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**Promoting resilience in street connected young people in Guatemala: the role of psychological and educational protective factors**

**Abstract**

**Aims:** Street connected young people (SCYP) are at risk of encountering negative life experiences, such as abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation. Nonetheless, some demonstrate remarkable resilience. This study therefore aimed to explore protective factors that promote resilience in SCYP in Guatemala City. **Methods:** Using ethnographic interviews and image elicitation eight young people and four adult educational outreach project coordinators participated within this study. **Results:** Three key protective factors emerged that help develop resilience; *Empowerment*, as educational projects support SCYP and provide opportunities; *Belongingness*, encapsulated creating positive relationships, a sense of affinity and positive family environments; and *Motivation* which highlighted the importance of the young peoples' willpower, engagement with learning and help-seeking behaviour. **Conclusions:** Educational projects working with SCYP can help to develop resilience by empowering them for change, providing a sense of belonging, whilst also acknowledging their individual motivation for change.

**Key words:** Street Connectedness; Risk; Resilience; Protective factors; Belonging; Empowerment, Motivation.

## **Promoting resilience in street connected young people in Guatemala: the role of psychological and educational protective factors**

### ***Street connectedness***

Street connected young people (SCYP) are a heterogeneous group who experience great variability of risks and life experiences (McAdam-Crisp, Aptekar and Kironyo, 2005). SCYP may have been abandoned by their families, may live in homeless families, or may work on the street to support themselves and their family (Pluck, 2014). They are often found in larger urban settings with profound disparity between rich and poor and little social support (Pluck, 2014). We are unsure about how many SCYP there are worldwide. Figures range widely, but they are nonetheless deemed high (Thomas de Benitez, 2011). SCYP are at increased risk of encountering negative life experiences, (i.e abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation) (McAdam-Crisp, et al., 2005). In Guatemala, where the current study is based, unemployment, crime, lack of basic services and limited educational possibilities are regular challenges for these young people.

Understandably it is conventional to stress the negative aspects of street connectedness amongst Guatemala's urban young people. Nonetheless some show remarkable adaptability in the face of adversity. This is essentially resilience, and many researchers have explored why some individuals experiencing risk can achieve positive outcomes (Masten, 2001). Various studies have demonstrated that SCYP, despite adversity, demonstrate significant resilience (Pluck, 2014).

### ***Resilience***

Resilience is defined as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaption within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar Cicchetti and Becker, 2000; 543). Resilience research aims to identify protective factors that can moderate risk and lead to positive adaptation (Masten, 2001). For resilience to be demonstrated, an individual has to experience

significant risk or adversity, and display better than expected outcomes on a specific domain (Masten and Powell, 2003). Resilience is not a trait but a process of how risk is moderated by protective factors (Masten, 2014). Protective factors may be located within the individual, but also importantly operate across ecological domains i.e. family, school and community (Ungar, 2015).

The socio-ecological approach to resilience acknowledges factors promoting the development of wellbeing, in the presence of risk, including person-environment interactions (Ungar, 2011). The relationships individual form with the environment are important predictors of adaptation to adversity (Ungar, Ghazinour and Richter 2013). No single factor is uniquely important in overcoming risk, and resilience cannot be predicted by a single variable (Rutter, 2006). The combination and interaction of multiple factors across ecological levels of development is important. Ungar et al. (2013) discusses the principle of *equifinality* (Cicchetti and Rogosch, 1996), referring to multiple protective factors supporting the resilience process. Resilience is not a universal concept, and individuals may show remarkable resilience in one particular outcome domain but struggle in another (Stevenson, Oldfield and Ortiz, 2019).

### ***Protective factors***

Many studies investigating resilience show a consistent pattern of protective factors that aid positive adaption for children and young people exposed to risk (Masten, 2006, Masten, 2014). This ‘short list’ of factors (Masten, 2001) have been corroborated using heterogeneous designs, samples and outcomes (Wright and Masten 2005). The factors include influences operating across individual, family and wider community levels, as well as interactions between these levels.

Individual level protective factors include executive functioning skills e.g. inhibitory control and cognitive flexibility. These have been found to be particularly important for high-

risk children, (Blair and Raver 2012). Mastery motivation, (motivation to succeed) and self-efficacy (belief in competence to succeed) are also considered key factors promoting resilience (Masten, 2014). Religious faith, the belief that life has meaning, and the spiritual and practical support gained from religious groups, are particularly significant in protecting against adversity (Crawford et al. 2006). Brewer-Smyth and Koenig (2014) found that faith groups provide social support and emotional release, for those who have experienced significant trauma, leading to positive health related outcomes.

