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Resilience, play space and adaptive behaviors among children in homeless shelters : a test of alternative models

Helen Day Miller

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Helen Day Miller entitled "Resilience, play space and adaptive behaviors among children in homeless shelters : a test of alternative models." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Social Work, with a major in Social Work.

James A. Neff, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Tim Davey, Bill Bell

Accepted for the Council:

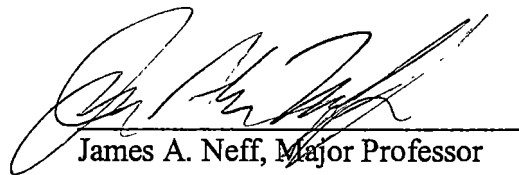
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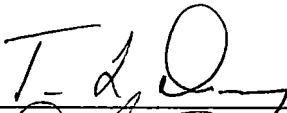
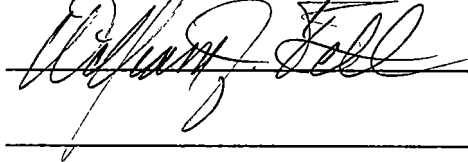
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To the Graduate Council:


I am submitting herewith a masters thesis written by Helen Day Miller entitled "Resilience, Play Space, and Adaptive Behaviors among Children in Homeless Shelters: A Test of Alternative Models." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Social Work, with a concentration in Management and Community Practice.


James A. Neff, Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend the acceptance:

Accepted for the council:


Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

**RESILIENCE, PLAY SPACE AND ADAPTIVE BEHAVIORS
AMONG CHILDREN IN HOMELESS SHELTERS: A TEST OF
ALTERNATIVE MODELS**

**A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Helen Day Miller
August 1999**

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of

Helen Hill Miller

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most grateful to the families living in shelters in the greater Nashville area for their willingness to provide a snapshot into the emotional lives of their children. They did so trusting that the results might come to a practical and effective means of alleviating homelessness.

I am particularly in appreciation of Jim Neff, my Thesis Advisor. His ability to repeatedly go the extra mile with a realistic skepticism regarding the condition of the road is rare and sincerely appreciated. I am thankful to the other members of my Thesis Committee, Tim Davey and Bill Bell, for keeping a light on in the eleventh hour.

Thanks to Eric Tarleton for his unconditional support and the Big desk.

Finally, I am indebted to my parents for their encouragement throughout.

ABSTRACT

In this study, two models of the relationship between resilience, play space, and adaptive behaviors among children in homeless shelters were tested. The analysis design involved a two factor ANOVA examining main and interaction effects of resilience (high vs. low, dichotomized at median of scale distribution) and play space (presence vs. absence). An interaction effect would have supported the hypothesis of the Dynamic Resilience Theory, which stated that in the presence of available play space, no difference between children with more or less resilience was anticipated. In the absence of available play space, it was anticipated that more resilient children would be more at risk for behavior problems than those with less resilience. The Adaptive Resilience theory would have been supported by results showing a main effect of resilience. More resilient children would have been less at risk for behavior problems than less resilient children regardless of the Availability of play space. In both groups, it was anticipated that available play space would result in less risk of behavior problems. No interaction between resilience and play space was hypothesized for this model.

Results indicate both a significant main effect of resilience for the externalizing behavior subscale and a significant interaction effect for internal and overall subscales. Mean profiles for external, internal, and overall subscales were similar, indicating no significant difference between more or less resilient children in shelters with inavailable play space. The mean profiles indicate a significant difference between more or less resilient children in shelters with available play space. The study concludes that both resilience and play space make a significant difference in the risk of child behavior

problems. Implications for the nurturing of children with less resilience in social and cognitive development are discussed.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Rationale

Documentation of the number of people who experience homelessness is often used in research as a way to identify homelessness as a critical issue in the public policy debate. Measuring the number of homeless people in the United States, however, is difficult to do with any degree of consistency. Researchers use various methods including point-in-time counts, which are counts taken on a given day or week, and period-prevalence counts, which are counts recording the number of homeless over a given period of time. Point-in-time counts are considered only a “snapshot” picture of the homeless, and they do not take into account those people who are intermittently homeless. Point-in-time counts are “often criticized as misrepresenting the magnitude and nature of homelessness” (National Coalition for the Homeless. NCH Fact Sheet #2,1998). Regardless of this fact, as early as 1984, “national estimates in the hundreds of thousands (were) based on known and explained research methods” (Burt & Cohen, 1988; Freeman, 1987; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development [HUD], 1984 as cited in Kondratas, 1991). This figure has grown steadily in the last fifteen years. The National Coalition for the Homeless now estimates that there are approximately 760,000 people homeless each night, and from 1.2 to 2 million during one year (National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1996 as cited in NCH Fact Sheet #2, 1998)

Other researchers have questioned the relevance of gaining an exact count of the numbers of homeless (Knodratas, 1991; Blasi, 1990, HUD, 1994). "Homelessness is not an end point but a recurring waystation for the very poor.... it is not a characteristic of people, but rather a condition in which some people find themselves at some point in time" (Blasi, 1990, 208-209). Specific issues regarding the effects of homelessness have nonetheless become evident as a result of this earlier demographic information. An example of this was the signing of the Stewart B. McKinney Act in 1987 consisting of "fifteen programs providing a range of services to homeless people, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, job training, primary health care, education, and some permanent housing" (NCH, FS18, p.2).

A recognition of the inaccurate but stereotypical image of the homeless "hobo" is a particularly important piece of information gained by these initial counts. A significant number of children are being brought up in the transitional lifestyle that is a result of homelessness. A 1991 report by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) documents this fact: "One-parent families, most often headed by women, represent an estimated three-fourths of all homeless families nationwide, according to the U.S. Conference of Mayors (CDF, p.3). The CDF (1991) reported that the number of homeless children varied from 61,500 to 500,000 nightly. More recently, the National Coalition for the homeless estimates that currently "families with children constitute approximately 40% of people who become homeless" (Shinn and Weitzman, 1996 as cited in NCH Fact Sheet #7, 1998). The NCH also found that, in 1997, 25% of the homeless population were children. In addition, "92% of the cities surveyed expected an increase in the number of requests for emergency shelter by families with children in 1998" (NCH Fact Sheet#7,1998).

Statement of the Problem

In their report, Homeless Families: Failed Policies and Young Victims (1991), the CDF describe the effects of homelessness on children. They included factors such as health, nutrition, emotional stability, family separation, early childhood development and education, and inadequacies in the shelter system.

Since homeless families are a recent phenomenon (Baker, 1987), there are few studies of them. However, existing research on homeless families involves an effort to understand the impact of this kind of lifestyle on child development. There are similarities between the characteristics of homeless children and children who were part of early research on migrant families, which described how frequent moves affected children. In these studies, the research indicates that migrant children have no sense of space or possessions (Coles, 1976). They lack experience playing with toys, blocks, games, and other activities necessary for the development of perceptions and spatial relationships (NY State Department of Education, 1968). Further, a study by the US Department of Education (1992) found that migrant children lack of a sense of private space or possessions, demonstrate aggressive behavior and frustration, and have difficulty with transitions.

Research on homeless children indicates commonalties with preceding studies of migrant children (Bassuk, 1986; McChesney, 1987; and Fagan, 1987). Bassuk and Rosenberg (1985; 1986; Bassuk and Rosenberg, 1988, 1990) found that homeless children show signs of lifelong cognitive, emotional and social problems. Half of all

preschoolers in their study had at least one serious developmental delay. Thirty-six percent of the children in one study had language delays, 18 percent lacked gross motor skills, and 33 percent had two or more developmental delays (Bassuk and Rosenberg, 1988, 1990). Dail (1990) found that homeless children were subject to a lack of opportunities to develop the interpersonal skills that could ensure their overall social and emotional development.

The organization of the physical environment in shelters also has an impact on children with transient lifestyles. Strahs (1985) reports that children have no quiet place to unwind or to do homework. Basler (1985) discusses the lack of available space for children to “use up” energy. Burn (1992) suggests that the restrictive quality of shelter life exacerbates passive behavior and notes a significant relationship between perceived loss of control and helplessness. The Children’s Defense Fund (1991) states “the dangerous physical environment in which homeless children live contributes to their developmental problems. Without a place to explore, progress in developing physical, cognitive, and gross motor skills is delayed for many children” (CDF, 1991, p.7). Preliminary research on homeless families suggests the need for a link between existing research that justifies a child’s need for a place to acquire and exercise crucial life-long skills and research that documents the lack of such space in shelters.

Objectives of the Study

The present study examines play space and adaptive behaviors among children in homeless shelters. More specifically, the concept of resilience is explored as a means of

understanding the impact of either available or inavailable play space on children coping with homelessness.

The research project will examine the interaction effect of play space as a third variable with respect to the relationship between the independent variable resilience and the dependent variable behavior problems. Two theories of resilience will be examined. According to the Dynamic Resilience Theory, children demonstrate resilience by acting out more frequently and more aggressively in reaction to shelters lacking available play space. In this case, in the presence of available play space, no significant difference is anticipated between more resilient children and those with less resilience. In the absence of available play space, it is anticipated that more resilient children will demonstrate more externalized behavior than those with less resilience.

According to the Adaptive Resilience Theory, resilient children accommodate themselves to the environment rather than becoming assertive. In this case, more resilient children will be less at risk for behavior problems than less resilient children regardless of the presence or absence of available play space. In both groups, it is anticipated that the presence of available play space will result in children being less at risk for behavior problems.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

To truly leap, you must learn how to use the ground as a springboard, and how to land resiliently and safely.

Erikson paraphrasing Plato (1977)

Resilience: A Response to Homelessness

Important questions arise from a review of the literature about homeless children. How do children make it through the shelter system? Who are the children who succeed regardless of their circumstances? What kinds of behavioral characteristics manifest themselves in shelter settings? Are these behaviors different for children who are successful than for those who fail to thrive?

