an adult in a variety of roles to help them cope with life stressors and to get them through difficult times. The data further emphasizes the role adults play in the lives of youth. Figure 13 also illustrates the important role of parents, siblings, and other adults. Parents were by far the adult most sought after when the participants were faced with adversity: specifically when dealing with family and personal stressors. It can be concluded that parents play a significant role in helping youth cope with life stressors, closely followed by other adults.

CHAPTER 5 – Study Overview, Interpretation, Conclusions, and Recommended

Actionable Solution

Study Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables while surveying participants who were students enrolled in a community college. Results in the study identified the stressors participants endured and also included which adults, if any, helped the participants cope with those life stressors. Furthermore, the strength of the connections to the sources was measured and the degree of recovery the participants experienced was determined. To what extent the sources of connectedness contributed to the resiliency in each participant was also examined. As a result of this study, parents, educators, and other adults will gain a better understanding and knowledge base of the role adults can play in building resiliency in students.

A primary reason for undertaking this study was the researcher's passion to gain more of an understanding of the importance of having adults in one's life, particularly during stressful times throughout the adolescent years. The researcher believes in the significance in having an understanding of the various stressors in the lives of students during their K-12 school age years. Equally important was understanding what mechanisms they used to work through the difficult times they experienced. It was the researcher's intent that the data would provide foundational thinking for proactive models of interventions in assisting future generations. This research has revealed some factors that contribute to building resiliency in students, with positive relationships being one component. It was discovered through this study who the participants named as their primary sources of support during their time of need, the strength of the

relationship with the identified person, and an explanation by the participants that described how adults impacted their ability to cope with life stressors.

Interpretation of Findings and Results

The participants were given a survey in which they were asked to list their most stressful experiences within the context of their family, friends, and own personal lives. These experiences had to have occurred during the participants' school-age years. After taking all subjects into account and including all responses, the correlation between relationship strength and the ability to cope, remained positive and significant. There were two hypotheses that related to correlations between the strength of the adult relationship and 1) ability to cope with life stressors or 2) perceived level of current resiliency. Although the purpose of the study was to look at relationships with adults, several respondents chose to mention their relationships with friends in some of their responses. The primary results discussed in this study ensured that the inferences drawn relate to the actual theory and motivation underlying this dissertation.

The results showed a very strong correlation between relationship strength and coping for each of the three stressors: family, friend, and personal. This suggests that when students had an adult to go to during difficult times, they were able to better cope with their stressors. This association is only slightly weaker when restricting the sample to respondents who clearly named an adult (rather than friends). In all cases, the relationship was highly significant. Overall, it can be suggested that no matter what kind of stressful situation one experiences (family, friend, or personal), it is possible to say that relationship strength does have a correlation with one's ability to cope. It was concluded that as the relationship improved, the participant's ability to cope with the identified stressor also improved. Literature also supports this. Benard (1993) identified

having stable relationships with peers and possessing a strong attachment or connection with at least one adult is considered to be of high importance.

Werner (2005) conducted a study and discovered similar results that indicated there was a relationship between the hard times the students experienced during their childhood years and the relationship sources that helped them get through the experience. Whether it is a friendship, mentorship, or another type of relationship, having personal connections is important at any stage of development. According to Rubin (2002) and Hartup and Stevens (1997), being part of at least one best friendship can improve adjustment periods in children.

It can be suggested as a result of the data analysis in this study that children need adults in their lives. According to Rubin (2002), adults who seek to understand the whole child and show an attitude of care and compassion, while providing support for learning, contribute to the development of resiliency and the overall healthy development of the individual. The data in this study revealed that many participants viewed relationships with adults as important. It can be inferred that there is no question as to whether adults have an impact on students, particularly when they're facing challenging times. Additionally, many of the participants expressed that having had a supportive and caring adult, whether a parent, other family member, or some other adult in their lives, helped them to overcome and work through difficult times. Supporting research that's been conducted echoed the notion of the importance of these relationships. The results of this study indicate it is important for adults to get involved in the lives of young people. This could begin in schools, youth programs, or other agencies. These places have been helpful in facilitating positive relationships between youth and adults and can be instrumental in assisting students in coping when faced with difficult times (Hass & Graydon, 2009). Teachers

who were surveyed in one study identified a strong connection and attachment to an adult as most important for developing resiliency in students (Benard, 1993).