Most resilience studies identify attachments as accounting for positive outcomes under risk situations (Masten, 2014). Relationships within families are particularly important as social, cultural norms and expectations are modeled by parents, who control risk by reducing exposure to adversity (Masten, 2014). Effective parenting (comprising support, monitoring and involvement) is especially salient in promoting competence in children from higher risk backgrounds (Domina, 2005). Arguably, whilst salient risks often emerge within family environments, a single good parent/caregiver relationship can promote resilience (Alink et al. 2009). Peer relationships can also be protective, as children with more peer acceptance were less affected by family adversity compared with poorer friendships (Criss et al. 2002).

Schools also play a prominent role in promoting positive development for at-risk young people. They provide opportunities to build meaningful relationships with appropriate adults. Teachers who become role models promote motivation to achieve and increase confidence (Masten, 2014). Positive, competent adult role models provide support for the most disadvantaged young people (Pianta, 2006). Positive school relationships foster a sense of belonging or connectedness; an established protective factor, (Oldfield, Stevenson, Ortiz and Haley, 2018). Specifically in Guatemala Winton, (2005) has reported that belonging to a local organization that unites community members helped participants feel ‘part’ of their

community.

### ***Justification for the study***

SCYP are at particular risk of various negative outcomes (McAdam's et al. 2005), although studies have found that other vulnerable groups, including SCYP, can display resilience (Masten, 2014). However, there is a lack of psychological research investigating the development of resilience in SCYP (Pluck, 2014), and the present study aimed to address this issue. The young peoples' unique perspectives were heard alongside the views from the educational outreach projects with whom they work. The study, framed within an ecological perspective, acknowledged individual, family and wider community protective factors that promote resilience. The study explored whether protective factors already identified in the literature were relevant for SCYP, and, if so, how they helped SCYP overcome risk and experience positive outcomes.

An ecological perspective is necessary as there are many pathways to resilience, with research showing coping mechanisms and support networks being evident across different ecological levels (Ungar et al. 2013). The present study therefore explored how SCYP in Guatemala City adapt positively in the face of adversity. Using a qualitative approach, we sought to understand SCYPs' experiences in their own life-worlds. However, it was also salient to acknowledge if any general guiding principles apply to the SCYP population globally.

### ***Context***

Guatemala has a population of around 16,673,000, with 60% assumed to be living in poverty (Hernandez, Hong, Frias-Martinez, Whitby and Frias-Martinez, 2017). Guatemala City has around 2.74 million people living in the metro area (World Population Review, 2017). A disadvantaged area of the City, in Zone 4, is known as *The Terminal*, an extensive space with a bus depot, wholesale and retail markets, and rubbish dump. *The Terminal* is also

a living space for some families living in small housing blocks around the market space.

Many young people who work within *The Terminal*, selling and recycling waste. These make up some of the twenty-six percent of Guatemalan children in the labour market (UNICEF, 2016). Many are unsupervised by adults, do not attend formal school and are at significant risk of abuse, exploitation and neglect. Here we refer to this group as street connected young people (SCYP).

Our study was carried out across three locations in Guatemala City over a 1-month period. The first location was *The Terminal*. The other two sites were provided by two outreach projects that work with vulnerable young people within the Terminal, providing educational support. One is located in a residential house, the other is located within a local church building. These volunteer-run charity projects provide educational and social support for young people who are considered to be at risk and who live and work in and around The Terminal. They offer a range of support to families, from help with registering children into publicly funded schools to the more everyday provision of resources (books, stationary) which are usually beyond the budget of families and not provided by public schools. These projects provide additional educational support in areas such as reading and writing. Their classes supplement opportunities for children whose learning and behavioural needs are not being met in the public-school system. In some cases, where children are not attending school at all, these classes may constitute their only access to numeracy and literacy education, and life skills such as cooking. These voluntary projects offer a safe, flexible and appropriate space to do homework and have access to resources, such as computers. These projects support approximately 200 young people and their families across their programmes. Six of the eight children who participated in our study attended these classes in addition to attending school, whilst two more participants in our study attended these classes whilst not attending school.

## **Method**

### ***Design***

The research adopted a qualitative approach utilizing visual and text-based methods for data collection. Ethnographic go-along and image elicitation (Pauwels, 2015) interviews were conducted whilst moving through the life space of participants (Moles, 2007). Choice of methods was influenced by participant preferences. The research team comprised two male academic psychologists from the UK and a female research assistant native to Guatemala, who led the majority of the go-along interviews and image elicitation activities. Conversations with SCYP and the project coordinators were recorded, transcribed and translated into English for analysis. Ethical approval for the project was granted for the study by the University Ethics Committee. Additional consent from each SCYP involved within the study and their parents/carers was also obtained. Before data was collected, participants (in the presence of project leaders) were fully informed about the study, guaranteed anonymity the right to withdraw their data.