The resilience literature suggests a constellation of characteristics that contribute to the ways children adapt to their living situations. Current research on resilience is commonly prefaced by a disclaimer that there is no consensus within the academic community on how to define the concept (Doll, Jew and Green, 1997; Jew and Kroger, 1997). Armstrong (1997) writes “resilience and risk are terms that have been used in a variety of ways to mean a variety of different things” (Armstrong, 1997). In one sense, the confusion can be boiled down to something resembling the nature/nurture question – i.e., is it primarily constitutional, or environmental factors which cause the development of resilience in people? The literature divides roughly in half. From one perspective, resilience is defined as a conglomerate of inherent, constitutionally based characteristics. Models of resilience from this perspective reflect a more static or unidimensional view.

That is, resilience is reflected in personality or characteristics of the individual. In addition, it can be viewed as a collection of characteristics reflecting a person within a specific environment. The second perspective defines resilience in terms of factors contributing to the development of a way of behaving/reacting. Models from this perspective reflect a dynamic or complex interactional view. Resilience is a set of strategies or factors contributing to coping within the context of stressful situations. It is an interaction between environmental, temperamental, and social variables producing a mechanism of coping called 'resilience.' Figure 1 provides a summary of the following review of the literature divided along the lines of either unidimensional or complex-interactional conceptualizations of resilience.

Current Theoretical Perspectives

Unidimensional Models of Resilience. In a review of five approaches to the study of resilience in children, Garmezy (1983) noted the centrality of three factors to the concept: temperament, family milieu, and support from the community. The approaches he reviewed cover studies in such diverse areas as epidemiology, literature surveys, longitudinal-developmental studies, genetic, constitutional factors, and observations of children in war (Garmezy, 1983). He found that regardless of the theoretical framework, this core "constellation of factors" contributing to resilience in children plays a significant role in enabling children to succeed under less than available circumstances (Garmezy, 1983).

Earlier studies highlighted similar core conceptual factors. Rutter (1971) suggested that "one of the ways in which genetic factors operate is through an influence on responsiveness to environmental stresses" (Rutter, 1979, p. 54). Rutter (1979) also

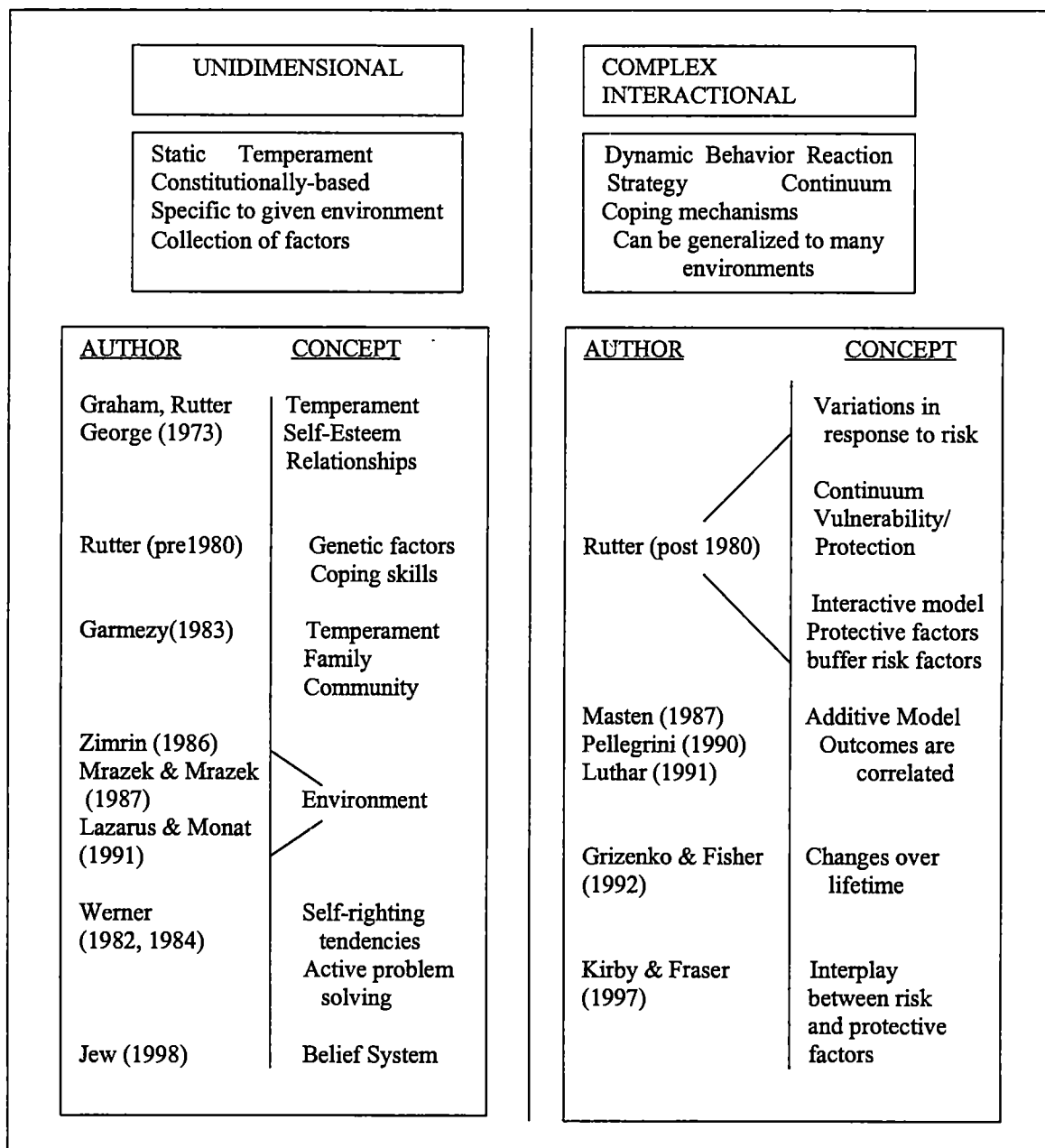


Figure1: Taxonomy of Resilience Literature

found self-esteem, stable relationships with an adult, the scope and range of available opportunities, and coping skills to be determinants of protective factors leading to resilience in children. Graham, Rutter, and George (1973), while looking primarily at the effects of temperamental characteristics on propensity for behavioral disorders, found links to family relationships.

While much of the early research viewed resilience as constitutionally based, there was a continuous recognition of the affects of the environment on the individual (Lazarus & Monat, 1991; Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987; Rutter, 1985; Zimrin, 1986 as cited in Jew, Green & Kroger, 1998). In Werner's (1984, 1982) longitudinal study of at-risk children in Hawaii, she cites studies concerning children living in extreme poverty (Clark, 1983, Gandara, 1982; Garnezy, 1981, 1983; Kellam et al 1975; Shipman, 1976), studies of the children of psychiatric patients (Anthony, 1974; Blueier 1978; Garnezy, 1974; Kauffman, et.al. 1979; Watt et. Al. 1984, Werner and Smith, 1982), and studies of children of divorce (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Her review of the literature uncovers four central characteristics of resilient children: active problem solving skills which serve the needs of a variety of emotionally charged situations; a constructive perception of all experiences (including painful ones); the ability to attract the attention of others; and confidence in a positive and meaningful outlook on life (O'Connell-Higgins, 1983, in Werner, 1984). In sum, she wrote, "research on resilient children provides us with a focus on the self-righting tendencies that appear to move some children toward normal development under all but the most persistent adverse circumstances" (Werner, 1984, p.71).

Complex-Interactional Models of Resilience. Werner's reference to "self-righting tendencies" illustrates an emerging shift in conceptualization among theorists. The focus of attention began to shift from specific characteristics or factors which might be inherent genetic determinants of resilience to the mechanisms by which resilience may be expressed. In a shift from his earlier definition, Rutter (1987) described resilience as being "concerned with individual variations in response to risk...if circumstances change, resilience alters" (p.317). These variations in response, or mechanisms, are reference points to locations along a continuum between the poles of "vulnerability" and "protection." Resilience describes the "modification of a person's response to the risk situation" along that continuum (Rutter, 1987, p.329). He identifies four primary mechanisms as being predictors of resilience: "reduction of risk impact; reduction of negative chain reactions; establishment and maintenance of self-esteem and self-efficacy; and opening of opportunities" (Rutter, 1987, p.325).

Current research concurs with the belief that resilience is the result of an "interplay between risk and protective factors" (Kirby and Fraser, 1997). Two models support this belief. Rutter (1979, 1983), asserting that protective factors serve to buffer risk factors has proposed an interactive model. They interrupt the chain of risk, and they can prevent the initial occurrence of risk (Kirby and Fraser, 1997). In the additive model, there is a positive correlation between negative risks and negative outcomes; and, In addition, there is a positive correlation between protective factors and positive outcomes (Luthar, 1991; Masten, 1987; Pellegrini, 1990 in Kirby and Fraser, 1997). To further complicate matters, this interplay between risk and protective factors is also affected by development:

Vulnerability or resistance to stressful experiences appears to shift as a function of development or maturation changes. The fluctuating nature of resilience may result from the interaction of individual and environmental conditions that change as children enter school, develop friendship networks, explore sexuality and so on. Developmentally, constitutional or individual factors appear more important during infancy and childhood, and interpersonal factors appear more important during adolescence.

(Grizenko & Fisher, 1992)

Emergent Theoretical Perspectives

More recently, Jew (1998) defined resilience as “a system of specific beliefs that interact with environmental stress to determine an individual’s coping skills...The development of this belief system may be influenced by variables such as personality, environment, and developmental stage” (p.7). She and her colleagues have attempted to design a resilience measure based on what they refer to as The Resilient Belief System (Jew & Kroger, 1998). In this context, beliefs influence cognition which mediates “the development of certain coping behaviors” (p.3).

Jew’s Resilient Belief System measure is a good example of how many of the conceptual roadblocks one encounters when examining resilience become most apparent when attempting to operationalize it. Clearly, as researchers examine the precise nature of resilience, their definitions become more complicated. When applying these definitions to human behavior, they are forced to adopt a more ecological perspective. At the same time, in order to understand resilience, they need a means by which to measure it.

