

## **Negotiating the Streets: Hidden Resilience among Grown-Up Street Children in Manila**

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This study investigated processes of hidden resilience of grown-up street dwelling children who still live on the streets in an inner city of Manila. Two adult street dwellers were purposively sampled based on their resilient functioning across four domains. A naturalistic narrative design was employed and the collected narratives were thematically analyzed. Results showed that both participants had experienced non-normative adversity, such as severe poverty, death of a parent and of other significant persons, dropping out of school, and exposure to drugs and vice. Six interacting resilience processes led to adaptive outcomes: having a significant adult, early involvement in work, distancing self from peers, delinquency as turning point, early parenthood, and spirituality. The identified processes and their corresponding outcomes reflect an idiosyncratic and context-specific adaptation to adversity, hence providing evidence for hidden resilience among grown-up street dwelling children as an atypical, discursive negotiation between individual and environment. The narratives illustrate the lack of basic rights and the great fragility in the participants' lives, but also enormous perseverance, contentment, meanings made, and generativity. The participants are not depicted as victims or delinquents, but their voices speak of agency, hope, and dignity.

*Keywords:* resilience, hidden resilience, street dwellers, street children

Little is known about the developmental processes involved in the lives of children who grew up on the streets and have remained street dwellers in adulthood. Fifteen years ago, an estimated 246,000 children lived on the streets throughout the Philippines, while about 50,000 of them were considered as highly visible street children, spending at least four hours a day on the street engaging in activities such as begging, peddling, petty crimes, play, or sleeping—mostly being unsupervised by adults (Lamberte, 2002). Manila City had the highest number of highly visible street children among all cities in the Philippines with an estimate of 3,266 (Lamberte, 2002). These numbers may have further increased with the growing urbanization in the country (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2016).

Children suffer the most when a society fails to fulfil its social contract towards the poor (Morrison, Nikolajski, Borrero, & Zickmund, 2014). Lack of economic opportunities may pressure children of poor families in the urban centres to work on the streets to supplement family income (Sta. Maria, 2010). Furthermore, economic hardship may lead to increased family violence and physical and emotional abuse at home may in turn push children to migrate to the streets (Conticini & Hulme, 2007; McAlpine, Henley, Mueller, & Vetter, 2010; Mello et al., 2014). Working or “living on the streets, children are exposed to high risks and they are often abused and exploited (Abdella, Hoot, & Tadesse, 2006; Lalor, 1999; Libório & Ungar, 2010; Montgomery, 2008). Yet, children on the streets are frequently seen with hostility by the society and either perceived as defiant, deceitful, delinquent, and antisocial or as helpless victims (Le Roux & Smith, 1998; Panter-Brick, 2002). However, understanding the pathways that lead to adaptive outcomes and resilience in the context of adversities of the streets may usher in a paradigm shift towards a more agentic view of street dwelling children.

The socio-ecological model of resilience is used here to explain resilience among growing up street children (Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013; Ungar, 2011). Accordingly, resilience is understood as a process that is negotiated discursively between the individual child and his or her ecological environment. Both internal and external resources that are available to the child contribute to the development of resilience, whereas the availability of resources in the child’s context is more crucial than the individual characteristics of the child (Ungar, 2013). Previous research on resilience predominantly focused on the western cultural context and on individuals that have not experienced the adversities of extreme poverty and growing up in the streets. A current fourth wave of resilience research is taking

cultural differences and similarities into account, while different resources and pathways in accessing these resources may have differential impacts across different cultures (Kolar, 2011; Ungar, 2008). The context specificity of resilience gave rise to the relatively novel concept of “hidden resilience” (Canvin, Marttila, Burstrom, & Whitehead, 2009; Ungar, 2006) arguing that marginalized populations may employ atypical or hidden strategies towards resilience. Hence, such coping strategies and negotiation for resources may not be apparent to the outside observer and may even seem maladaptive or socially inappropriate (Libório & Ungar, 2010; Malindi & Theron, 2010). Yet, resilience, viewed as a dialectic process nested in a specific ecological and cultural context, has to be understood from the viewpoint of the person experiencing adversity (Ungar, 2008, 2013).

Even though resilience has been widely studied, the perception of children or youth on their own resilience, as well as their views and experiences of the processes that lead to bouncing back across different cultures has yet been given limited attention (e.g. Ungar et al., 2007). This becomes particularly true in the Philippine context, and among more vulnerable populations that are not generally perceived as resilient. Particularly, only very few studies have investigated resilience of street children (i.e., Bacos, Ramirez, & Dungo, 2005; Banaag, 1997; Sta. Maria, Martinez, & Diestro, 2014).

This study aimed to explore hidden resilience processes among a population not conventionally considered as resilient (Malindi & Theron, 2010; Ungar, 2006)—adult street dwellers who grew up on the streets. Understanding the pathways towards such resilience among growing-up street children across their life trajectories may inform and guide further intervention. Employing a constructivist and critical lens (Ponterotto, 2010), children growing up on the streets are not seen as vulnerable victims or as defiant youth, but as individuals who have agency over their lives and actively engage with their environment, negotiating for resources towards their positive development and thus towards resilience. In that way, the study aimed to contribute to a shift in the predominant societal view of street dwelling children by making their voices heard and by exposing the injustice they experience.

## METHOD

This study employed a narrative research design in order to collect two life stories of adult street dwellers who grew up on the streets, focusing on

their experience of negotiating the streets towards hidden resilience. Narrative research is based on the assumption that knowledge has to be obtained and understood in the context of human experience, positing that human action is always intentional and thus follows a certain structure (Czarniawska, 2004). Narratives are especially useful to shed light on the meaning making process of individuals throughout their life course, because “people organize their interpretations of reality in the form of narratives” (Murray & Sargeant, 2012). A new direction in resilience research among indigenous and marginalized groups has been employing life narratives in the exploration of resilience pathways (e.g., Allen et al., 2014; Ramirez & Hammack, 2014). Likewise, a narrative approach was meaningful for the predominantly oral, collectivistic, and relational culture of the urban poor in the Philippines, also taking into account that most street dwellers have not enjoyed much formal education.