### ***Participants***

There were twelve participants (see Table 1): eight SCYP (five boys and three girls, ranging from 11-16 years) and four adults, who were the project coordinators. When not participating with the outreach projects the young people were working, selling produce, recycling rubbish, or out on the streets in the *Terminal* area. Four participants were adult co-ordinators of the educational projects (two male, two female). Project co-ordinators acted as gatekeepers for the SCYP and suggested those most willing to participate. Selection criteria were that the young people had been engaging with the outreach projects', were considered to be street connected and were willing to take part. The research involved both SCYP and



project co-ordinators in order to explore the different perspectives of possible processes of resilience. Despite being a relatively modest sample size, the study engaged with participants who live transient lives, included them in visual based participatory approaches and ultimately enabling their voices to be heard (Pauwels, 2015).

<< *Insert Table 1 about here*>>

### **Data Collection**

Initially, ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) were used to establish rapport with participants. These involve the researcher being physically emplaced within the participant's life-world. Interviews were conducted in *The Terminal* (on the street), or the house building or church of the education outreach projects; locations participants frequented habitually (Stevenson, 2014). All interviews were mobile (Moles, 2007), semi structured and conducted in Spanish. Questions were asked around possible risks experienced to the young people i.e. *What would you change about this place if you could?* Similar questions were asked to the project leaders i.e. *What are the biggest risks associated with this area for the children and young people?* Further questions related to more positive issues such as asking the young people *'Can you show us something that helps you when you are experiencing difficulties?'*. Similar questions were asked to project coordinators i.e. *What helps young people who live and work in the terminal overcome their problems?* Participants were interviewed multiple times across a three-week time frame. Each interview ranged from around 30 – 60 minutes, and were either conducted individually or in pairs. The interview schedule was based on the theoretical notion of resilience; and included questions about risks, protective factors and positive outcomes.

To supplement verbal data, image elicitation (Pauwels, 2015) was used within the ethnographic go-along interviews, to elicit more detailed responses. The images are not used as data themselves but as a means to gain depth from participants' verbal responses. SCYP

were asked to draw or photograph places, people or things within their environment in response to questions from the researcher e.g. *Can you take a photograph/draw something that is important to you?* Subsequently these images were used within the interviews. SCYP were asked why they had taken a particular photo or drawn a certain picture. Image elicitation enhances verbal data gained during interviews (Literat, 2013), helps researchers to access populations whose language is different from theirs, and is particularly salient when talking about personal well-being (Alasuutari and Järvi, 2012). Interviewing with images has the added bonus of improving participant engagement (Harper, 2002).

### ***Data Analysis***

Verbal data were transcribed and translated into English by a two native Guatemalans who have lived in the UK and are fluent in Spanish and English. They worked independently on translating transcripts and after completion checked a sample of each other's work for consistency and accuracy. Data was analysed by two researchers using inductive thematic analysis as '*it offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data*' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 77). We followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) analytical guidelines, following a six-stage process; familiarization with the data set, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes and then produce the report. We followed these steps to ensure quality and rigor of the analysis. Themes from the data are supported by quotes from participants, rather than coming with preconceived ideas about protective factors for this group of young people. Thematic saturation emerged when researchers did not generate further themes. Themes were then compared between researchers and a consistent model emerged. Once the themes and quotes had been selected and agreed upon within the research team, we took an additional step to enhance trustworthiness and rigor by asking the researchers who originally conducted the interviews

in Spanish to check for consistency between the Spanish recordings and written text in English.

## Results

Three major themes (and associated sub themes) related to protective factors and processes for street connected young people were identified – see Table 2.

<< *Insert Table 2 about here* >>

### ***Theme 1: Empowerment***

Within this broad theme two sub themes were highlighted; *support and encouragement and providing opportunities*

#### **a) Support and encouragement**

The SCYP acknowledged the work the project co-ordinators did in providing practical support and encouragement when life was difficult “*Like when we don’t have the things we need they [the projects] provide it for us, like when we don’t have a pen, and my mum doesn’t have any money.*” – Carla. The importance of education is also highlighted by Carla when she acknowledges the support she has received from the projects “*they help us study, if we don’t know something they explain it, they teach us on the computers, we do homework, exercises and they help us.*” – Carla. One of the projects co-ordinators, Christian, also mentioned a conversation he had had with a SCYP who highlighted the important work of the project.