Researchers at the American Educational Research Conference in April of 1998 continued to try to identify and operationalize variables indicating resilience. Jew (1991) made one of the first attempts. This early measure, the Children’s Resiliency Belief System, attempted to measure general temperamental and environmental distinctions

between resilient and non-resilient individuals. Later, measures of cognitive characteristics and belief systems were added to the measure (Jew, Green, Kroger, and Luft, 1996). The instrument is currently being used in a multidimensional measure called the Resiliency Evaluation Subscales Inventory or RESI (Jew & Armstrong, 1998 as cited in Armstrong, 1998).

Application of Resilience Measures to Homeless Children.

Measures of the constitutional elements of resilience have remained relatively unambiguous – i.e., self-confidence, self-esteem, social competence. Measures of the interaction between these temperamental qualities and the environment have proven more difficult. Werner's (1989) longitudinal study of 698 Hawaiians has lasted 40 years. Her results include a number of these more difficult to measure qualities: "higher levels of autonomy, independence, empathy, task orientation, curiosity, and problem solving" (Jew, 1998, p.5). In an attempt to consolidate the findings of a number of previous studies into items specifically designed to measure resilience, Jew (1998) developed subscales including the following:

Active skill acquisition reflected the skills and abilities of formation and utilization of relationships for survival, information seeking, precocious maturity, altruism, and identification with aggressor's competence. Future orientation reflected optimism and hope and positive projective anticipation. Independence/risk-taking reflected rapid responsivity to danger and decisive risk-taking.

(Jew, 1998, p. 19)

The participants in Jew's study were 392 7-12th graders. In her discussion, Jew (1998) notes that, rather than using high school students, using children and adults in future studies would provide valuable information as to the relevance of these subscales across generations. At this time, however, it is questionable that studies of resilience in

young homeless children would benefit from Jew's measure. As mentioned previously, Bassuk (1986) and others have noted significant developmental delays in these children, and abstract measures such as identification with aggressor's competence, future orientation, and decisive risk-taking may be beyond the scope of their years.

This is not, however, to suggest that resilience is an irrelevant concept with regards to the lives of homeless children. Nieman (1988) writes "vulnerability and resilience might be thought of as a wide range of strengths and weaknesses that all children have in relation to specific stressors and situations at various times in their lives" (1988, p.24). Rather than looking for "resilient children," researchers look for specific characteristics in children which are indicators of resilience. A meaningful application of research techniques makes use of comparative analyses of specific characteristics such as competence, autonomy/dependency, and personal empowerment in the lives of homeless children. Given the blatant reality of the loss of a home, the environment also has an important impact on the expression of these characteristics. Theoretical perspectives on resilience require integration to make sense in the lives of homeless children.

Integration of Theoretical Background

Integration by way of Homelessness. Integration of static and complex interactional conceptualizations of resilience may find resolution in the living quarters of the homeless child. To repeat Nieman (1988): "the relationship between physical environments characterized by crowding and the behavioral problems in children is particularly relevant to the consideration of resiliency in homeless children" (p.23). From one perspective, it might be asserted that children demonstrate resilience by acting out more frequently and more aggressively in reaction to the shelter setting. From the

opposing perspective, children whose behavior is aggressive demonstrate a lack of resilience as it has been described more commonly – i.e., flexibility, ease of temperament, likability. In this case resilient children would accommodate themselves to the environment rather than becoming aggressive.

This research project will examine the effect of play space on the relationship between resilience and acting out. For homeless children the essential questions may not be “Is the child temperamentally inclined to adapt and thrive regardless of adversity?” (as static conceptualists might ask) or, “What range of behaviors has the child learned to use in the face of adversity?” (as complex interactionists might ask). Rather, the question may be posed, “Given a more or less restrictive play space, and based on their unique temperamental proclivities, how do children react in order to continue to accomplish important developmental milestones?” In other words, resilience may develop in an individual through expressions of specific temperamental qualities in interactions specific to the environment. This last question takes the “person-in-environment” approach, both by recognizing the effects of environment on person and by recognizing the social construction of reality.

Integration by way of Social Work. A second possibility that exists for integrating static and complex interactional conceptualizations of resilience lies in the unique perspective of the social work profession. The person-in-environment view of human development has been an essential part of social work practice for many years. Greene (1991) wrote, “the person-in-environment perspective has been a central influence in the formation of the profession’s theoretical base as well as in its approach to practice” (p.1). Gordon (1962) noted the requisite “dual focus” on person and

environment for effective work in the helping process (in Green, 1991). “Germain and Gitterman (1980) stressed the interplay of human potential and the properties of the environment that support or fail to support the expression of that potential” (Greene, 1991).

The person-in-environment perspective evolved directly from the more abstract theoretical base of General Systems Theory. In other words, the term ‘person-in-environment’ is a specific reference to what is more broadly seen as the ‘nested nature’ of open systems: an individual’s biological system is a subsystem of his or her social/familial system, which, in turn, is a subsystem of communities. Adaptability and permeability are essential for the development of open systems:

To keep within system limits, the system must draw on internal feedback processes to inform it about the relationship among its parts, and on external feedback processes to inform it about the environment and its own relationship with the environment. Internal feedback includes biological, physiological, and psychological processes. External feedback included such processes as the verbal and nonverbal expressions, perceptions, attitudes, expectations, and behaviors of other individuals; the sanctions exerted positively and negatively by social systems, the reactions and responses of physical settings, and many other kinds of information.

(Greene, p.465)

A child constructs meaning out of the elements in his or her surroundings based not only on what is available in the environment but also on his or her own temperamental inclinations to make sense of it all. One way that children “make sense of it all” is by playing. Play is a primary environment through which a child exercises both temperamental characteristics and social constructs. A discussion of the

developmental necessity of play offers more detailed explanation of how the play environment may be viewed as an essential element in exploring the question of resilience in childhood.

Resilience and Child's Play

Play, Cognitive, and Social Development

Play and Cognitive Development. A large body of literature supports the idea that play is the 'honest man's work' of a child. Erikson (1972) refers to this when he writes, "play is an infinite resource of what is potential in man" (p.127). Piaget (1972) described play in the context of cognitive development:

I would like to give an example that a friend of mine told me and to which he attributes his career as a mathematician. When he was a small boy, he was counting some stones and he counted them from left to right and found that there were ten. Then he counted them from right to left and, lo and behold, there were ten again. Then he put them in a circle, and finding ten once again, he was very, very excited. This is a discovery; it is a reflexive abstraction stemming from his own actions.

(Piaget, p. 23)

From this perspective, cognitive development is seen as a direct result of the interaction between self-exploration, thought, and the environment. What might appear to be a simple scenario involving a child's haphazard arrangement of stones is, in fact, the initial stages of the development of a mathematical mind. Wolff (1972) writes that "Piaget's theories are based on the discovery that thought is the interiorization of sensorimotor interactions with the environment and that the transition from sensorimotor to thought operation represents a universal direction of individual development" (p. 35).

In the process of playing, children acquire and assimilate a foundation for cognitive growth.

Play and Social Development. Erikson contributed to Piaget's theory by examining it in a different realm of child development. Whereas Piaget's interest in play was in its relationship with cognitive development, Erikson was interested in the impact of play on child development in the social sphere:

If, in this small boy's life, the classroom and the home setting are an early equivalent of the sphere of adult actuality with its interplay of persons and institutions, then his solitary construction is the infantile model of the playwright's work: he, too, condenses into scenes of unitary place and time, marked by a "set" and populated by a cast, the tragic (and comic) dilemma of representative individuals caught in the role conflicts of their time.

(Erikson, 1972, p.133)

Erikson found that play not only enhances cognitive development, but it also exercises a child's knowledge of the social world. In terms of this discussion of resilience, Piaget and Erikson were exploring the "constellation of characteristics" Garnezy later found to be central to the resilience literature.

Integration of Perspectives on Play. Other correlational and experimental studies have examined the relationship between play and social cognition during childhood. Johnsen & Christie (1984) review eight studies done in the 1970s using experimental procedures. Significant gains were found in groups trained in some type of play on measures of role-taking, role-switching, cognitive perspective-taking tasks, and cooperation (Johnsen & Christie, 1984). The authors raise three important issues with regards to the reliability and validity of the research due to the inconsistency of the measures of perspective-taking, to the confounding effects of adult-child interactions

during the trainings, and to the fact that no follow-up assessments were made in order to consider lasting gains of the training. The review does, however, point to a long-standing interest in play as a mechanism for child development. Scherler (1979) described six development functions of play: the adaptive, the expressive, the explorative, the productive, the communicative, and the comparative (in Moore, 1986, p.15). He asserted that each function contributes to the acquisition of competence through play.

The education arena is a third area in which play has a captive audience. The basic premise of work done by school curriculum experts concurs with the studies mentioned above: "play facilitates young children's development" (Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983; Monigham-Nourot, Scales, Van Hoorn, & Almy, 1987 in Howe, Moller, Chambers & Petrakos, 1992). Basing their work on cognitive developmental theories, curriculum specialists have designed models around the idea that children create environments which allow them to interact in ways that promote decision-making, problem solving and judgments (Howe, Moller, Chambers & Petrakos, 1992, p. 236). This perspective on play infers greater emphasis not only on the activities children engage in while playing but also on the environment itself. Play becomes an issue of both quantity (how much play is necessary for children to develop healthily) and quality (where and with what do children play).

Types of Play Environment

Factors Contributing to Quality of Play. Researchers taking an ecological perspective on child development have examined the importance of the play environment (Parten, 1932; Van Alstyne, 1932, Moore, 1986; Martin, Brady, & Williams, 1991; & Rettig, 1998). Moore (1986) writes that "depending on its quality, the environment

engages the child in exploration and discovery; it is a source of knowledge; it promotes the growth of environmental competence, stimulates the practice of skills and enhances performance” (p.13).