Conclusion

There were four key research questions that framed this study. They related to the theme of positive student-adult relationships and how these relationships impact one's ability to cope with life stressors, the importance of developing resiliency, and how adults can make a deliberate effort to build resiliency in youth. The research was generated around participants who were students between the ages of 18-30 enrolled in a community college in South Central Pennsylvania, and how they valued the relationships they had with adults during their school-age years. They were asked if they saw a connection between these relationships and their ability to cope with life stressors. The researcher aimed to describe the relationships between the different identified stressors and the adults who were named as supporting the participant's ability to cope with the life stressor. In addition, the relationship between the adult identified and the participant's ability to cope with the life stressor was analyzed in order to determine the strength of the association of these two variables.

The research sought to answer these questions:

1 What is the relationship between positive student-adult relationships and a student's ability to cope with life stressors that one experiences during K-12 school years? (Quantitative)

2 What is the relationship between the participant's positive relationship(s) with an adult and his/her current perceived level of resiliency? (Quantitative)

3 Who (what role) will each of the participants identify as the influential adults who helped them as K-12 students cope with the life stressors? (Quantitative)

4   What types of life stressors will the participants report as having experienced

during their K-12 years? (Quantitative)

This study revealed that there was a significant correlation between the student's positive

relationship with an adult and the student's ability to cope with life stressors. Additionally, there

is a significant relationship between the strength of the relationship the participant had with the

identified adult (during the time of youth) and the participant's current level of perceived

resilience.

One of the survey questions asked the respondents to identify with whom they turned to

during different stressful situations. The most commonly chosen adult across all three types of

stressors was a parent. Following closely was the choice of no one, as well as other adults.   Of

the "other adults" chosen, participants listed friends or a boy/girlfriend for the identification of

the "other adult." Assuming that friends are of a similar age, this suggests that several

respondents were not comfortable choosing an adult as someone who offered support during a

difficult time.

The researcher aimed to explore the impact adults have on children as they cope with life

stressors. Notable was the fact that there were participants in the study who reported having no

adult to whom they turned during their difficult times. This suggests several possible

conclusions: The participants may have preferred handling challenges on their own, had no trust

relationship with an adult, feared adult scorn or judgment, and/or were in a situation where a

trusted adult was unavailable.

The final research question addressed identifying the specific types of stressors that

students faced during their K-12 years. On the basis of the results in this study only, it was

interesting to learn that nearly 20% of respondents could not name any stressor in their lives that

they could recall within the context of their family. Of the remaining responses, it appeared that death of a family member and illnesses within the family were the biggest family stressors. It should be noted, however, these were followed closely by the stressors of a parent's substance abuse and divorce.

With regard to friend stressors, approximately 21% of subjects did not volunteer any stressful situation. Of the participants who did respond, the top two stressors having to do with friends were relationship break-ups and conflicts with close friends. The final stressor addressed personal experiences. Of the stressors identified in this category, the most stressful encounters had to do with entering the next level of school, such as college, as well as working while attending school. The fact that the stressors are very diverse further piques the interest of the researcher. While one talked of family substance abuse, another viewed going away to college as stressful. Does it suggest that we as adults need to be cognizant of individual differences? What may be stressful to one may not be a problem for another?

Recommendations

This study provides valuable insight into the overall concept of how adults can impact the lives of students, particularly when there is a positive relationship established before the child encounters various and unpredictable stressors of life. Literature supports the notion that outside of the family circle, students spend more time with teachers than any other adult. As a school administrator and an advocate for students, it is the researcher's strong belief that these relationships start at home and should continue in the schools. Woolfolk (1993) describes the opportunities teachers have to positively influence their students and impact their lives early on. Benard (1995) parallels this thinking when she discussed how much time children spend with their teachers, particularly compared to other members in the circle of influence. With parents

being the exception, teachers are in contact with children for a considerable segment of a child's life. This measure of contact equips teachers with opportunities to observe, relate, and exercise influence and care over student learning and development, as compared to any other connections a child may have. Apart from the family, teachers act as a significant role in the lives of resilient children. Werner and Smith (1988) further emphasize the critical role teachers and schools play in developing and sustaining resilience for coping with stressful situations.

It was surprising to the researcher that the data revealed teachers as significantly low as the chosen adults the participants called upon for support. Consequently, it is imperative to convey to educators the role teachers can play and the opportunity they are given to influence a child's well being. Teachers can play a much larger role beyond the delivery of instruction. The research conducted by Howard et al., (1998) suggests teachers lack understanding of their powerful role in developing resiliency. Teachers reported viewing academic success as being a component toward building resiliency, rather than establishing and maintaining positive relationships and connections with others. It is the researcher's objective to communicate to educators the identified gap in teachers awareness as well as their understanding of their ability to support and prepare students for the stressors they may experience, and the need for students to have at least one trusted adult who is available.