The participants were two adult street dwellers, aged 28 and 36 years, one male and one female, who grew up in the streets as children of street families with the street as their major dwelling place, and currently still live on the street with their families in an inner city in Manila, Philippines. They were purposively sampled according to the criterion of being considered resilient. Literature suggests competence indicators for resilient individuals, including academic, behavioural, and social domains (Anthony, 2008; Drapeau et al., 2007; Masten et al., 1999). Based on these previous investigations, inclusion criteria were: (1) behavior domain: not involved in delinquent or illegal activities (i.e., drugs, alcohol, petty crimes); (2) employability domain: regular and honest source of income (i.e. regularly pursues legal livelihood, does not involve own children in begging, is able to provide basic needs of family); (3) social domain: healthy family functioning and relationships (i.e. own children of minor age live with parents, children in school age are in school, no violence or abuse in the family); (4) personal characteristics domain: no symptoms of psychopathology.

The purpose and nature of the study was explained to the participants and written informed consent was obtained from them. Prior to the interviews, the researcher spent 3 to 4 hours with the family of each participant at their location during different times of the day, observing their lives and their interaction, asking informal questions, and taking field notes. Subsequently, initial and follow-up narrative interviews were conducted with both participants at their dwelling places on the street. The initial interviews lasted between 50 and 70 minutes, the follow-up interviews between 35 and 50

minutes. The initial interview primarily focused on the life narratives of the participants by asking open non-leading questions. During the elicitation of the narratives, the researcher took the role of an active listener, not interrupting the narratives. During subsequent interviews, the researcher asked follow-up questions based on the initial data analysis, in order to explore the themes emerging in more depth (appendix A). All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data analysis was based on a naturalistic approach to narrative research employing the thematic model, thus focusing on what the participants experienced, how they coped, and what their life experiences mean to them (Esin, 2011; Riessman, 2008). After the initial interviews, the narratives of the participants were re-storied by the researcher into a chronological sequence using the original words of the participants (Allen et al., 2014). The narratives were then coded according to thematic units utilizing MAXQDA Version 10, and emerging themes and subthemes were then identified. The initial themes were verified with the participants before the follow-up interview, and overwhelming agreement was found. From the initial themes, follow-up questions were formulated. The data from the follow-up interviews was included into the chronological stories. A second round of thematic analysis yielded themes and overarching processes, paying attention to similarities and differences of the experience of the two research participants. The output of the second phase of analysis was again verified with the participants in order to establish trustworthiness of the results (Williams & Morrow, 2009). As acknowledgment for their participation, a bag of groceries was given to each participant.

## RESULTS

This section describes the results as they emerged from the narratives and the participant observation, including the socio-cultural context, adversities experienced, the resilience processes, and resilience outcomes. Names used in this section are pseudonyms; quotations are translated from Tagalog.

### **The Socio-Cultural Context**

The inner city of Manila where the study was conducted is a melting pot of different religions and cultures. A famous catholic church represents

the Roman Catholic population, to which the two participants belong. A large mosque serves the Muslims, while Chinatown represents the Filipino-Chinese residents. During the Spanish time, the inner city was a blooming district with many waterways; later it was a commercial district, now run down, but nevertheless highly congested. The poorest families occupy vacant spaces under bridges, beside buildings, and along sidewalks. Due to the pressures of severe poverty, drug abuse and petty crimes are rampant in the area.

Meryl, the first participant, lives with her family on the sidewalk in front of a bank, together with four other families. She is a single mother, 28 years old, with seven children ages 1 to 13 years. Her children play on the street, and two one-year old twins are always naked in their wooden cot. Meryl works as parking attendant in front of the bank and she also sells candies to passing Jeepneys, earning 145 to 250 pesos a day. Her mother, who lives with them, came to Manila as an adolescent, looking for work, and ended up in this particular inner city. Meryl is her only child.

Ricky, the second participant, lives with his family in a make-shift house under a bridge. Because it is very tight, dark, and hot in the eight square meter shanty, the family spends their day on the streets and only sleep in the shanty. Ricky is 36 years old and has five children ages 5 to 16 years. His source of income is a sidecar; he earns 200 to 300 pesos a day, seldom 400 pesos. His mother was born in this inner city, while his father migrated from a province in the south, but grew up here

### **Non-Normative Adversity**

Children in poverty cannot per se be considered a high-risk population, even though they are potentially exposed to higher risks than other populations (Panter-Brick, 2015). Only the experience of “non-normative adversity” permits positive developmental outcomes to be considered as resilience (Liebenberg & Theron, 2015b). The narratives of the participants provide evidence for the accumulation of adversity beyond poverty itself, which can be considered nonnormative and a major risk threatening their healthy development.

Both participants started their narratives on a positive note: there was a time when life was still okay: “I also experienced the good life with my father. I had everything I wanted.” (Meryl); “When we were young, we were brought up well by our mother.” (Ricky). But circumstances changed

and through the sudden death of a parent they ended up in severe poverty: “Only the two of us were left, that’s why life became very difficult for my mother. She was just a laundry woman” (Meryl); “... life was very difficult for us then... we experienced eating only fish sauce and rice. And sometimes, only salt [and rice]” (Ricky).

Meryl’s father ended up in jail when she was three years old and subsequently died in jail. When she was eleven years old, her mother was also put in jail for running drugs. Being a single child, Meryl was left on her own on the streets. Ricky’s mother died of tuberculosis when he was 11 years old. Losing his mother was the greatest challenge he had experienced: “It was so difficult to accept that she was gone. I wondered how I could survive.” His father had been taking drugs ever since he remembered. He did not take responsibility for his family when the mother died. Due to the early loss of their parents, both participants were left on the streets to fend for themselves: “I didn’t have a place to stay... I and my friends slept wherever we were, on the street, on the sidewalk, anywhere” (Meryl).