Wachs (1985) finds that physical environmental factors such as ambient background noise, overcrowding, and physical restraints on exploration have a negative relationship with cognitive development (in Rettig, 1998, p.189). Rettig (1998) reviews specific factors affecting the play of young children including the amount of space available for play, the theoretical orientation of the program, the arrangement of play areas, social vs. isolate toys, and the quantity of toys and playthings. Rettig’s review of the literature confirms that these areas warrant consideration when developing appropriate play space for children.

Multiple Uses of the Play Environment. In a qualitative study of six children from East Harlem, Middlebrooks (1998) was able to enter the “secret places” of child’s play to find out more about their motivations to play. “ Inside their teepees and clubhouses, their tents and playhouses, the children seclude themselves from the rest of the world; there they find room to experiment and permission to rewrite who they can be in a world often closed to them” (p. 47). Middlebrooks identifies five characteristics which differentiate what she terms “worldmaking” from other games such as hide-and-seek or playing house: affiliation, control of the environment, a three-dimensional structure, complexity, and “making it real.” These factors, along with the freedom to explore various role-plays (such as baker, banker, bank robber, and gambler), allow the children to practice necessary social skills and play with the parameters of social

behavior at the same time. One child in the study comments that “you could both (be in) the real thing and see how it really feels” (p.64).

One important element Middlebrooks (1998) discovered in her research was that much of this exploration in play occurs when parents are away. Two boys who become masters at creating low-budget Sunday matinee thrillers are in their element in an empty house (i.e., void of adult interruptions). “Challenged by boredom and routine, he comes up with a new game or a variation on an old one; suffocating, he invents air holes; crunched, he designs a larger setting; having but one location for all the action, he simply names it something else and yells, ‘ACTION!’; and with a cast of only two actors, the boys play multiple roles” (Middlebrooks, 1998, p.123). Her qualitative analysis provides a rich description of the important developmental agenda of children who play:

Hence when Michael says, “As I’ve gotten older, I’ve got better games,” he acknowledges his ability to have ideas and to improve them, to build upon and out of multiple experiences, to experiment and make changes, to expand or retract depending on local factors, conditions, and resources. In the matter of play and games, he gives himself credit as someone who makes things happen.

(Middlebrooks, 1988, p.124)

Conclusion

Given the information about the significance of play in a child’s life, the question of what happens to children in homeless shelters with less than available space for meaningful play becomes more relevant than it may seem at first. This research project proposes to look at the implications of play space availability (or the lack thereof) for children who experience homelessness in a shelter setting. Do resilient children find more creative means to cope with a lack of play space? Do they adapt by working within the prescribed rules and structure of the space available, or do they do so by attempting to

play in spaces which are expected to be more “adult-like?” Homelessness, like many other areas of interest in the social sciences, is comprised of complicated social, political and personal dynamics. Children are often short-changed when taking a wide view of how to solve these problems. Nonetheless, developmentally, childhood is a crucial time. Understanding more about the nature of the forces affecting homeless children may provide insight into possibilities for diminishing the rapid growth of homeless families in this country.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Selection of Sample

The sample for the research project consisted of African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic families with children who were living in four of Nashville's family shelters (Family Life, Salvation Army, Nashville Family Shelter, and St. Patrick's) during the Spring of 1999. A total of 18 families participated, comprising 31 children. Sixty-one percent (n=19) of the sample were Caucasian, thirty-nine percent (n=12) were minority. The children were elementary school aged. The average age of the children was eight years old; the average grade was third. The children's ages ranged from five years old to sixteen years old. Forty-five percent (n=14) of the sample were boys, fifty-five percent (n=17) were girls. Parents who were not at least 18 years old were not included in the sample.

Data obtained for use in this study was part of a larger assessment package being utilized by researchers at the University of Tennessee College of Social Work in Nashville. The Principal Investigator of the larger project approached potential subjects gaining written consent before giving them assessment packages. The Principal Investigator and Catherine Knowles, M.S.S.W., Homeless Education Program Director, assisted in administering the forms. Information about shelter settings and available play space was obtained in interviews with Ms. Knowles and from staff members at each shelter.

Setting

Nashville Family Shelter

Nashville Family Shelter opened in 1988. A converted single family home, the building provides rooms for up to four families and a total of 12 people. The shelter is located in a small neighborhood in an otherwise industrial area. Houses in the neighborhood are modest with small yards. According to the Shelter director, the area is "risky" in terms of children playing outside, so there is no outside play space. If they want, families may walk four blocks to a park or to St. Luke's Community House, both of which have playgrounds.

In 1995 the shelter was renovated specifically to provide additional play space for the children and sleeping quarters for the volunteer staff. An addition was made to the back of the house which includes an open room approximately 24' x 15.' The room is set up for children to play, and a Metro tutoring program is held in the room two nights a week.

According to the shelter director, depending on their age and maturity level, children are sometimes allowed to play in this part of the house by themselves. The room is well lit by two big windows. It contains comfortable furniture including a leather couch, table and chairs, a bookshelf holding approximately fifty books, and other shelves used to store toys. The shelter has a wide array of toys, all of which were donated. The range includes things appropriate for children of different ages. A playhouse constructed out of plywood sits in the middle of the room under the windows. Many children have signed their names and drawn pictures on the outside walls of it. The children currently staying in the shelter put a freestanding plastic kitchen console into the playhouse. The

available playthings do not include clothes for make-believe play; however, the director stated that the kids occasionally drape themselves in blankets and afghans for imaginative play.

Whether or not the children play together varies considerably with the families that are staying at the shelter at the same time. The director commented that the younger elementary-age and kindergarten kids tend to play together frequently. In addition, elementary-age children will sometimes adopt a caretaking role with infants and toddlers. Teenagers tend not to use the room at all. Most of the rules governing the play space regard safety issues such as not climbing on top of the playhouse. The director said that she generally defers discipline to the children's parents.

St. Patrick's Ecumenical Family Shelter

Forty churches in the Metropolitan Nashville area founded St. Patrick's Ecumenical Family Shelter in 1984 to provide emergency shelter for homeless families. Originally housed in a church, the shelter moved to its current location in 1991. The 57,000 square-foot building was constructed specifically as a shelter for homeless families. Each family has a private bedroom approximately 15'x15.' The rooms contain a double bed for parents and bunk beds for children. These rooms surround a central commons area, which is 65'x65.' There are three areas in the commons containing couches and chairs, one of which also has a television. A half wall separates the dining area from the commons, and it contains shelves for books and two bins full of toys that have been donated to the shelter. Most of the books for children (approximately 100) have been donated as well. Shower, bathroom, and laundry facilities are shared. Adult

residents are required to save 75% of their income while living in the shelter. The average length of stay at the shelter is 45 days.

The three areas available to the children are the commons, a play space in the downstairs area, and a classroom for a Metro tutoring program held in the shelter two nights a week. The playroom in the downstairs is accessible by walking through a large storage area containing piles of clothes and toiletries. It is only available to the children if they are supervised by an adult and is intended to be used for organized activities and tutoring. A mural has recently been painted in the playroom of a map of Nashville. A quotation in the mural reads, "You are a child of the universe – no less than the trees and stars, you have a right to be here and whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should. Shoot for the moon, even if you miss, you'll land among the stars." Like Nashville Family Shelter, St. Patrick's does not have costumes or play clothes for the children to use for imaginative play. The classroom is also sectioned off from the storage area downstairs. It contains a chalkboard, games, and folding tables and chairs.

Since the playroom is not easy to access, the children mostly play in the commons area. The rules regarding no running or shouting in this area are loosely followed, usually as a reminder which goes unheeded by the children once a critical mass of them has gathered. One shelter worker commented that the area so closely resembles a gymnasium it is no wonder the children's first impulse is to play games there. During the time the investigator was conducting interviews, the age range of the children in the shelter was from infants to 8-year-olds. The children appeared to enjoy playing with each other and were quick to include newcomers in their games. Shelter staff commented

that this air of collegiality varies depending on the families who are staying there and the age of the children. When there are a majority of teenagers, they tend to stay separated.

Salvation Army Transitional Housing

The Salvation Army Shelter is part of a larger group of programs sponsored by the Salvation Army of Nashville. Officially called Transitional Housing, the shelter provides housing for up to 10 single women and 15 families. Residents may stay for two years; however, the average stay is six months. Residents are required to be working and are involved in GED, job training classes, and counseling sessions. Seventy-five percent of all residents move into permanent housing (compared to the national average of 40 percent).

The Salvation Army building holds a licensed daycare center and crisis nursery called Kare For Kids, which is the only one for homeless children in Nashville. The center can accommodate 37 children during the day and 12 overnight. Homeless participants receive up to 30 days of free childcare. The center consists of three large rooms and separate office space for staff. Two of the rooms are designed for center activities and play, and the third is set up for infant care.

In addition to the daycare center, the shelter has a library/tutoring room, which is used twice a week by a Metro school tutoring program. Teachers have organized the library, and books are color-coded and may be checked out by the children in the shelter or read in the room. Children are taught a simple procedure for removing and replacing books on the shelves. The room also has two computers, games, and various areas with tables and chairs.

Outside the shelter, there is a large playground. Shelter residents who are enrolled in the daycare center use the playground frequently. Children who are not enrolled may use it when it is not being used by the center. An adult must accompany children when using the playground.

Family Life Center

The Family Life Center is part of the Nashville Union Mission Ministry to Women. The building holds two programs: an 85-bed shelter open to any women for emergency shelter called The Family Life Center, and a drug and alcohol recovery center called the Hope Center. Funding streams and resources for the two programs are provided separately. The shelter houses on average 80 to 95 adults, and at the time of the research project, there were 10 to 11 children staying there. Narrow hallways access common areas in the shelter. The bedrooms are upstairs and are simply two large rooms separated by small common areas. Single women sleep in bunk beds in one large room; mothers with children use the second room. Children may play in the common area, but the director commented that many of the single women are impatient with the children's activity.