The study's results provided the researcher with some very powerful information. The data provides K-12 school practitioners, parents, coaches, mentors, family, and adults in general, the declaration of how important their roles can be in the life of a child. Because teachers were seldom noted as the adult chosen as the adult to go to when the participants were struggling through hard times, it would be beneficial for educators to be informed of the data and reflect on and evaluate how they can better understand the importance of establishing and fostering

positive relationships with students. The results from the study support the notion that adults can and do impact students. Action steps may include sharing the data with parents and educators in both K-12 settings and higher education institutions, including community colleges. The results could be shared with parents, coaches, youth directors, counselors, and anyone who has interaction or involvement with youth.

The results can add to the professional practice in that it can lead educators to a greater understanding of the importance of adults fostering positive connections with students. The focus is the significance of building and sustaining positive relationships. Educators must understand the key role they can play in fostering and establishing connections through positive relationships and interactions with students and how this can lead to developing individuals who can prosper and overcome disadvantages. It can also enlighten educators to the ways in which cultivating positive relationships and having a sense of belonging, connectedness, and bonding can contribute to resiliency and social emotional well being. Educators need to be aware of the significant contributions that can be made in developing and fostering resiliency during the school age years (Werner & Smith, 1998).

As a result of high stakes testing and accountability for academic achievement, teachers may neglect or undervalue the importance of their role in the lives of students and ultimately their capacity for contributing to the development of resiliency in students. Dryden, Johnson, Howard, and McGuire (1998) reported interview data on students perspectives noting they are well aware of the critical role teachers play in helping them develop resiliency. Their study indicated students fully understood the critical role teachers played in their lives. Those students conveyed a powerful response in the study. Many reported that during their toughest and most challenging times, it was a teacher who was a key influence in being connected and making a

difference in their resilience development. Interestingly, the results in this researcher's study illustrated almost the opposite with teachers being listed near the bottom as those adults who helped the participants get through their most difficult times.

Further research recommends that positive student-adult relationships be examined in a variety of other populations. For example, a study done on urban settings may yield different results than a study conducted on a suburban population. The stressors may be different, as well as the adults chosen for support. It may be beneficial to examine high school seniors and conduct the research near the end of their senior year. Another recommendation would be to conduct a more qualitative study that could include more open-ended questions and/or interviews. Another suggestion would be a longitudinal study to survey students while in school, shortly after graduation, and then again several years later. Administering parallel surveys to both the parent and the child may reveal differing perspectives on life stressors and relationships.

It is also recommended to conduct the study on a larger sample of participants from other institutions across the region, state, or country, and across a variety of demographic areas. A larger study sample would enhance the generalizability of the study and represent more of balance of participants. Finally, it is recommended that future research explore any methods that investigate the importance of student-adult relationships and the positive impact relationships have on a student's ability to cope with life stressors.

Summary

The study focused on a sample (n = 78) of community college students between the ages of 18-30 located in South Central Pennsylvania who were enrolled in an entry-level course. The results from the study demonstrated the need for students to have positive relationships with adults. More often than not, participants in this study called on an adult, in a variety of roles, to

help them cope with life stressors and to get them through difficult times. Moreover, the data

illustrated the important role that parents, siblings, and other adults play in the lives of young

people. Parents were by far the adult most sought after when the participants faced adversity,

specifically when dealing with family and personal stressors. It can be concluded, particularly in

this study, parents play a significant role in helping youth cope with life stressors, closely

followed by other adults.

Data analysis bridges the gap between what one perceives how things should be

esoterically and how things really are. People are influenced by present biases and their own

personal experiences. The researcher's motivation in conducting this study was to further

explore the impact a teacher's role has in contributing to one's resiliency. In this study, the

researcher anticipated that the participants would have identified teachers more frequently as the

adult they chose to help them cope with life stressors during their school age years. That was not

the case. Data was extracted and the researcher discovered what was true for this study only,

suggesting teachers did not play an important role in the lives of the participants, particularly

when they were going through difficult times. The reasons for this should be further explored.