Both participants got involved in work at a young age. Meryl began to work after her father had died, to supplement the income of her mother. She worked as dishwasher at food stalls, sold plastic bags at the market, and cleaned windshields of cars. When her mother was put in jail, she began to run drugs, as this was a lucrative and easy way to generate income. Ricky began to work after he had dropped out of school, helping out in food stalls, slaughtering chicken, or collecting garbage. At 12 years old, he already worked as a helper on construction sites.

Both participants dropped out of school early. For Ricky, who did not finish Grade 3, this was due to his disinterest in studying and to his mother asking him to help her with work. Meryl dropped out of Grade 6 when her mother was already in jail. Working while still going to school was unsustainable: “I couldn’t do both, work, school, work, school. I didn’t get enough rest; I couldn’t do it anymore.” Due to living on the streets, both participants were exposed to drugs and vices rampant in their place: “Many enticed me to sniff solvent, try drugs, or take marihuana” (Meryl).

In addition to losing their parents early on, both participants also lost several other people that played a significant role in their lives. Ricky experienced the death of six of his siblings. Later he lost his aunt who was supporting him emotionally after his mother had died. Meryl lost a woman who took her in for a few years while her mother was in jail. The death of this significant person in her life still affects her: “I treated her like my

second mother. She is now gone, she is dead [cries, pause] ... First I was angry. Whoever was nice to me was taken away [cries]”. One year ago her third husband died: “I feel pity for my twins, because I was only pregnant with them, and they have never met their father... It was a big tragedy when he died. It felt like one of my wings was cut off.”

### **Resilience Processes**

The thematic analysis of the narratives yielded six processes that fostered resilience in the participants (Table 1). Even though these pathways are presented as separate processes, they interact with each other.

*“Sya ang nagmulat sa mata ko”* (“She opened up my eyes”; Ricky). Both participants recalled significant adults in their lives who were a resource for them. For Ricky it was the example of his mother who became his inspiration once she had died. He remembers his mother as hardworking and sacrificial in providing for her family. He gained his survival skills from the example of his mother: “She opened up my eyes how to survive... she persevered for us to live... she made all the sacrifices... even when she was sick, she still sold on the market. That’s where I focused myself.” After his mother died, he began to emulate her: “We strive to live an honest life. Because of our mother, even though we were poor, she brought us up not taking advantage of our neighbours” (Ricky). By observing other people, he was able to verify the lessons that he had learned: “My mother had already told me. But sometimes I learned from the people around me doing these things. I did not do it anymore because I knew it would harm me.” Based on these learnings, he is now able to provide advice to others and is respected because of his clean and honest way of life: “Even if they are older than myself, I tell them off... but they respect me.” What he has learned from his mother, he now also imparts to his own children: “Whatever my mother did with me, that’s the best we can now teach our children” (Ricky).

Meryl recalls adults, who, even though they were not able to support her financially, advised her to stay away from vices and to not emulate the example of other youth: “What they said was carved into my mind.” She made a promise to never touch drugs, and she kept her promise. Similar to Ricky, she arrived at the conclusion that their advice was true by observing other youth, and she gained a strong conviction to stay away from drugs: “Because I saw it with others, that was the effect [of taking drugs].” She now provides advice to children in a similar way that the adults did to her:



“That is the biggest help that I have ever received, the advice of these elderly people... I am now able to advise children of whom others think they don’t have a future. This is the biggest help that I ever received, because I can share it now with others.” Finally, she imparts her learnings to her own children: “That’s why I am so happy about Liezel, these are the signs that the dreams I have for her are being planted [in her].”

*“Hindi pa dapat talaga, dahil sa murang edad ko noon”* (“It should not have been, because I was still young”; Meryl). Getting involved early in work was not only an adverse experience, but served as a pathway towards adaptation. Both participants got involved in work as children: “When I came from school, I had a sideline. I helped out at stalls, to whomever I could be of help. So that [my mother] did not have difficulties to provide for me” (Ricky). When they were left alone on the streets, they were able to utilize their learned work skills to provide for their own needs, but they also recognized the detrimental effects of their labour: “I pressed hard in my work... did my best, agreed to everything, until I learned things that were not appropriate for my age [referring to running drugs]. It should not have been, because I was still young” (Meryl).

Both participants did not only provide for their own needs, but also took on responsibility for their younger siblings. Meryl recalls how a younger girl who lived with them gave her strength to cope with her situation: “Now, this girl, she served me as an inspiration. When I thought of her, I said, I can do it... I didn’t treat her differently, I treated her like a true sister. Because of her I felt stronger. I had to stand on my own, because of her... because of my parental responsibilities.”

Similarly, after the death of his mother, Ricky took responsibility for his younger siblings: “It was like I was the eldest. I had to guide them all, I taught them all I knew. They respected me.” He describes how he worked hard in order to provide for his siblings, and later for his own children: “I made many sacrifices... first of all for my siblings. After that... I poured myself into my children.” Through many years of hard work, Ricky was able to obtain a sidecar with a bicycle, then a “kuliglig” (side car with a built-on engine) and finally a motor bike to attach to his side car. He had been able to send all his children to school, provide for their needs, and also help his siblings. Work provided him with a way of coping, gave him consolation, and helped him to emotionally distance himself from the struggle of poverty: “It was helpful, an important factor... I had something to do, and of course, I thought of my siblings.”

Table 1 Themes and Subthemes for the Resilience Processes arising from the Narratives.