A second option for the children is a small room in the basement of the building which has been painted with a mural reading "God's children will be mighty in the Lord." The room has two bookshelves, tables, a small pool table, and child's desk, and a few dollhouses. One bookshelf holds 30 to 40 books. Children may not go to the room unaccompanied. The director commented that the room is not used as much as he had hoped it would be.

A playground in back of the Hope Center was donated by a Nashville family who continues to maintain it. It was built specifically for children whose mothers are in recovery. Children staying in the shelter may use the playground if they schedule it with the Hope Center. The director commented that children in the Family Life Center use the playground most frequently during the summer when church youth groups hold activity days for the children.

Instrumentation

Independent Variables

Resilience as indicated by Competence and Self-Esteem. Among the measurements included in the assessment package were the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) and the Social Competence section of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). The Coopersmith Inventory has been used to assess homeless children before (Bassuk, 1987; Konik, 1988; and Davey, under review). It was “designed to measure a child’s attitude toward self in social, academic, family and personal areas of experiences” (Davey, 1994, p.52). The CSEI has been tested for both reliability and criterion-related validity. Spatz and Johnson (1973) obtained coefficients that exceeded .80 (Davey, 1995, p.53). Donaldson (1974) estimated criterion-related validity through regression analysis ($p < .01$), and Kokenes (1974) found that four bipolar dimensions obtained in a factor analysis were highly congruent with the test’s subscales (Davey, 1994, p.53). The form consists of 50 items that measure self-esteem in school children ages 5 to 15. Information obtained from the Coopersmith was used as an interval level measure of self-esteem, one indication of resilience.

The social competence section of the Child Behavior Checklist was chosen as a second indicator of resilience. It has also been used in past research studies on homeless children (Bassuk, et. al., 1986; and Davey, 1994). The section measures “the child’s involvement in sports, organizations, friendships, family and school” (Davey, p.56). The CBCL has been well researched and is known for its outstanding psychometrics. Both reliability and validity have been established (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983; Davey, 1994; Moody, 1985). The total social competence section of the CBCL has reliabilities of .996 and .974 for one-week and three-month test-retest reliabilities respectively (Moody, 1985). Davey (1994) summarizes the validity of the CBCL:

The content validity was supported by the independent finding that 116 out of 118 behavior problems and all of the social competence items were significantly ($p < .01$) associated with clinical status (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983). Correlations with other behavior rating scales (Conners Parent Questionnaire, $r = .91$) provide evidence of construct validity (Moody, 1985). Criterion-related validity was established by the significant difference ($p < .001$) in all behavior problem scores of randomly selected children who were referred for mental health services and those who were not referred (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983).

(Davey, p. 57-58)

Play Space. A qualitative interview was held with shelter workers regarding the availability of play space within the shelters. Questions included whether or not there is space specifically allotted for children’s play, the size of the space, the location, what kinds of materials are available, and how developmentally appropriate the materials are. The form used to guide these interviews is included in Appendix A. Shelters were then categorized as having low or high play space availability based on the number of questions indicating the presence or absence of play space.

Dependent Variable

Behavior Problems. The Shortform Assessment for Children (SAC), a modification of Achenbach's CBCL, was developed by Glisson and Hemmelgarn. The measure has recently been tested with 116 cases with initial estimates of reliability at .89/.96 (teachers internalizing/externalizing and .90/.94 (parents internalizing/externalizing) (Hemmelgarn, 1998). Earlier versions of the SAC which were used with a sample of 1,114 children had internal reliabilities of .89/.95 and .90/.93 respectively. The SAC provides a ratio level variable measure of behavior problems, in terms of both internalizing and externalizing behavior. Parents were asked to answer 48 psychosocial functioning items on a single-page instrument. Catherine Knowles, Homeless Education Program Director, completed the SAC instrument on each of the children whose families participated in the study.

Data Analysis: Predicted Outcomes

As with all children, adaptive behaviors in homeless children encompass a wide range of responses. In developing research questions regarding this unique population, consideration must be given to the disparate ways in which children cope with the experience. Both aggressiveness and withdrawal mark the extremes of these reactions (Bassuk, 1985; Bassuk & Gallagher, 1990; Gerwartzman and Fodor, 1987; Grant, 1990; Klein, 1990; Molnar, 1988; Nieman, 1988; Rafferty and Shinn, 1991; Rosenmen and Stein, 1990). As Bassuk and Gallagher (1990) note, aggressiveness may serve differing functions:

Increased aggressiveness may be a way for homeless children to express anger at their circumstances and at their parents for being unable to protect them. At the same time, unruly, provocative and aggressive behaviors are a 'cry for help,' a way to get more attention from adults who are depressed and anxious, and preoccupied with issues of survival...defying adults may also help them gain acceptance from peers (p. 27).

Molnar (1988) suggests that these behaviors be viewed as strengths. Behaviors which have traditionally been seen as "inappropriate" may mask adaptability: "For example, the physical activity and running around that is frequently characterized as hyperactive may be quite an appropriate antidote to a small, cramped and crowded room" (p. 80).

Nieman (1988) writes that "the relationship between physical environments characterized by crowding and the behavioral problems in children is particularly relevant to the consideration of resiliency in homeless children" (p.23). As discussed earlier, this relationship takes on double meaning in the sense that acting out behavior may either signify resilience in the face of adverse living conditions, or, conversely, it may imply a lack of coping strategies appropriate to the experience of living in a shelter. A research design that analyses the relationship between resilience and behavior must take into account the different implications resulting from either theoretical orientation. From one perspective, it might be asserted that children demonstrate resilience by acting out more frequently and more aggressively in reaction to the shelter setting. For the purpose of reference, this theory will be referred to as the Dynamic Resilience Theory. From the opposing perspective, children whose behavior is aggressive demonstrate a lack of resilience as it has been described more commonly – i.e., flexibility, ease of temperament, likability. In this case resilient children would accommodate themselves to

the environment rather than becoming aggressive. This theory will be referred to as the Adaptive Resilience Theory.

For each of the theories, the research project will examine the interaction effect of play space as a third variable affecting the relationship between the independent variable resilience and the dependent variable behavior problems. According to the Dynamic Resilience Theory, in shelters with available play space, no significant difference in behavior is anticipated between more resilient children and those with less resilience. In shelters lacking available play space, it is anticipated that more resilient children will demonstrate more externalized behavior than those with less resilience. According to the Adaptive Resilience Theory, more resilient children will be less at risk for behavior problems than less resilient children regardless of the Availability of play space. In both groups, it is anticipated that available play space will result in less risk of behavior problems.

Because of the sample size ($n=31$), Analysis of Variance was chosen as the most appropriate means by which to test whether the difference in behavior means between resilience and play space was statistically significant. The analysis design involves a two factor ANOVA examining main and interaction effects of resilience (more vs. less, dichotomized at median of scale distribution) and play space (available vs. inavailable). An interaction effect would support the hypothesis of the Dynamic Resilience Theory which states that in shelters with available play space, no difference in risk of behavior problems between more resilient children and those with less resilience is anticipated. In shelters with inavailable play space, it is anticipated that more resilient children will

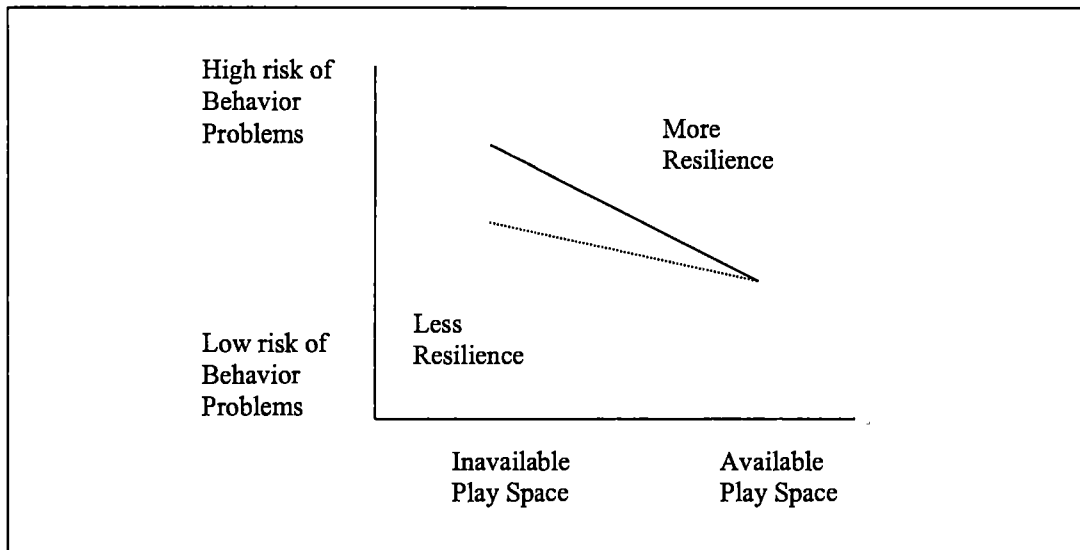


Figure 2. Dynamic Resilience Theory Outcomes

demonstrate more externalized behavior than those with less resilience. This hypothesis corresponds to a mean profile similar to Figure 2.

The Adaptive Resilience Theory would be supported by results which show a main effect of resilience. More resilient children will be less at risk of behavior problems than less resilient children regardless of the Availability of play space. In both groups, it is anticipated that shelters with available play space will result in less risk of behavior problems. No interaction between resilience and play space is hypothesized for this model. The Adaptive Resilience Theory results in a mean profile similar to Figure 3.