*So I was chatting with her and she was telling me: “Look Profe, if Seño Julia wouldn’t help us with this support she gives us with school supplies, and seeing that we go to school, I would be in the dump as everybody else.* – Christian.

## Protective factors in street children

Educational support is seen as a major factor in promoting positive well-being and breaking the cycle of poverty. Ana (a project co-ordinator) highlights this, saying

*It's something [Education] that no one else helps them with and that they have such a need for it cos we know that that's one thing that if they can achieve ..... that's one thing that's really gonna give them a foot up in life and help them.” - Ana.*

This sub theme was not just about providing practical support, it also relates to the importance of recognising achievement and praising it in the hope of changing how young people see themselves, leading to more positive sense of self.

*“I think that us recognising achievement in their lives like when they're able to do something different I mean when they come and do computer work with us and in something like so simple like to ask 'oh you sat down and you typed on a keyboard' and like kind of make a big deal of it like 'oh my gosh did you see what you did you've never done that before that's so cool'” – Ana.*

The young people also mentioned the importance of being encouraged by the charity workers and the positive affect that it has had upon their lives. Miguel answered in response to a question about how the charity project has had an affect in helping to overcome risks with *“Yeah, that they'd help me thrive and be someone in life... she [Seño Julia] tells me to keep going. Carla also mentioned “we started to trust Profe Gabriel and Seño Ana, we used to share about our lives with them, we still do because they tell us that we have to move forward and even if troubles are very tough we can ask God for Wisdom and continue to strive and not remain stuck where we are”*

### **b) Providing opportunities**

The young people and the project leaders acknowledged that the educational projects provide a number of opportunities, they otherwise would not have. For example Francisco says

*“sometimes, they come to take us somewhere, ... once they took us to the swimming pools”* and Carla mentioned in response to the question why she participants with these projects *“for the recreational activities they do.. sometimes to the zoo, of the field or like always they take us to play”*. The young people clearly place importance on being given opportunities outside of their experience. For Miguel it was important that one of the charity projects gave him the opportunity to discover a love for cooking. When asked which of the photos he had taken he most liked, he responded with, the one showing the kitchen and said *“Because I like cooking... that’s where I learn also to cook”*.

A key factor in promoting a sense of resilience was about encouraging the young people to see life outside of their current situation to empower them and provide opportunities to see that life could be different. *So it has do to with opening their eyes to see there is more to it [life] beyond the circle of the Terminal.”* – Julia. Julia is very passionate about providing opportunities for the young people to see there is another way of living and there are possibilities for the future.

*“I think that the contributions that we make as organizations, in some way has opened their understanding that there is another way of living, so the contribution that we make, helps them have other possibilities and opportunities for the present and the future”* – Julia.

She acknowledges the tangible strategies the project uses to provide opportunities to empower the young people to help overcome risk.

*the other thing that we can offer them sometimes is the possibility to see things beyond what’s in front of them, we’ve been to a museum, a book fair, places like this, so the fact that they can see that there are other possibilities of life outside the Terminal is something we can offer them slowly.”* – Julia.

Another issue mentioned by Ana (project co-coordinator) was around providing opportunities for young people to see themselves differently. She highlights the value of empowering them to think differently about themselves so they would have the resources to overcome risk.

Here she says *“kind of be purposeful in that anything else that sees them differently I think its just treating them differently when you treat them differently they see themselves differently.”*

- Ana. She also mentioned the importance of *“someone coming along side of them and at least believing with them that they’re capable of doing it.”* – Ana. Here she highlights that believing that the young people are capable, and showing them opportunities, helps empower them to overcome risk and experience positive outcomes.

### ***Theme 2: Belonging***

Within this broad theme three sub-themes were highlighted *creating positive relationships, a sense of affinity and supportive family relationships.*

#### **a) Creating positive relationships**

Positive relationships between the SCYP and project co-ordinators was seen as key in promoting resilience, and helped the young people to overcome difficulties when experiencing risk. When asked *“What would you miss most if you couldn’t come here [to the project] anymore?”* The answer to this question given by Miguel was *“the teachers”* –, and Mateo answered with *“Seño Julia”*. The importance placed on relationships with the project co-ordinators is further evidenced from the quote by Carla *“ I love Profe Gabriel and Seño Ana very much, because they’ve helped us since we were little girls.”*

For the project co-ordinators, the relationships formed with SCYP were emphasised as extremely important in promoting a sense of belonging with the project, which in turn helps them to support and empower the young people. *“I think the reason they feel a part of it [the project] is because of relationships with us and so I guess that’s just because we make an effort to have a relationship with them and make them feel safe.* – Ana. In this quote Ana

emphasises the commitment put into forming positive relationship with young people and creating a sense of safety that the young people otherwise might not experience.