Process	Subthemes	Description
<p><i>“Sya ang nagmulat sa mata ko” (Ricky) (Significant Adult)</i></p>	<p><i>“Dahil nga iyung payo sa akin ng mga matatanda noon, iyon ang naging inspirasyon ko.” (Meryl)</i>  <b>(Inspiration)</b></p> <p><i>“Itatanim ko talaga sa utak ko iyan. Dahil nakikita ko din sa iba. Iyan, kung ano ang epekto.” (Meryl)</i>  <b>(Verification through observation)</b></p> <p><i>“Ang ginawa sa akin ng mga matatanda, iyon din ang ginagawa ko sa iba, binabahagi ko din sa ibang bata.” (Meryl)</i>  <b>(Emulation of Example)</b></p> <p><i>“Kaya natutuwa naman ako kay Angela, eto yata ang mga signs, sabi ko, ung mga pangaral ko sa kanya...tumatanim na sa utak niya.” (Meryl)</i>  <b>(Impart lessons to own children)</b></p>	<p>This process revolves around the participants having one or two significant adults in their lives who become a resource leading to more resilient functioning. The developmental process starts with being inspired by them and learning from their example, verifying what they say by comparing it with the experience of others, emulating their example, and later imparting the lessons to their own children in a similar way than the significant adults did to them.</p>
<p><i>“Hindi pa dapat talaga, dahil sa murang edad ko noon” (Meryl)</i></p>	<p><i>“Eh, hindi naman sapat ang kikitain niya sa paglalabada... doon ko nasubukan iyung mag-tinda ng plastic sa palengke.” (Meryl)</i>  <b>(Child work)</b></p>	<p>This process is related to the participants’ early involvement in child work. As young children they learned the value and importance of work in order to survive. They learned to provide for</p>

**(Early involvement in child work)**

*“Sa mga kapatid ko... sila din ang naging ilaw ko ... sinakripisiyo ko talaga ang sarili ko para lang sa kanila.”* (Ricky)

**(Inspiration through early responsibility)**

*“Iyung ginawa ka sa sarili ko, pinrusige ko nalang ang sarili ko... sa paghahanapbuhay.”* (Ricky)

**(Perseverance)**

*“Sila lang ang iniintindi ko, kung anu-ano ang trabaho pinasok ko.”* (Meryl)

**(Hard work to provide for own children)**

their siblings because they took on responsibility early on due to the loss of their parents. Their siblings served as their inspiration, they learned to persevere, and finally they continue to work hard in order to provide for their own children.

*“Ang pag-babarkada, kung minsan nasa maganda, kung minsan nasa pangit“*

(Ricky)  
(Tension between needing support and distancing self from peers)

*“Mga kaibigan ko, tinutulungan din ako, pag may sobra silang pera.”* (Meryl)

**(Seeking support from peers)**

*“Hindi ko masasabi, talagang masama rin sila. Isang beses yinayaya nila ako, pag sabi ko, ayoko, hindi na nila ako pipilitin.”* (Meryl)

**(Resisting vices)**

*“Hindi ako lumalapit, kundi ako rin ang umiiwas.”* (Ricky)

**(Distancing self from peers)**

This process illustrates the tension between looking to peers for support but then distancing self from them because of their negative influence. Both participants initially sought the support from peers when they were left on the streets on their own, but then began to resist their vices and finally distanced themselves.

Process	Subthemes	Description
<p><i>“Iyon ang pinakamatinding leksyon na naransan ko”</i> (Meryl) (Delinquency as turning point)</p>	<p><i>“Kaya kung minsan may nagawa na hindi maganda. Dahil sa sobrang higpit ng buhay.”</i> (Ricky) <b>(Illegal work as a means of survival)</b></p> <p><i>“Nahuli din ako. Pero hindi ko pinagsisishan iyon, kasi nga, alam ko yung pinasok ko.”</i> (Meryl) <b>(Realization of consequences)</b></p> <p><i>“Kaya sabi ko ganoon, naiisip ko sa paraan na tumigil na lang. Mas ma-igi pa maghanap nalang ng trabaho.”</i> (Ricky) <b>(Deriving learning from the experience)</b></p> <p><i>“Hindi na ako pumasok sa lugar na iyon, dahil takot na talaga ako.”</i> (Meryl)</p>	<p>This process is related to the participants’ involvement in delinquent activities such as running drugs or committing hold-ups as a means of survival. Realizing the consequences of such delinquency, for example by being put to jail, was a turning point that led them to the conviction to stay away from further delinquency.</p>
<p><i>“May nagtatawag na tatay, may gumagabay sa iyo.”</i> (Ricky) <b>(Early partnership and parenthood)</b></p>	<p><i>“Siya nagiging karamay ko”</i> (Ricky) <b>(Early partnership as positive experience)</b></p> <p><i>“Sasabihin ko sa sarili ko, hindi ko kailangan ng asawa.”</i> (Meryl) <b>(Early partnership as negative experience)</b></p> <p><i>“Sila iyung inspirasyon ko. Sila rin ang nag-bigay ng kulay sa buhay ko.”</i> (Meryl)</p>	<p>This process revolves around early partnership and parenthood. For one participant early partnership was a positive experience leading to mutual support, while for the other participant it was a negative experience leading to separation. Nevertheless, for both participants, early parenthood led them to</p>

	<p><b>(Children as inspiration)</b>  <i>“Ang pangarap ko na hindi natupad, sana sa iyo matupad.”</i> (Meryl)  <b>(Projection of dream to children)</b></p>	<p>draw their meaning of life from their children, and to project their own unachieved dreams to their children.</p>
<p><i>“Dasal lang ako ng dasal... doon nalang naging malinaw ang takbo ng isip ko”</i>  (Meryl)  <b>(Spirituality)</b></p>	<p><i>“Ikaw nalang ang magsisilbing magulang ko.”</i>  (Meryl)  <b>(God as parent)</b>  <i>“Sa kulungan... natuto ako doon magrosary, humawak ng bible, magbasa.”</i> (Meryl)  <b>(Jail as turning point)</b>  <i>“Malaki ang paninidigan, pananampalataya sa kaniya.”</i> (Ricky)  <b>(Trust in God)</b>  <i>“Mga wala nakapansin sa kanila, siya nalang ang tululong, siya nalang ang magbigay, magsilbi, magibigay ng lakas, tatagan iyung kalooban.”</i>  (Meryl)  <b>(Prayer and love for others)</b>  <i>„Alam mo kung saan ang Panginoon, sabi ko sa kanya. Nandito iyan, 'nak, sa puso.”</i> (Meryl)  <b>(Sharing with own children)</b></p>	<p>This process illustrates how spirituality and belief in God has become a resource for the participants. The participants experienced God as a parent and as a provider. Difficult experiences, such as jail time, served as a turning point leading to an even deeper trust in God and dependence on him. Finally, the participants learned to pray for and to love others, and they are now sharing their faith with their children</p>

Likewise, Meryl narrated how she has worked hard in order to provide for her children: “I only care about them, I entered any kind of work. I worked as parking attendant and on the market, where ever I could find work.”