Although the researcher has acknowledged the results of this study were different than

expected, it does not discount the credibility and importance of the study. Limitations were

identified. If the survey was created differently, asking specific questions relating to how

teachers in particular were helpful during stressful times, perhaps divergent or complementary

results may have been anticipated. This proposes an area for future research. New studies have

the opportunity to investigate the phenomenon further and update the literature. The need for

students to make positive and lasting connections with caring adults during their school age years

is essential. This study indicated adults were helpful in supporting students and their ability to cope with life stressors, and most often the adults were parents.

Absent those positive parental relationships, teachers can fill the gap. The researcher is not suggesting that teachers supplant the role of parents in the lives of young people, but rather they be present and available should students lack the opportunity to ask a parent for help. Teachers can be the next best source of support; therefore, the researcher believes there is a need for educators to be aware of the significance of building and sustaining positive relationships with students. Master and Reed (2002) conclude that the best-documented source of developing resiliency is a strong bond to a competent adult. Whether parent, coach, pastor, or educator, the role of adults in nurturing, comforting, and aiding young people through difficult times cannot be overlooked. As young people develop and mature, our responsibility to help them grow cannot be diminished.

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http://www.aap.org/stress/childcopehome.htm (pediatric)

QUESTIONNAIRE: VALUE OF POSITIVE ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

This questionnaire is part of a doctoral study designed to examine the impact of life stressors on young adults. This questionnaire will assist the researcher in determining how young adults coped with life stressors that they have encountered during their K-12 School Ages.

I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SURVEY: ☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

<u>DEMOGRAPHICS</u>

This section will assist the researcher in doing a thorough analysis of the data.

1. What is your gender?

   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female

2. What is your age?

   ☐ 18-20
   ☐ 21-23
   ☐ 24-26
   ☐ 27-30

3. What is your ethnicity/race?

   ☐ American Indian/Alaskan Native
   ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander
   ☐ Black (Non-Hispanic)
   ☐ Hispanic
   ☐ White (Non-Hispanic)
   ☐ Multi-Racial

4. In what kind of school did you spend the majority of your K-12 years?

   ☐ Public
   ☐ Private
   ☐ Prep school
   ☐ Cyber school
   ☐ Home school
   ☐ Alternative school
   ☐ Parochial/Christian school
   ☐ Other (Type _____)

5.   What was your family structure during the majority of you K-12 years? **(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)**

☐ Married parents
☐ Divorced parents
☐ Single parent mother
☐ Single parent father
☐ Raised by guardian (e.g., grandparent, foster, other relative)
☐ Gay/lesbian parent
☐ Blended family/remarried
☐ Foster care
☐ Other - Explain: _____

Section 1: FAMILY STRESSORS

This section of the questionnaire is designed for you to identify the **family** stressors that impacted you during your K-12 years and for you to name the individual(s) who contributed to your ability to cope with the experiences.

1.   Given the stressors related to your relationship with your **family**, which of these have most affected you during your K-12 years? **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

☐ Death of parent
☐ Divorce
☐ Parent/family member in jail
☐ Death of family member
☐ Parent substance abuse
☐ Serious health problem of family member
☐ Gain of a new family member (new baby, parent remarries, or adopts)
☐ Conflict with family
☐ Parents' financial status (loss of job and/or no money)
☐ None of the above
☐ Other (Explain_____)

2.   Given the **family** stressors you chose in question #1, identify your most difficult experience and write it on the line below. Circle the number below that describes the level of severity in which you were affected by this experience during that time.

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Extremely

3. Given the most significant **family** stressor that you chose in question #2, identify whom you believe most contributed to your ability to cope with that stressor: **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- ☐ Parent
- ☐ Sibling
- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Mentor
- ☐ Coach
- ☐ Professional Counselor
- ☐ School Counselor
- ☐ School administrator
- ☐ Clergy person (pastor, priest, youth pastor, etc.)
- ☐ Other family member (Who?_____)
- ☐ Other adult (Who?_____)
- ☐ No one

4. Given the sources you chose in question #3, identify who was the most helpful in getting you through your most difficult **family** stressor and write it on the line below. Circle the number below that describes the strength of your relationship with that person during that time.

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Extremely

5. Was the relationship you identified in question # 4 established before you went through your difficult time?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

6. To what extent did the person you identified in question # 4 help you cope with your most difficult **family** stressor?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Slightly
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Extremely

7. To what extent did your relationship with the person you identified in question # 4 help you to become more resilient later in life? ***Resilient*** *- The capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity.*

- [ ] Not at all
- [ ] Slightly
- [ ] Somewhat
- [ ] Moderately
- [ ] Extremely

Section 2: FRIEND STRESSORS

This section of the questionnaire is designed for you to identify the **friend** stressors that impacted you during your K-12 years and for you to name the individual(s) who contributed to your ability to cope with the experiences.