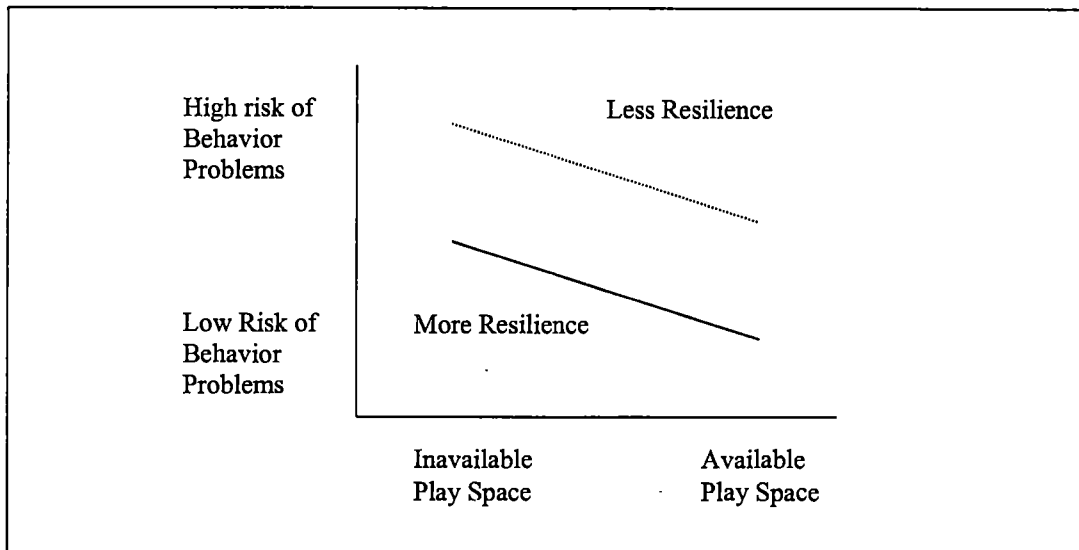


Figure 3. Adaptive Resilience Theory Outcomes

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Instrumentation

Independent Variables

Self-Esteem. The Total Self Score of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (SEI) was used for the self-esteem component of the resilience variable. Internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha) for the Coopersmith was .54, suggesting that the measure was not effective for this population of homeless children. Suggested reasons for this are covered in the discussion in Chapter Five. The median score of the group was 70. High scores corresponded to high self-esteem. A nominal variable was created labeling all scores 70 or above as "high" and those below 70 as "low."

Social Competence. The Competence section of the Child Behavior Checklist was used for the social competence component of the resilience variable. Each child's scores were graphed for total activities, total social, and total school scores, and a *t* value was identified using the CBCL score sheet. Children who scored either borderline or at risk were coded as "low" competence, and those within the normal range were coded as "high" competence.

Resilience. Dichotomized Self-esteem and Competence variables were combined to form a dichotomous Resilience variable as follows. Children with high scores in both self-esteem and competence were coded as "high" resilience (more resilience). Children with "low" scores in either self-esteem or competence or both were coded as "low" resilience (less resilience).

Table 4.1. Availability of Play Space in Shelters

Shelter	Common Area (Adult/Child mix)?	Playroom for Children in Shelter?	Children have access to playroom?	Outside Playground Available?	Toys are available?	Children's books?	Children Play together?	High vs Low Play space?
Salvation Army	Y	Y	L	L	Y	Y	Y	High
Nashville Family Shelter	Y	Y	Y	L	Y	Y	Y	High
St. Patrick's	Y	L	L	L	L	Y	Y	Low
Family Life	Y	L	L	L	L	L	Y	Low

Y = YES
L = LIMITED

Taxonomy of Shelter Play Space Interviews with shelter staff as well as observations made in visits to the shelters allowed for the development of a taxonomy of play space availability. The shelter type variable was coded as either “low” (lacking available play space) or “high” (available play space) based on results listed in table 4.1.

Dependent Variable

Behavior Problems. A computerized scoring program of the Shortform Assessment for Children was used to derive raw scores and *t* values for the internal, external, and overall subscales of the SAC. Raw scores were used in the Analysis of Variance run on each of these dimensions described in the Data Analysis section of this

chapter. For all three subscales, children with SAC t scores of 60 and above were considered at risk of behavior problems and children with t scores of 59 or lower were considered within the normal range (low risk of behavior problems). Raw scores were used in the Analysis of Variance for each of these dimensions.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Variance was used to find out if there were any significant differences between resilience and play space subgroups on background variables such as age, gender, race, and grade. Pre-existing differences would confound the examination of resilience and play space main and interaction effects. Analysis of Variance were then run using internal, external, and overall SAC scores as the Dependent Variable. Shelter type and Resilience were used as Independent Variables. Table 4.3 summarizes the findings.

There were no significant differences between play space or resilience on age, gender, grade, or race. The fact that these variables were unrelated to the Independent Variables indicated that it was not necessary to control for possible confounding effects of these variables in the Analysis of Variance for the principal Dependent Variables.

For the internalizing subscale, a significant interaction ($F_{1,27} = 13.2, p < .000$) was found between resilience and Availability of play space (Figure 4). A priori t-tests were used to test for significant differences in means between hi-low groups of resilience and play space. This was done in order to clarify the interaction effects. In shelters lacking available play space, the difference in mean scores for internalized behavior between the two groups was not significant ($p = .43$, tested by Independent Samples t-test). In shelters with available play space, more resilient children internalized significantly

Table 4.2 Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA Results for Background and SAC Variables

Background Variable	Resilience:	Lo Play Space				High Play Space				Play Space(P)		Resilience(R)		PxR	
		Less		More		Less		More		F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD						
Age	8	2.4	7	3.2	8	3	10	3.3	1.54	0.23	0.087	0.77	0.501	0.49	
Gender (% female)	0.45	0.5	0.67	0.6	0.56	0.5	0.63	0.52	0.019	0.89	0.433	0.52	0.111	0.74	
Grade	2	2.2	2	2.7	3	3.4	3	3.56	2.04	0.17	0.001	0.97	0.013	0.91	
Race (% minority)	0.27	0.2	0.33	0.3	0.33	0.2	0.63	0.18	0.755	0.39	0.755	0.39	0.33	0.57	
SAC Variable	Resilience:	Lo Play Space				High Play Space				Play Space(P)		Resilience(R)		PxR	
		Less		More		Less		More		F	Sig.	F	Sig.	F	Sig.
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD						
Internal	48	6.9	52	7.6	58	8.9	41	3.4	0.06	0.8	5.4	0.03	13.2	0	
External	54	6.8	50	12	63	15	45	6.2	0.31	0.58	6.5	0.02	2.8	0.11	
Overall	54	3.1	50	5.9	63	3.4	45	3.6	0.06	8.12	7.1	0.01	10.4	0	

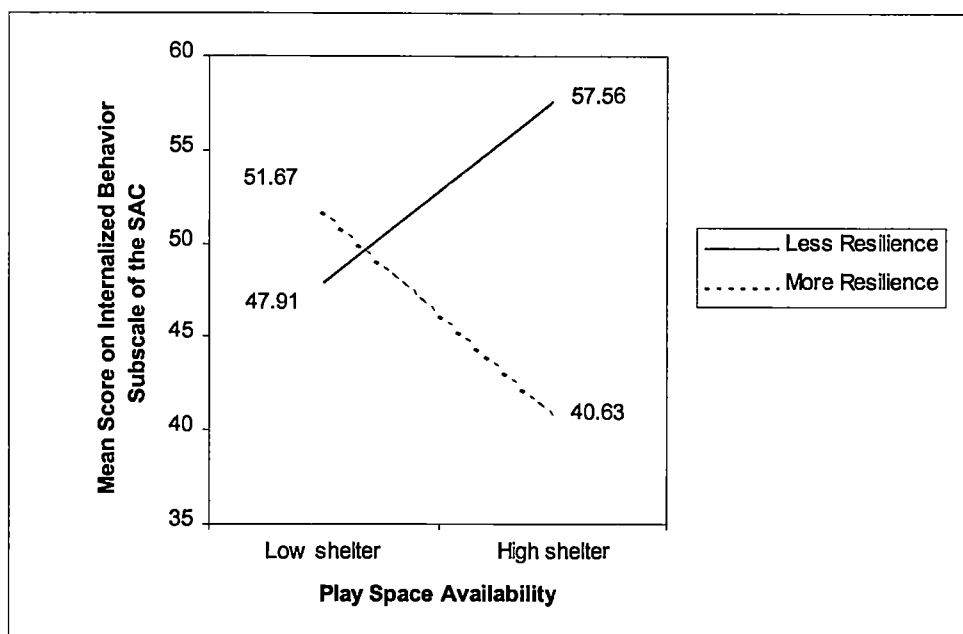


Figure 4. Internal Behavior as Measured by the SAC: The Interaction Between Resilience and Availability of Play Space

less than children with less resilience ($p=.000$). In shelters with more available play space, children with less resilience internalized behavior significantly more than they did in shelters lacking available play space ($p=.01$).

For the externalizing subscale (Figure 5); the resilience effect was significant ($F_{1,27}=6.5, p<.02$); however, neither the type of shelter nor the interaction between shelter type and resilience were. In shelters with more available play space, children with less resilience externalized behavior significantly more than children with more resilience did ($p=.008$, tested by Independent Samples t-tests). In low shelters, the difference between the means of the two groups was not significant ($p=.49$). The mean score for children with less resilience indicates that they are more at risk for behavior problems in shelters with more available play space. While the mean profiles for the externalizing

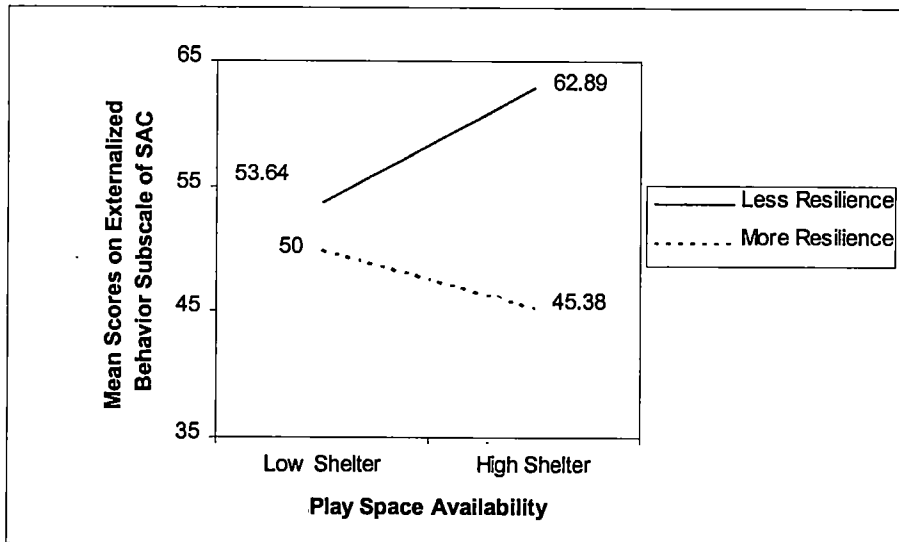


Figure 5. External Behavior as Measured by the SAC.

subscale are similar to those obtained for the internalizing subscale, the interaction was not significant.