*“Ang pag-babarkada, kung minsan nasa maganda, kung minsan nasa pangit”* (“Sometimes peers are helpful but sometimes a nuisance”; Ricky). This process involves seeking and receiving support from peers, but then acknowledging the negative influence of the peers, resisting their vices, and finally distancing oneself from the peers. Meryl narrated how she was supported by her peers when her mother was in jail: “My friends helped me when they had some spare money. They gave it to me and told me: [Meryl] buy some food. They put money together for me, they helped me.” However, she began to see the negative effects of their drug use both by listening to the advice of adults and by observing them. It led to a tension of resisting the vices of her peers and the associated group pressure: “I couldn’t say they were really bad. They repeatedly invited me, but when I refused, they didn’t force me. They said: [Meryl], we are going to do drugs, just stay away for a while.”

For the same reasons, Meryl kept her distance from the relatives of her father: “I didn’t want to ask for help from [them], because most of them had vices. I was afraid that I could be influenced and that I could not resist them.” Finally, she narrated how being taken in by a concerned adult provided an escape: “I said to myself: this is now my big chance... to distance myself from the bad examples... because my friends had vices, they sniffed solvent and took marihuana.”

Similarly, Ricky sought the support of his peers after his mother had died: “I had many vices then... I took marihuana... got involved with a gang, used to hang out on the streets.” But realizing the effects of drug use, he began to distance himself from his peers: “I didn’t want to grow up like this. It was difficult... Sometimes peers are helpful but sometimes a nuisance. That’s why I kept my distance.” The strategy of distancing himself led him to continuously avoid vices. He is now imparting his own experience to his children by urging them to stay away from drugs: “I stopped with my vices, I tell them. I don’t want you to experience what I experienced. I don’t want to get involved with vices, because it is very difficult.”

*“Iyon ang pinakamatinding leksyon na naransan ko”* (“This is the biggest lesson I ever experienced”; Meryl). Both participants got involved

in petty crimes in order to generate income and as means to survive on the streets. Ricky joined his peers only a few times on hold-ups. Unlike Meryl, he was not caught, but he realized the consequences that such behaviour might have through his personal reflection: "Doing these things can have huge consequences. You can be put to jail, or something may happen to you." He also empathized with the people who were their victims: "I said to myself: I felt pity on the victims. I thought: how would it be if that happens to us." As a consequence, he decided to stay away from delinquency: "That's why I said, what I do is too difficult, and I stopped."

Meryl started running drugs when she was only 12 years old, but after she separated from her first husband and was left with a child to care for, she began to depend on this kind of livelihood in order to survive. At age 19, she was caught and put in jail for three years. She recalls how her jail time became a turning point for her that led to her decision to stay away from delinquency: "Maybe the Lord did not allow me to become like that. That I would run drugs. That's why he gave me a lesson. This is the biggest lesson I ever experienced. That's why I said, when I get out, I will not go back to this place, whatever happens. So that this will not happen to me again."

*"May nagtatawag na tatay, may gumagabay sa iyo"* ("They call me dad, they guide me"; Ricky). Both participants got together with their partner at 15 or 16 years of age. For Meryl, her early partnership was a negative experience from which she derived her learning, while for Ricky it was a source of strength. After having her first child at 16 years, Meryl got separated from her partner. She thought that the partnership would give her the security and care she was looking for, but she learned that her young husband did not really care for his young family and was busy with his own friends: "My living-in early on did not help me. My husband... was a nuisance. I thought my life would change for the better. But that was not the case. It got hard, harder even." Getting separated led to a sense of emancipation. She narrated her advice to one of her peers: "I would not stay long with such a husband. He makes life even harder, he fights with you, even hurts the children. I would say to myself: I don't need a husband." She decided that if ever she would find a partner again, he should be older than her. Her next partner and father of her second and third child was older indeed. Even though he was industrious, she found out that he was taking drugs. Thus, she got separated again. Her last partner was a responsible security guard and fifteen years older than her, but he died after they had four children together. Her children are now her inspiration and strength that keep her

going: “If I would not have children, I would not be able to fulfil my responsibilities. They are my inspiration. They give colour to my life. Even if they are naughty, I am glad. If not because of them, I would not have a family.” The dreams she had for her own life she now projects to her children, particularly her eldest daughter who just graduated from Elementary School: “I said: the dream I was not able to pursue, hopefully you will... I also have dreams, but they did not come true, with all the things that happened to me, all the bad things I went through. I hope they will not happen to you.” Moreover, she imparts the lessons she has learned to her daughter by urging her not to get ‘married’ too early: “You see how my life looks like, because I married early. You should not experience these struggles.”

Ricky narrated how finding a partner led to a sense of solidarity and mutual support and helped him to cope with the challenges of life. He describes his experience as both happy and difficult: “My wife also helped me... because all the struggles, my struggles and her struggles, we put it all together, so that we could help each other... For example, I was sad because I was alone, but she empathized with me. That’s why my wife is a big support to me. I put all my effort into our relationship, despite everything, I love her and she loves me.”