1. Given the stressors listed related to your relationship with your **friends**, which of these have most
   affected you during your K-12 years? **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

   ☐ Relationship breakup or conflict with boyfriend/ girlfriend
   ☐ Conflict with boyfriend/girlfriend's family
   ☐ Death of a close friend
   ☐ Conflict with friend or circle of friends
   ☐ Friend struggling with substance abuse
   ☐ Serious health problem(s) of close friend
   ☐ None of the above
   ☐ Other (Explain _____)

2. Given the **friend** stressors you chose in question # 1, identify your most difficult experience and write it on the line below. Circle the number below that describes the severity in which you were affected by this experience during that time.

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Extremely

3. Given the most significant **friend** stressor that you chose in question #2, identify whom you believe most contributed to your ability to cope with that stressor: **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

   ☐ Parent
   ☐ Sibling
   ☐ Teacher
   ☐ Mentor
   ☐ Coach
   ☐ Professional Counselor
   ☐ School Counselor
   ☐ School administrator
   ☐ Clergy person (pastor, priest, Sunday school teacher, youth pastor, etc.)
   ☐ Other family member (Who?_____)
   ☐ Other adult (Who?_____)
   ☐ No One

4. Given the sources you chose in question #3, identify who was the most helpful in getting you through your most difficult **friend** stressor and write it on the line below. Circle the number below that matches the strength of your relationship with that person during that time.

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Extremely

5. Was the relationship you identified in question # 4 established before you went through your difficult time?

   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

6. To what extent did the person you identified in question # 4 help you cope with your most difficult **friend** stressor?

   ☐ Not at all
   ☐ Slightly
   ☐ Somewhat
   ☐ Moderately
   ☐ Extremely

7. To what extent did your relationship with the person you identified in question # 4 help you to become more resilient later in life? **Resilient** - *The capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity.*

   ☐ Not at all
   ☐ Slightly
   ☐ Somewhat
   ☐ Moderately
   ☐ Extremely

Section 3: PERSONAL STRESSORS

This section of the questionnaire is designed for you to identify the **personal** stressors that impacted you during your K-12 years and for you to name the individual(s) who contributed to your ability to cope with the experiences.

1. Given the stressors listed related to **your personal experiences**, which of these have most affected you during your K-12 years? **CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

    ☐ Puberty
    ☐ Pregnancy
    ☐ Serious health concerns, illnesses, or issues
    ☐ Juvenile Probation or in trouble with the law
    ☐ Drug and/or alcohol use
    ☐ Entering college/beginning next level of school
    ☐ Change in amount of responsibilities
    ☐ In trouble at school
    ☐ Working while attending school
    ☐ Change in friends' circle
    ☐ Sexual adjustment problems (confusion of sexual orientation or identity)
    ☐ Lack of sleep at night
    ☐ Need for outstanding academic achievement (grades, awards, etc.)
    ☐ Change in living conditions (visitors in the home, single parent, etc.)
    ☐ Change to a new school
    ☐ Change in religious activities
    ☐ None of the above
    ☐ Other (Explain_____)

2. Given the **personal** stressors you chose in question # 1, identify your most difficult experience and write it on the line below. Circle the number below that describes the level of severity in which you were affected by this experience during that time.

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Extremely

3. Given the most significant **personal** stressor that you chose in question #2, identify whom you believe most contributed to your ability to cope with that stressor**: CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

    ☐ Parent
    ☐ Sibling
    ☐ Teacher
    ☐ Mentor
    ☐ Coach
    ☐ Professional Counselor
    ☐ School Counselor
    ☐ School administrator
    ☐ Clergy person (pastor, priest, youth pastor, etc.)
    ☐ Other family member (Who?_____)
    ☐ Other adult (Who?_____)
    ☐ No one

4. Given the sources you chose in question #3, identify who was the most helpful in getting you through your most difficult **personal** stressor and write it on the line below. Circle the number below that describes the strength of your relationship with that person during that time.