For one project co-ordinator, Julia, the importance of relationships is also acknowledged *“they trust us enough to share things that can be very private about their family or about themselves and they know we’re not going to judge them or point our finger at them.”* – Julia. Adopting a non-judgemental supportive relationship where adults are always available shows the depth of relationship that is required to adequately support SCYP.

The project co-ordinators also acknowledge that relationships are a two-way process and despite putting in the effort to form meaningful relationships with young people that can moderate risk, the young person needs to realise they are valuable and the project coordinators care about them as individuals.

*when they realise you care about them, then they respect you more, they listen more because they realise you’re not you know yelling at them but you care about them and so I think part of it is just they need someone to just treat them like a human.* – Ana.

This quote is further supported by Miguel who stated *“I’ve had people that help me and teach me good things and teach me a little about what you can achieve anything in life, giving your best and not following bad footsteps”*. Here Miguel is clearly acknowledging the importance of positive relationships that have helped him to overcome challenges in his life.

## **b) A sense of affinity**

Christian (project worker), referring to the young people, said *“they’ve felt that they are valued here, that value that we give them as people, so they say ‘Oh, right here they are interested that I move forward, they want me to learn, they want me to thrive”*. This emphasises the importance SCYP place on being valued, having a sense of affinity with the project and knowing that people are interested in them as people. Gabriel (project worker) also mentions

that this sense of affinity is also evident *“I think that it happens with the van because when they see the van they’re like ‘oh oh that’s ours.’”*.

The project co-ordinators also mention the importance young people derive from their affinity with the project. Christian mentions here that one young person that he works with finds the programme a bit difficult, because she lacks the habit of studying, *“but she has managed to identify herself with it because she sees the interest of the program in helping her, she sees the interest of the educational programs and she thrives and moves forward”*. Furthermore, Julia highlights the importance that young people attached to the different programmes and the sense of affinity they have with them she quotes *“I think it makes them feel part of something and important, ... they are like ‘oh, I’m from that programme Señor’ or ‘I’ve been called to another one’ so I think they feel valued and taken into account.”* Here Julia mentions the importance of the young people feeling part of something and valued, their identity is attached to the different programmes of the projects and they feel affinity and pride that promotes belonging.

### **c) Supportive family environment**

A supportive family environment was another theme to emerge. It was highlighted as an important protective factor for SCYP. When the young people were asked about supportive relationships they maintained and people who would help them overcome difficult situations they frequently mentioned family members. For example Maria said *“my Grandma”*, and Cristobal said *“My mum.”*

Carla: *“In her poverty my mum has pulled us forward, because she is single, she doesn’t have anyone’s help, my own father, my father doesn’t help*

Interviewer: *and, do you know him?*

Carla: *No, but we’re together with my sisters, in the good and the bad and my mum is always with us and she washes clothes.”*



Interviewer: “*Why is it important to ‘look for your parents or your grandpa’?*”

*Francisco: He can take care of us, because sometimes my mum is not around.”*

It was not just about the physical presence of a family member that offer a sense of safety and protection but also a willingness in the family members to support the young people and offer them the best options possible. In the following quote, Carla mentions the support that she receives from her own mother.

*we also sold fruits, but my mum told us she preferred to see us study than selling, because we weren't going to sell fruit all the time, sometimes on holidays she makes us sell, but other days she doesn't, when we want to sell we do, if we don't we don't... She tells me that she doesn't want me to repeat the same story that she repeated; she wants us to move forward in everything we can.*

Carla mentions here the autonomy that she receives; her mum would prefer her to study and take a different path in life but the choice is up to Carla in whether she sells to make money or studies with the project.

The project co-ordinators also mentioned the importance of family relationships in providing protection that can overcome risk.

*if they can maintain their connection to the family that will strengthen them for the present and the future, ... when they separate and ... lose all relationships with family it makes them more fragile and more vulnerable to other situations, so maintaining their family bond in the present will make them more whole and stronger for the future.*

– Julia.

Although some relationships with family members of those that live in *The Terminal* are negative Julia mentions here that family connection can sometimes be important in promoting positive outcomes.