In the same way as with Meryl, his children have become his inspiration, he expresses pride because they are industrious in school, and his dream for them is that they one day will have a better life than he did: “They call me dad, they guide me. They call you dad. And then you see them going to school, they are able to finish school... I tell them, I don’t want them to experience what I had to go through. I want them all to finish school.” His oldest daughter has just graduated from High School and he is happy that she does not plan to have a boyfriend yet: “She wants to study HRM... that’s why she says she does not want to have a boyfriend yet. She really wants to study.”

“*Dasal lang ako ng dasal... doon nalang naging malinaw ang takbo ng isip ko*” (“I prayed and prayed... there my mind became clear”; Meryl). Finally, spirituality and belief in God served as a resource to both participants. Ricky expresses his spirituality and trust in God through participation in religious festivities that provide him with a sense of coherence and identity: “Everything that happens to us we entrust to God... He never neglected us... we have trust and faith in him. That’s why during feast day, holy week, we devote ourselves. For a long time, I have been a devotee, I never miss out on him.”



For Meryl, spirituality is less a communal experience, but rather personal-relational. She narrated how prayer helped her to keep her mind clear and to stick with her convictions when she was left on the streets on her own. In the absence of her mother, God became her substitute parent: “I prayed and prayed... I said, I have lost my father, and my mother is in jail, you are now my parent. Help me, don’t neglect me, I wish my life will not be wrecked. There my mind became clear, that I should not let people without direction influence me.” Her jail time became not only a turning point regarding her delinquent behaviour, but also strengthened her faith. Reading the bible became a personal spiritual exercise for her: “In jail I met people who really trust the Lord, I learned to pray the rosary, to read the bible... there I understood everything. How important it is to use the bible... I couldn’t forget what I read there: My parents may send me away, but the Lord will take care of me. I never forgot that.” Back on the streets, she recalled how she had put all her trust in God, how he answered her prayers, and how she experienced him as her provider when her family did not have enough to eat: “He never neglected us. When I had nothing to cook, I said, my God... my children are hungry today, what should I do? Help me. Then somebody called me: can you help me with this work. Wow, thank you, he heard me immediately, I have enough to buy food and milk for my children.” Meryl has also learned to ask for forgiveness, and she shared that she is daily praying for other people: for forgiveness for those who have sinned, for freedom for those in jail, for healing for those in hospital, and for help for those who nobody pays attention to. She ended her narrative with expressing her dependence on God and her desire to love others in the way she is loved by God: “How he loves us, that’s how we love our neighbour and him.” She now shares her faith with her children, explaining to them how they should pray every day, ask for God’s guidance, and thank him for the things they have received. She explained to her daughter that God is not far away and that he will never stop listening to her: “You know where the Lord is, I told her. He is here, child, in your heart. Even if you don’t talk loudly, if you talk to him in your heart, he hears you.”

### **Outcomes of the Resilience Processes**

The defining characteristics of resilience are adaptive and positive outcomes despite the experience of non-normative adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 2007). Adaptation has to be understood as “multidimensional and developmental” (Masten & Obradovic, 2006), hence positive adaptation as seen among the participants

is not a static outcome but dynamic and still evolving. The outcomes cannot be assigned to anything singular among the processes above, but rather are the result of their interaction.

Currently, both participants show a sense of generativity, as expressed in their care for their children: “I say to myself I am able to support my children. That’s what I do, I concentrate myself on them” (Ricky). All processes contribute to the participants’ desire and effort to impart their experience and lessons learned to their own children. Their children provide them with meaning in their daily struggle, and with a sense of hope for the future. Furthermore, they are not only concerned with their own families, but also with other people. They expressed how they have come to respect and even love others, and provide help to those in need: “Hence it is better to help your neighbours no matter how poor we are” (Ricky).

In order to provide for their children’s needs, both participants have shown perseverance in the face of severe poverty. Their present attitude of hard work and sacrifice is an indication of their resilience in facing the hardships of poverty, as illustrated in the following excerpt: “I worked in construction, when I was done, I pedalled [my side car] again. Then I worked in construction again. And now, pedal again. Pedalling and pedalling, that’s my livelihood [laughs]. Pedalling through life [laughs]. There is sacrifice, sweat, life in poverty means people live off their sweat. If you don’t exert all your effort, nothing will happen to you.” (Ricky)

For the same reason, they both continuously stay away from vice and crimes: “I prefer to work and work hard for my children, in an honest way. I want to work, in order that [our sustenance] does not come from bad things” (Ricky). Being able to provide for their families through a ‘clean’ livelihood provides them with a sense of pride, achievement, and agency despite poverty: “We are burdened with poverty. But it feels good. In spite of it all, you can see positive outcomes from your struggle” (Ricky). Their sense of agency can also be seen in the way they face their problems instead of avoiding them: “You should not run away [from your problems], or take drugs in order to forget. Tomorrow, your problems are still here. Why don’t you face them, find a way out, so that you will be able to solve your problems” (Meryl).

Finally, the way the participants have dealt with their experience provides evidence for their meaning making. They have arrived at a “sense of having made sense”, acceptance, integration of the adversities into their identities

(Park, 2010) and a sense of cohesion (Ungar et al., 2007). Both participants expressed contentment with their lives: “We are able to live here in Manila, we are able to earn our living, I have a sidecar, and we are content. Despite everything, we are able to eat three times a day” (Ricky). Their contentment leads to a sense of thankfulness: “I learned to be thankful ... for what I have received today” (Meryl). They have not only come to accept their past, but their past has become a resource for them as they face their future. They are able to account for the lessons they have learned, and imparting these learnings to their children provides them with a sense of continuity and anticipation of a better future. Meryl narrated how the process of making meaning led to a sense of maturity and integration as observed by others: “That’s why some elderly people tell me that I am like an older person. They say my mind is broad. I tell them, with the depth of what I have gone through, with all my experience, no wonder I have become mature.”

## DISCUSSION

The participants were able to narrate their life experience in a very challenging context, focusing on what contributed to who they are now. Their narratives yielded six interacting resilience processes, leading from the experience of non-normative adversity to positive developmental outcomes, and providing evidence for hidden resilience among them (Figure 1).