As Figure 6 indicates, ANOVA results and mean profiles for the overall subscale were similar to those obtained with the internalizing subscale, showing a significant interaction effect between resilience and play space availability ($F_{1,27}=10.4, p<.000$). In shelters lacking available play space, the mean scores between the two groups of children were not significantly different ($p=.67$). In shelters with more available play space, the mean score for children with more resilience decreased significantly ($p=.02$). The mean score for children with less resilience increased to the at-risk level in shelters with more available play space, and the rise was significant ($p=.03$).

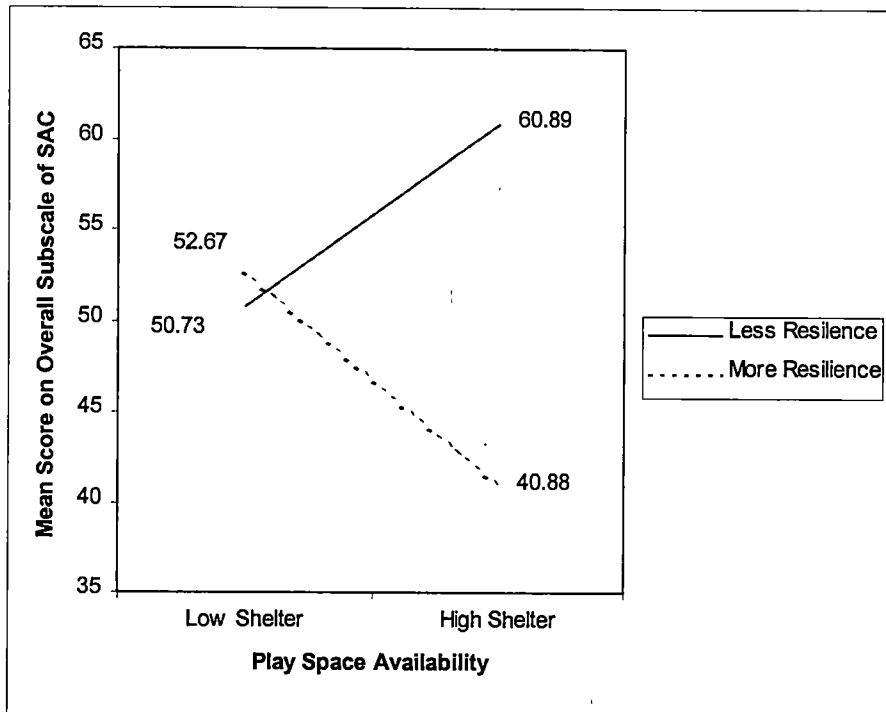


Figure 6. Overall Behavior as Measured by the SAC: The Interaction Between Resilience and Availability of Play Space

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion and Implications

Discussion

Results of the ANOVAs for internal, external, and overall subscales of the SAC, provide support for some of the original hypotheses. In review, the underlying assertion from the Adaptive Resilience theoretical perspective was that more resilient children would have adapted to their environment. They would have been more flexible and less confrontational. From this point of view the investigator anticipated the following findings:

- More resilient children would be less at risk of behavior problems than less resilient children regardless of the Availability of play space.
- High quality play space would result in less risk of behavior problems for both children with more and less resilience.
- A main effect of resilience was anticipated.

The underlying assertion from the Dynamic Resilience Theory was that more resilient children would assert their needs in order to gain the experiences they need for healthy development. At times the assertive behavior might have included acting out, or what was perceived to be acting out. From this point of view, the investigator anticipated the following findings:

- More resilience would be reflected in more externalized behavior under circumstances lacking available play space.
- All children would demonstrate less risk for behavior problems in shelters with available play space.
- There would be no difference in behavior between more or less resilient children with in shelters with available play space.
- An interaction effect was anticipated.

The findings that correspond to the initial hypotheses may be summarized as follows:

Corresponding to the Adaptive Resilience Theory

- On all SAC results, more resilient children were less at risk for behavior problems in either shelter setting.
- More resilient children demonstrated less risk for behavior problems than less resilient children in shelter settings with available play space.

Corresponding to the Dynamic Resilience Theory

- More resilient children demonstrated less risk for behavior problems in shelters with available play space than they did in those lacking available play space.
- The Internal and Overall subscale ANOVAs suggested an interaction effect.

Some findings did not correspond. While it was hypothesized from the Dynamic Resilience Theory that there would be no difference in behavior between the groups of children in shelters with available play space, the results indicated a significant difference. Less resilient children were more at-risk for behavior problems in shelters with available play space, while more resilient children were less at risk of behavior problems in these settings. It was also anticipated that both groups of children would be less at risk of behavior problems in shelters with available play space. Finally, the theory suggested that more resilient children would externalize behavior more in shelters lacking available play space. The results indicate that they instead internalize as much as less resilient children do. A striking finding which was not hypothesized was that less resilient children internalize their behavior significantly more in shelters with available play space.

According to these findings, the Adaptive Resilience Theory would appear to be more accurate a reflection of resilience in homeless children. More resilient children adapt to their environment with more flexibility of behavior. Greater opportunity for play only enhances their inclinations for low risk behavior. While the Adaptive Resilience

Theory suggested that more play space would result in low risk behavior for both groups, the results indicate that less resilient children are more at risk in shelters with more play space. One explanation for this may be that for the purposes of the study, low resilience was coded not only for children with weak scores in both self-esteem and competence, but also for children with weaker scores in one or the other of the two. Sixty-four percent of the sample was coded as less resilient (n=20). A larger sample of children may have allowed for a better representation of children in each category. Other concerns about the measurements and their administration bear consideration.

Limitations of the Study

Sampling Limitations

One of the greatest challenges to getting significant quantitative results was the difficulty in amassing enough subjects, and, subsequently having enough assessment material to analyze. The fact that the study involved three separate assessment measures made it difficult to get complete sets on each child. Another reason for the inconsistency in the amount of data collected was the author's reliance on secondary data. The success of the findings relied on consistent, thorough and organized collection and management of data. Given the type of question being asked by the author, the project may have been more successful using data acquired first-hand.

Other limitations encountered included the fact that many families entering the shelter had children who were under five years old. This limited the total number of families interviewed. In addition, the number of available children from each shelter varied, so a consistent number was not achieved between the three shelters (i.e., data was

gathered from 9 children at Nashville Family Shelter, nine children at St. Patrick's, eight children at Salvation Army, and five at Family Life).

Methodological Limitations

Methodological limitations included the conditions under which the assessment measures were administered. Since children were often reticent to be interviewed alone, they were sometimes given the Coppersmith in the same room with their parents and other families. Therefore, parents were often involved in the interview, and, at times, affected the answers the children gave. For example, it was difficult for children to answer "Like Me" to the question "I usually feel as if my parents are pushing me" if the parent was sitting nearby. In addition, for the younger children, statements on the Coopersmith that were posed as negative were confusing. For example, "I can't be depended on" was a statement generally requiring elaboration in order for children younger than seven to understand. Under these conditions, there were many distractions that may have impacted the results.

In addition, families were given the assessment package at different points in time relative to their arrival in the shelter. Some families provided information the day they arrived at the shelter. This would affect their responses for obvious reasons relative to the stress of having so recently entered the shelter. They also may have not had time to use the space in the shelter for play. Other families had been living in the shelter for weeks or months. Their responses may have been less a reaction to an immediate crisis within the family. Results may have been more consistent if each of the families were given the package a predetermined number of days after having arrived at the shelter.

A third consideration regards response bias. The SAC was completed by either a parent or by the director of the Homeless Tutoring Program. The director's responses may have been more objective than the parental responses. In terms of the parents' responses to the CBCL, the investigator noticed that one parent scored her child as being "above average" for 23 of 26 questions. On the other hand, another parent scored either "don't know" or "below Average" for 12 of 13 questions. If the SAC were completed by both the parent and the director, scores could be compared.

Implications

Implications for Theory and Research

The results are an unusual hybrid of the theories initially proposed. As stated, they most generally conform to the idea that resilience is best reflected in a child's ability to adapt to his or her environment. The behavior of more resilient children improved in shelters with more play space. In shelters lacking available play space, their behavior was well below the at-risk range. The risk of behavior problems in less resilient children seemed to worsen in shelters with more play space. According to the Adaptive Resilience theory this could be interpreted as a lack of ability to adapt – i.e., more choices, more stimulation, more accountability caused more behavior problems. Accordingly, resilience was predicted as having a main effect, and this appears to have born out in the external subscale of the SAC. Resilience made a significant difference in the behavior of children with more vs. less resilience in shelters with available play space. Temperamental characteristics that are lacking in less resilient children may be present in more resilient children, and they may enable them to adapt to more stimulating situations

– situations that, in the long run, allow them to develop important cognitive and social skills more effectively.