	1	2	3	4	5
_____	Not at All	Slightly	Somewhat	Moderately	Extremely

5. Was the relationship you identified in question # 4 established before you went through your difficult time?

    ☐ Yes
    ☐ No

6. To what extent did the person you identified in question # 4 help you cope with your most difficult friend stressor?

    ☐ Not at all
    ☐ Slightly
    ☐ Somewhat
    ☐ Moderately
    ☐ Extremely

7. To what extent did your relationship with the person you identified in question # 4 help you to become more resilient later in life? **Resilient** - *The capacity to adapt successfully in the presence of risk and adversity.*

    ☐ Not at all
    ☐ Slightly
    ☐ Somewhat
    ☐ Moderately
    ☐ Extremely

How has having a positive relationship with an adult during your K-12 school age years impacted your ability to cope with life stressors? Please use the space below to answer this question.

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APPENDIX B:
Survey Script Protocol

Good Morning. My name is Shelly Lappi and I'm working on my doctorate at Drexel University. I really appreciate you taking the time to participate in this survey! This survey is designed to assist me in determining how young adults coped with various life stressors they have encountered during their K-12 School Age Years.
On the 1st page of the survey, you will first be asked to check yes or no stating whether or not you agree to participate in this survey. This is very important. Please don't forget to answer that question. Please be assured your responses will not be attached to your identity in any way; it is strictly anonymous. This survey is divided into 4 sections. Some general demographic questions are on the first page. The remainder of the survey is divided into sections about life stressors. Each of the questions in the sections include checklist and likert scales. Please read every question carefully, answer it to the best of your ability, and please do not skip any questions. The last question on page 8 is an open-ended question. Please read it carefully and answer it as completely as you can. Please write legibly.

- Question # 1 in the last section on page 6 does not have a line next to the word **"other".** If you choose other, please write specifically what you are referring to next to that word.

Each of you has a folder with a survey enclosed. There is a number on your folder. Please put that same number at the top right corner of each page on the survey.
When you finish answering all of the questions, please put the survey back in the folder and bring it to me. If you have any questions while taking the survey, feel free to ask me.

APPENDIX C:

Approval Letter to Conduct Research from Participating College

HACC
Founded in 1964

One HACC Drive, Harrisburg, PA 17110-2999
T: 717.780.2300 or 1.800.222.4222
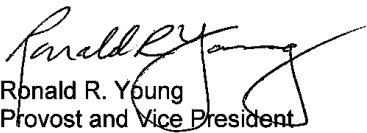www.hacc.edu

November 30, 2011

Shelly J. Lappi
148 Tory Circle
Enola, PA 17025

Dear Ms. Lappi

After reviewing your research request and the student survey document, I am
providing approval for you to proceed. Kindly work with Dean Thad Sampson to
identify faculty who will be willing to support your efforts to work with students to
complete your research.

Good luck in this endeavor and the attainment of your doctorate from Drexel
University.

Sincerely,

Ronald R. Young
Provost and Vice President
Academic Affairs

APPENDIX D:
Drexel University IRB Approval

DREXEL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Office of Regulatory Research Compliance

APPROVAL NOTICE (EXEMPT)

TO: Joyce Pittman, Ph.D.
        School of Education
        Mailstop: Drexel

FROM: *Sreekant Murthy. Ph.D.*

        Sreekant Murthy, Ph.D.
        Vice Provost for Research Compliance
        Drexel University College of Medicine
        1601 Cherry Street, Suite 10444, 3-Parkway, Philadelphia, Pa 19102
        Tel: 215-255-7864 Fax: 215-255-7874

SUBJECT: EXEMPT APPROVAL
        Examining Student-Adult Relationships During K-12 School Age Years
        SPONSOR: Internal
        PROTOCOL No: 1112000631

RE: 12/22/11 - Approved Exempt Category 2. This study will conduct
        questionnaires with 100 subjects recruited from Harrisburg Area
        Community College

Date: 12/22/2011

On behalf of the Committee, I am pleased to inform you that the subject protocol
has been reviewed and approved as **EXEMPT research** (45 CFR 46, 101(b) (4)) for
the period indicated above. We operate under many Government requirements.
As a result, this approval is granted with the following understandings:

1. If this is a sponsored project, then the study may not be activated until the
   Clinical Research Group has received BOTH a fully executed sponsored
   agreement AND appropriate letter(s) of indemnification by the sponsor. If
   this is not a sponsored study (designated "internal"), the costs of the project
   must be identified and a cost center designated. Please call 215-255-7857 if
   you have any questions regarding these procedures.
2. You must advise the IRB of the activation date. Use the attached form for this
   purpose.
3. Protected Health Information (PHI) cannot be collected without a Waiver of
   Authorization per HIPAA regulations.