### **Theme 3: Motivation**

Within this broad theme three sub themes were highlighted; *willpower, engagement in learning and help seeking*.

#### **a) Willpower**

Willpower to change is an important theme in offering protection in at-risk environments. When asked whether they enjoy participating within the educational projects Miguel replied with *“Because I want to be someone in life”*. And Carla said to *“..move forward and be someone in life, not being like right now.”* Clearly these young people had aspirations and ambitions to improve their lives.

Julia (project leader) also mentioned that *“this also has to do with their will right? In that in the end they believe that they will accomplish something that it’s worth it”*. Here Julia highlights that the young person needs to have willpower in order to succeed and they need to believe in themselves that studying is worth the effort and investment. Many of the young people within the *Terminal* area see the immediate reward in selling as they gain money, whereas studying is a long-term goal and has fewer immediate benefits.

Christian (project leader) also highlights the importance of willpower and suggests that this is one of the major factors that offers protection against risk for young people:

*because she’s had that willpower, she’s had the dedication to take advantage of her studies, to overcome, and there have also been ups and downs in her life, that sometimes make her want to go back or leave the studies behind or give up. But she has moved on, she’s been constant, perseverant.*

Christian also mentions another conversation he had with a young person who had felt rejected and undervalued but now says *“I feel different, I see myself different from the rest, and I’m not in a sense of bragging about it, but I’ve seen how I have been taking advantage of studying, of the opportunities that I’ve been given”*. For Christian this young person has had

the willpower to change her life course to be her own agent of change. Christian acknowledges the importance the project has had in supporting her but highlights her own willpower and motivation to study has had a positive effect upon her life.

### **b) Engagement in learning**

All the young people were asked why they came to the project and what was their major motivation to attend. The most common response was around wanting to learn. In a response to the question about why the young people come to the educational projects Miguel answered with *“Coming to study”* and when pressed further for what exactly he likes to learn he replied with *“Science and social studies, about different cities and countries.”* This response was reflected in other participants’ responses Interviewer: *“Why do you principally come here? Mateo: because I want to learn... getting my grades up but I couldn’t do it by myself.”; “Because we want to learn.” – Joaquin; Learn, we come here to learn.” –*

Francisco. When asked the types of learning takes place in the education project Francisco replied with *“Maths, computer... adding.”* Clearly learning is a major motivator for SCYP. They do not get the opportunity to study elsewhere and have taken advantage of what is on offer to them by the projects. However, the project co-ordinator Ana distinguishes between those who have engaged and those who do not, stating it is often a natural drive within them as individuals.

*there are kids that want to learn they want to know more they want to have an education and so some of them they just have this natural drive in them and there’s other ones that don’t they couldn’t care less they don’t want anything to do with school and they couldn’t care less that you talk to them about it making a difference in their lives and part of it I think is just a natural drive in them.*

The participants within this study were all actively engaged in the project so engagement in learning and motivation were particularly evident. This is not the case for all young people in the *Terminal*, as evidenced in the quote above by Ana.

### **c) Help seeking**

This sub theme refers to how the young people seek help in times of difficulty. When the young people were asked what do they do when in a difficult situation or if they have problems and life gets tough, Carla responded with “*Pray to God*”. When asked what has helped to overcome difficult situations Natalia mentioned, “*that people pray for me*”. This point is further expressed in the conversation with Carla

Interviewer: “*Have you had problems? how have you manage to solve them before?*”

Carla: *Going to church*

Interviewer: *What about the church helps you?*

Carla: *To pray*

Interviewer: *When you pray.. how does it help you?*

Carla: *To be calmer and feel better.”*

SCYP also often ask for help from the project coordinators.

*And recently Julian was telling me: ‘Seño, I don’t want to be in The Terminal anymore, can you help me to see if I can do something else?’ but what can you accomplish until a child makes their own decision to say ‘I want a change’.*

*Sometimes you can be insisting and offer different possibilities, but if they don’t want to, the programmes may offer them heaven and earth and everything else, but it won’t work if they don’t want to make the change.” – Julia.*

Here Julia highlights the motivation that some young people have in seeking help to change their circumstances. The young people know who can potentially help and support them.

However, Julia mentions that despite this, transformation will only be possible if the young

person themselves really wants to change. She mentions another conversation where a child asked her “‘*Can you help me find something else I can do?*’ So I talked to him ‘*Look there are other possibilities*’ but it’s when in a certain way they are willing and they ask for it.

Again, Julia shows the commitment that the project has in supporting at risk young people but acknowledges that for any intervention to be successful the SCYP must show an equal if not greater commitment to wanting change for themselves.