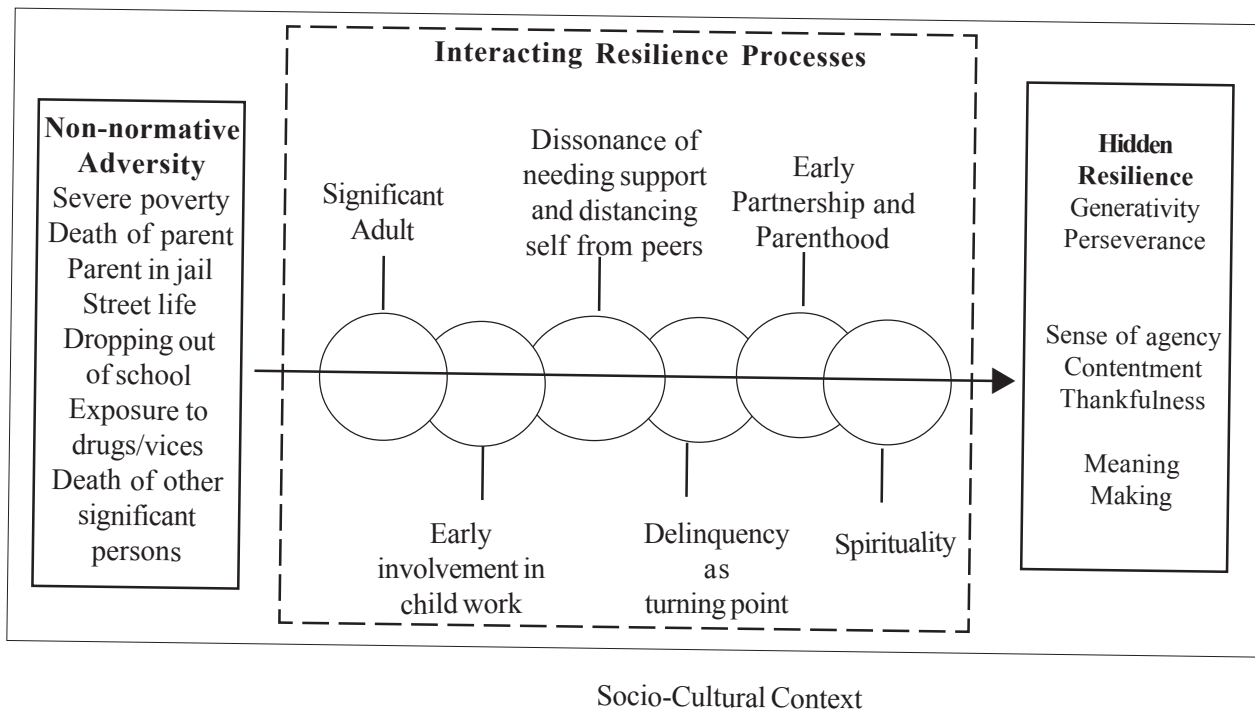
The most significant finding of this study is the way in which the three processes revolving around distancing self from peers, engagement in delinquency, and early parenthood contributed to resilience. These findings are unique for this context and atypical or hidden inasmuch as they are not conventionally considered as resilience promoting processes. Street children usually are not able to find supportive relationships within the context of their families and turn to their peers (Malindi & Theron, 2010). Peers also provided support for the participants in this study; however, they were also drawing them towards risk behaviour. With a growing awareness of this tension, the participants decided to distance themselves from peers in order to stay away from the risk. Instead, they steered towards work opportunities to support themselves and towards the responsibilities of early parenthood. By taking a stand against drugs and vices and navigating towards other resources available to them, they demonstrated personal agency (Ungar,

2006). Furthermore, while delinquent activities served as an important source of income, both participants had learned their lessons from their involvement in delinquency, leading to a deliberate decision to steer away from it. Thus, they went beyond findings from previous studies that have identified “unconventional practices” such as petty crimes as an element of the agency of street children that helps them to survive in the streets (Malindi & Theron, 2010). Moreover, teenage pregnancy and early marriage are usually perceived as detrimental factors (Fagg, Curtis, Cummins, Stansfeld, & Quesnel-Vallée, 2013; Morrison et al., 2014; Rutter, 1987). In this study early parenthood provided the participants with a sense of purpose and belonging. Whether their partnership worked out well or not, they took responsibility for their offspring, who in turn became their source of inspiration and strength. This finding suggests that early partnership and teenage pregnancy is not always a risk, but for the most deprived it may be the only resource available that provides them with a sense of direction and meaning.

This study is consistent with previous findings implicating that child labour among street children is not only a risk factor, but also provides a sense of agency and contribution to their community and thus leading to more resilient functioning (Libório & Ungar, 2010a, 2010b; Sta. Maria, 2010). Early involvement in work was a risk factor for the participants because it pushed them to drop out of school early and exposed them to long hours of work in a difficult environment. On the other hand, it was an important resource when it came to providing for theirs’ and their siblings’ basic needs. Furthermore, engaging in work early on taught them the value of hard work perseverance, and sacrifice, and provided them with a sense of purpose and engagement in productive activities contributing to their families (Sta. Maria et al., 2014), thus entailing another hidden process.

Relationship with significant adults has previously been identified as an important component in resilience processes (Drapeau et al., 2007; Ungar et al., 2007). Both participants recall such relationships, though it is surprising that these significant adults were only present in their lives to the verge of adolescence. Later they talked retrospectively about the lessons they had learned from these adults and how they continued to apply these lessons to their lives. Finally, this study is consistent with previous findings of spirituality and religion being a resilience promoting resource among street children (Malindi & Theron, 2010). In this study, spirituality was expressed both as a personal encounter with God and as participation in communal religious feasts. In both ways, spirituality was a significant source of strength, it

Figure 1. Six interacting resilience processes throughout the life trajectories of the research participants leading from the experience of non-normative adversity to their current resilient functioning. The entire process is situated in the specific sociocultural context of the participants.



provided cohesion, fostered meaning making, and led to respect and care for others. Spirituality as a resilience process has not been given much attention in western contexts, but it is a very natural component in Philippine culture.