On the other hand, for both the Internal and Overall subscale, the data indicated an interaction effect. In fact, the External subscale could also be interpreted as being a weak interaction effect. This was initially predicted for the Dynamic Resilience theory, the main premise of which was that an interaction between environmental, temperamental, and social variables produces resilience. In its broadest terms, the theory predicted a change in the behavior of children (with more and less resilience) based on the effect of the environment (play space). The results of the study indicated that, to a certain degree, this is also the case. The behavior of children (with both more and less resilience) was significantly different in different kinds of play space.

What was made clear, however, was that changes in the unique behavior patterns of children with more or less resilience would need to be studied further in order to flesh out the theory. This might best be accomplished by studying the *same* child in transition from shelters with available play space to those with less (or vice versa). In other words, a confounding variable not accounted for in this study was the type of situation each child came from when entering the shelter where he or she was interviewed. Some children may have come from environments with less play space (even if they were in shelters that were considered by this study to be “low”). Other children may have come from highly stimulating environments, making even the “high” shelters in this study seem less available. Placing the child’s behavior in a context relative to his or her previous living situation is a crucial step in fully understanding the implications of the Dynamic Resilience theory.

Not only might the quality of the previous environment be a confounding variable, but also so might the social setting from which the child came. Some children may have been excluded from play with other children as a result of having traveled with their families prior to entering the shelter. Others may have recently left neighborhoods where they had a group of friends. Constant moving may mark the educational history of some children, or they may have left the only school they ever attended. Information of this kind would be a useful addition in assessing the reactions of the children to the shelter settings, both in terms of the physical and social environment. The interaction effect suggested that the environment had a significant effect on the children's behavior (high and low resilient). However, the study did not create a meaningful "historical" context for each child's behavior in which to comprehensively understand the kinds of modifications he or she may have been making in the shelter.

Third, the shelter environment itself (in which the play space was "nested") may have been a confounding variable. The effects of the overall environment may have been more significant than those of the play space. A review of the shelters indicates, however, that those with less accessible, less provisioned, and more chaotic play spaces were, themselves, more chaotic and less amenable to family life. Broadly, the interaction effect found in the results indicates the significant effect the environment has on children's behavior. A more complex model for examining the environment (perhaps including dimensions other than play space such as family privacy, dining area, amount of time families use particular areas of the shelter, etc.) would allow for a better understanding of what specific qualities in the shelter environment are affecting children's behaviors and in what ways.

At this point it should be clear that resilience is not a concept amenable to short term study (or for the faint of heart). Here, Werner's (1984,1982) longitudinal study is particularly relevant to the discussion. Her forty-plus years of field research identified *characteristics* of resilient children. Upon closer inspection, however, they are primarily characteristics that serve the child best in an *environmental* context. To review, her findings include:

- Active problem-solving skills in emotionally charged situations
- A constructive perception of all experiences
- The ability to attract the attention of others
- Confidence in a positive, meaningful outlook on life

Werner successfully distilled individual qualities that are assets to social development, regardless of the context – be it familial, community, school, or shelter setting. As mentioned earlier, her work marked a pivotal point in the research on resilience, and the breadth of her studies of the same subjects surpassed most. A hybrid of both the Adaptive Resilience theory and the Dynamic Resilience theory is best exemplified by her findings.

The results of the present research are a snapshot of these longstanding attempts to “nail down” resilience. The data indicated that resilient children appear to be less at risk for behavior problems in either play spaces. However, equally strong were results indicating that the types of environments children are in appear to have a significant effect on their risk for behavior problems. This suggests that the answer to the question of resilience is about as easily pursued as that of nature vs. nurture. Like a fractal, questions raised at the theoretical level are only microscopic pictures of themselves at the operational level.

The person-in-environment perspective has relevance to this dilemma. By accepting the 'nested nature' of human development as inherent to the "life cycle" of an open system, it is possible to also accept the fact that both internal temperamental characteristics and the quality of the environment one is living in can be equally of primary importance in development. Greene (1991) wrote, "the concept of adaptiveness speaks to a goodness-of-fit between the individual and his or her environment and vice versa. From a social work standpoint, adaptiveness is transactional in nature and involves the reciprocal influence of the environment and the individual – with both the individual and his or her environment making mutual demands on and influencing the other" (p.26). Acceptance of resilience as a concept embedded in the duality of person-in-environment suggests research that, rather than struggling to resolve the two, examines the "goodness of fit" between the two.

Implications for Practice

At the practical level, the recognition that a) an adaptive temperament makes a difference, and b) environment does, too, has important implications for both more resilient children and those who are not. The person-in-environment perspective requires an analysis of the implications at both a micro/clinical and a macro/policy level.

Micro Implications. Clearly, the availability of play space allows more resilient children to thrive. They take advantage of the alternatives, the stimulation, and the challenges posed by more opportunity. What is not so obvious is that availability of play space may be at least as crucial for less resilient children. If, as the results indicate, their behavior deteriorates in places with available play space, they clearly need more practice learning to adapt to such environments. As was reflected in the kinds of questions used

to assess the shelter spaces, the availability of more play space reflects more of the complexities of “real world” environments. Less resilient children need to learn important developmental skills in order to navigate life’s complexities. They may even need directed attention as to how to do so. Opportunities for both social and cognitive development are necessary parts of childhood. An uncomfortable but intuitive reaction to the results, which indicated that less resilient children react negatively to more available play space, is that they must, then, need limited stimulation. However, a possible underlying reality is that they may have a deficit of significantly important skills that would allow them to better navigate situations which, in the long run, are in their best interest.

Macro Implications. At the policy level, decisions must be made about the organizational context of homeless shelters that provides children with experiences with proactive, self-determined, participatory adult role models. A large body of literature supports a recurring issue concerning the way in which the organization of shelters may promote “learned helplessness” in homeless adults. Shinn, et. al. (1990) found that shelters infringed on the dignity of residents “by lack of privacy, filth, disrepair, bolted-down furniture, admonishing posters, unnecessary regimentation, and other suggestions that residents are less than valued members of society” (p.177). Burn (1992) found a significant relationship between perceived loss of control and helplessness in the homeless individuals he studied: “Effectively helping the homeless may involve carefully designing the organizations and environments intended to help them, since shelters and service organizations with rigid rules and little privacy may increase helplessness and passivity” (p.1170). Friedman (1994) suggested that shelters lacking a mechanism for the

development of informal social supports may be promoting episodic or chronic homelessness. Dordick (1996) argued that “shelters produce an enclosed social world whose rules and values come to constitute the worldviews of those who live there” (p.376).

Macro solutions to these problems are not opaque. As early as 1988, Timmer (1988) suggested that homelessness has been conveniently relegated to the “deviant” (or unworthy) realm of society. Homeless persons were then considered not deserving of the resources they would need to find housing again. Although the reality is that homelessness has specific political and economic sources, many shelters operate without a recognition of homelessness as a political issue. In this context, Timmer suggests that solutions lie in the empowerment of the homeless themselves:

The beginnings of this empowerment means having the homeless themselves “take back” the daily organization, operation, and routine of the shelter. Homeless persons and families should cook for themselves, provide their own security, care for their own and others’ children, and control their own money and bank accounts. Indeed, to the extent possible, the homeless need to establish and run their own shelters (p.167).

Kiesler (1991) emphasised that public policy issues regarding the homeless should be focused on changes occurring cross-generationally. His work cited recent studies confirming that “the poverty of parents has become a dominant predictor of life outcomes for children” (p.1250). The findings in the present study suggest that it is essential for homeless children to be “nested” in shelters in which their parents are taking an active role in the success of the life of the family. The intergenerational nature of homelessness points to the fact that developmental milestones early in life have far-

reaching consequences. It is important that shelters be organized in such a way as to facilitate the full potential of the children living in them. Doing so involves a recognition of the impact of the person-in-environment perspective on the healthy development of children.

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Appendix
Shelter Interview Questions

Is there one place inside the shelter where children primarily play?
If so, how big is the space?
If no, where do children play?
If there is a play space, do children play in other areas as well? Where?
Does the shelter use a playground or have outside play space?
What kinds of playground equipment are there?
Is the playground supervised? By whom?
What kind of lighting is in the space inside?
How many windows are in the space?
What kind of furniture? (Number of chairs, tables, and couches)
Does the shelter own toys for the children to play with? How many?
If so, are they easily accessed by the children?
Where did the toys come from?
Are they age-appropriate for the range of children in the shelter?
Are there costumes/play clothes for the children to play with?
Are there materials for "home" play (i.e. stove, refrigerator, and plastic lawn mowers)?
Are there organized games which are age appropriate?
Are there building materials (Legos, Lincoln logs, k-nex, blocks)?
Are there rules about playing in the shelter? (Get a list)
How often do children from different families play together?
Is there anyone who supervises children when they play?

A1. Shelter Interview Questions

VITA

Prior to attending the University of Tennessee College of Social Work in Nashville, Helen Miller received a Masters of Science in Education from Western Maryland College. Her Bachelor of Arts degree is from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut where she completed an undergraduate thesis on women's health issues. In 1994, Helen received a grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities to study Medieval Irish literature at Harvard University.

Ms. Miller is currently a Legislative Research Analyst in the office of the Comptroller. Her internship in the first year at the University of Tennessee was in a mental hospital for prison inmates. Prior to entering the College of Social Work, Helen was an elementary teacher at the University School of Nashville. During that time, she chaired a curriculum development committee, and the group completed a K-4 curriculum guide for social studies. As well she taught and integrated students with special needs into a regular second grade class.

Ms. Miller's other teaching experiences were with multiple handicapped deaf students, mainstreamed deaf and hard of hearing students, and seriously emotionally disturbed students. As a member of the Advisory Board of the Global Education Center in Nashville, Helen has led inservice training sessions on topics including conflict resolution, group dynamics, Irish mythology, and stress reduction.

Ms. Miller's interests include involvement in a variety of music projects, both in performance and composition, intercostal and ocean sailing, and a broad interest in the development of dialogue between cultures as expressed in the arts, learning, and life experience.