## Discussion

This research demonstrated that important protective factors for SCYP are multifaceted and operate across numerous ecological domains. The first key theme to emerge was around issues of *empowerment* by project coordinators in supporting and encouraging young people and providing them with alternative opportunities.

Providing practical support to SCYP, enabling them to access educational opportunities is important for promoting resilience. Education opens up opportunities for social mobility and a route out of poverty. Furthermore, providing education outside of the *Terminal* offers an activity away from adversity evident in this area, offering opportunities for young people to boost their sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). If self-efficacy is increased and young people start to believe they are capable of achieving, motivation will grow, which will ultimately promote resilience. Opportunities for mastery experience promote a sense of perceived agency (Masten, 2014). Therefore, when a young person believes they are capable of achieving, they will be motivated to continue studying.

Opening the eyes of SCYP to possibilities outside of their frame of reference provides tangible goals to aim for which can become motivating influences (Locke and Latham, 2002). As self-efficacy beliefs are socially constructed through interaction with the environment (Bandura, 1997), showing SCYP alternative possibilities which are normally outside their

frame of reference will help them to feel more capable to achieve them. Masten (2014) reports that teachers are able to provide a sense of agency when they offer opportunities for young people to see themselves differently and these skills will help to boost resilience.

The second theme was around promoting a sense of *belongingness*. This involves building positive relationships between the young people and project coordinators, helping young people to have a sense of affinity with the projects they are part of, and where possible promoting a stable family environment. Creating positive relationships is key within the resilience literature. Many studies have highlighted that where positive relationships are formed between a young person and their teachers, this leads to better mental health outcomes (Murray and Greenberg, 2001, Pianta, 2006).

A sense of affinity is also important in promoting resilience. Quotes which support this theme highlight specific cases where SCYP have felt some affinity with the projects. Whilst these examples may appear fairly trivial, Walton et al. (2012) suggests that even minor cues indicating a connection to a particular place or group can be a powerful motivator.

The young people in this study highlighted the importance of relationships with their parents. This theme supports previous literature, which demonstrates that effective parenting might be particularly salient in high-risk backgrounds (Domina, 2005). Furthermore, in some instances the presence of just one effective parent is sufficient in promoting resilience, (Alink et al. 2009).

The final theme was *motivation*. Our findings suggest that individual young people must be willing and wanting to overcome risk. They need to have some engagement with the learning process, to know how to, and to want to, seek help, if they are going to overcome their risk situation and experience resilience. Willpower is a key aspect of Self Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Within this theory individuals strive to meet their

needs of competence (to master their environment), autonomy and relatedness. Particularly relevant here is the need of competence. The SCYP in this study were all motivated, to a greater or lesser extent, to achieve and presumably to meet their mastery need, despite the adversity they experienced. According to Masten (2014) teachers and parents are key in shaping mastery motivation.

All the SCYP within the present study were engaged with the outreach projects and their commitment to learn was a particularly salient feature of the research. Clearly, these young people saw the value in education. Their parents were not forcing them to attend, so they displayed autonomy in making their own decisions. Increasing a sense of autonomy is a key feature of motivation (Ryan and Deci 2000), which might support resilience functioning. The engagement to learning demonstrated by the participants here might also reflect enhanced executive functioning (EF) skills. Blair and Raver (2012) evidenced the importance of EF skills, particularly for high-risk young people who have to navigate a lot of competing demands and respond appropriately to a variety of situations.

For the young people in the *Terminal*, when life is difficult and there are limited options available, asking for help from project co-ordinators, praying and attending church offers them a source of comfort and protection to navigate in an environment of risk. Research demonstrates that those individuals displaying more resilience often acknowledge sources of strength coming from their faith and the spiritual support they gain from religious organizations (Crawford et al. 2006, Brewer-Smyth and Koenig 2014). This is both an individual level influence of personal faith as well as a community level influence, as the religious organizations provide social support, which is particularly pertinent for those experiencing significant adversity.

The findings demonstrated that there are a number of modifiable protective factors across different ecological levels that can be changed in order to promote a sense of resilience

in SCYP. This is encouraging as it shows that promoting resilience is not solely an individual's responsibility. Outreach projects can promote resilience by building a sense of belonging in the young people so they feel part of any organization working on their behalf. Organizations need to then empower young people to help them see possibilities outside their frame of reference and to believe they are capable of reaching their goals. If organizations work in this manner, SCYP are likely to experience an increase in motivation to engage in learning, seek help when needed and commit to the effort required to reach their goals. Supporting a single protective factor is, however, unlikely to be sufficient and there is a requirement to target multiple factors. Finally, risk factors should not be forgotten and working to reduce these alongside promoting resilience is essential.

### ***Strengths, limitations and further research***

A clear strength of this study was how it engaged with a population of young people who are often neglected within the research literature. Limited studies have investigated resilience from a psychological perspective with SCYP, with fewer studies in Guatemala. In doing this research a contribution to knowledge has been attained with this at-risk population.

A further, related strength concerns the methodology utilized. The present study adopted a flexible, visual-based, ethnographic approach, which gave a voice to the young people. Using image elicitation in interviews and situating interviews ethnographically, enabled exploration of the life-worlds of participants. Further research could continue in this vein and explore protective factors in young peoples lives through the use of new technology and social media (Volpe, 2018). A multi-informant approach was also adopted, including SCYP and the project coordinators. This adds knowledge to our understanding of resilience, street connectedness and the experiences of young people who live, work and study in adverse situations.



Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge some of the limitations of this study before implications are drawn. Issues concerning the sample need to be raised. The sample who participated in this research were all young people living, working or studying within the *Terminal* area in Guatemala City. However, the project coordinators selected young people to take part in the research who were the most engaged with the projects and motivated themselves to participate. As a result SCYP who only attended the project projects irregularly were not present in the research. These individuals lead potentially more transient life styles and have irregular daily routines due to many financial and familial commitments, and could be considered even more at risk than the participants in the present study. There is more to do to engage the most vulnerable young people in the research process and further studies could attempt to target those who find themselves on the periphery.

An aspect that was lacking in the current study is the voice of the parents/carers (Berckmans, Velasco, O'Driscoll and Loots 2016). The scope of the present study prevented interviews with parents, a decision to focus on SCYP and the project coordinators was made in the first instance. However, it would be interesting in further research to hear the perspective of any available parents/carers and to establish how much they deem the streets of the *Terminal* a risky environment for their children, and why they adopt their particular child rearing practices.

Our roles as researcher's possibly had an impact on the data collection. Despite all interviews being conducted with a native Guatemalan in Spanish, certain conversations might have been opened up or closed down because of the presence of a research team that were not from the Terminal area. In future work empowering project coordinators to carry out their own action research might take this research forward, leading to better outcomes for SCYP connected with project projects.

Finally, assessing the degree to which each young person was at risk or living within an adverse situation was based on interviews with project coordinators. Themes of violence and exploitation were mentioned as common in *The Terminal* area, and as the young people were mostly unsupervised for the whole day they were at particular risk. There is an implicit assumption that risk was consistent across all young people, but this might not have been the case. Protective factors are likely to act in distinct ways depending on the unique risk experience of the SCYP. In future studies a more objective assessment of risk could be attained or acknowledged. Despite these limitations, the present study achieved its aim to explore resilience in SCYP by identifying salient protective factors and process that help to moderate risk experience when working, living and studying in an adverse environment.

The factors and processes identified are complex and intertwined, addressing influences on different ecological levels. They do not appear to work independently, but a cyclic model would best explain the process. Increasing a sense of belonging in SCYP leads to the ability and opportunity for project coordinators to empower these young people who in turn feel motivated and enabled for change. Therefore resilience is best developed when project coordinators, young people and their families are working together in partnership. SCYP who live work and study around the *Terminal* area are within a high-risk environment, but to some extent these risks are being moderated with the help of the projects with whom they work.

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Table 1: Participants (pseudonyms) and key demographic information

Participant	Role	Age	Gender	Attending a public school part time
Carla	Young person	15	Female	Yes
Natalia	Young person	14	Female	Yes
Maria	Young person	13	Female	Yes
Miguel	Young person	14	Male	No
Mateo	Young person	14	Male	Yes
Joaquin	Young person	13	Male	No
Francisco	Young person	11	Male	Yes
Cristobal	Young person	11	Male	Yes
Julia	Project leader	50s	Female	N/A
Christian	Project leader	30s	Male	N/A
Ana	Project leader	30s	Female	N/A
Gabriel	Project leader	30s	Male	N/A

Table 2: Major themes and sub themes identified

Theme	1. Empowerment	2. Belonging	3. Motivation
Sub theme	<i>a. Support and Encouragement</i>	<i>a. Creating Positive relationships</i>	<i>a. Will power</i>
	<i>b. Providing Opportunities</i>	<i>b. A sense of affinity</i>	<i>b. Engagement in learning</i>
		<i>c. Supportive family relationships</i>	<i>c. Helping seeking</i>