Some of the resilience processes identified relate closely to previous findings across other cultures, while other processes seem to be highly context specific, providing further evidence for the importance of understanding resilience as an interactional process negotiated by the individual with his or her socio-cultural context (Ungar, 2006, 2008). Each resilience process sets on in childhood or adolescence, continues to promote resilience into adulthood, and leads towards imparting the experience to their children. In other words, the continuous negotiation towards positive adaptation begins in the past and reaches into the future. Therefore, resilience, as it arises from the narratives of the participants, has to be seen as a dynamic, on-going and context specific process, rather than a static, universal trait (Rutter, 2007). The narratives of the street dweller participants provide illustration for adaptive processes that can be understood as their version of resilience. Inasmuch as these processes and their corresponding outcomes reflect an idiosyncratic adaptation to adversities, they provide evidence for hidden resilience: Despite their poverty, the participants have become content and are able to look beyond their own needs and to care for others in need. Despite not completing their schooling and not being formally employable, they pursue a livelihood with great perseverance, through which they are able to provide for their families. Despite having limited opportunities, they have a sense of agency in acting on their situation and bringing about positive change. Despite their seemingly hopeless situation, they have great hopes and dreams for their children and for their future. Hidden from the eyes of the world, they are heroes in their own context. They give advice to others and are respected by people even older than themselves. They have not just shown how to survive, but how to maintain their dignity in the midst of poverty and adversity.

## IMPLICATIONS

The adversities the participants have experienced illustrate the vulnerability and fragility of their lives in particular and the lives of children of street families in general. Their narratives exemplify how they lack opportunities and basic rights, such as shelter, education, and the care and

protection of their parents. Their families seem to be caught in a cycle of poverty with no real chances of escape, as seen in the intergenerational cycle of poverty and street dwelling reaching from their grandparents to their children. Even though the participants attribute their poverty to individual and familial causes (similar to Tuason, 2008), their narratives expose the structural injustice and government neglect of the poorest of the poor in Philippine society. For example, parents are put in jail without consideration of the plight of their children. Even when their parents die, no social services are available to them. When they would like to study, which is a basic human right, they are left to fend on their own. Instead of being upset about the lack of opportunities and neglect by the wider society, the participants are left with a sense of shame about their experience. It is difficult for them to see beyond their own experience and understand societal causes of their fate. Furthermore, their voices remain unheard by the wider public; hence they remain powerless to bring about socio-structural change. Nevertheless, this study showed how narrative research can give them voice (Liebenberg & Theron, 2015a; Ponterotto, 2010), enabling them to move from a position of vulnerability and powerlessness to agency and empowerment. As expressed by one participant after the interviews, the research process led to personal change by verbalizing their experiences. They felt listened to, were able to process some of the emotional pain involved, overcome the fear of rejection, and move on from their past. In that sense, the naturalistic approach to narrative research had progressed further into an interactional co-construction of a life story between participants and researcher (Esin, 2011).

## LIMITATIONS

A very limited number of participants provided an in-depth understanding of the individual's experience and idiosyncratic explanations of the processes involved (Theron & Phasha, 2015; Ungar, 2006). The data collected in this study relies on retrospective narratives of the participants and may therefore be distorted by their memory, selection, and interpretation. Facts presented here are constructed in the process of conducting the narrative interviews. Due to the limited number of participants, conclusions from this study cannot be generalized beyond the research participants situated in their specific socio-cultural context.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Future studies can build on these findings, employing a more representative sample for the population of grown-up street children in Manila. A mixed methods approach could help to generalize findings beyond single participants. Future studies may also explore resilience processes among other socio-economic groups in the Philippines in order to exemplify similarities and differences. Further qualitative studies on resilience among other marginalized groups may foster a more positive view of them as demonstrating agency in their engagement with the environment.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study provides further evidence for hidden resilience among grown-up street children. Employing a narrative design has helped to elicit resilience processes throughout their developmental history with minimum researcher intervention. It has been shown how marginalized and educationally deprived people are able to make meaning of their experiences through narratives. The resulting resilience processes are culturally embedded with both similarities and differences to other socio-cultural contexts. Better understanding of these often hidden and atypical processes furthers a positive view of street dwelling children with strengths and agency, actively negotiating the streets and navigating towards resilience. Acknowledging hidden and unconventional ways of adaptation can help shape interventions that build on these resilience processes and invite street children to be co-constructors of their destiny.

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## Appendix A:

### Narrative Interview Guide Questions

Initial interviews:

1. *Pakikuwento mo ang karanasan mo sa buhay mula sa pagkabata hanggang ngayon, at paano mo hinarap ang mahirap na buhay sa lansangan.* (Please tell me about your life experience from early childhood up to now, and how you coped with the adversities of living in the streets?)
2. *Ano ang ginawa mo para makarating ka kung nasaan ka na ngayon?* (Please tell me what you did so that you arrived at where you are today.)
3. *Paano mo hinarap ang mga kahirapan at pagsubok? Ano at sino ang tumulong sa iyo? Ano ang tulong na nakuha mo?* (What did you do to cope with these difficulties? What and who helped you? What resources were you able access?)
4. *Paano naging maayos ang buhay mo sa kabila ng mahirap na pinanggalingan mo?* (How come you are doing so well in your life right now, considering where you have come from?)

Follow-up interviews:

1. *Paano mo hinarap ang mga kahirapan at pag-subok: kamatayan ng tatay/nanay/asawa/kapatid, pagkukulong sa nanay, pag-iisa sa lansangan, trabaho bilang bata, pag-hiwalay sa asawa?* (How did you face the following difficulties and struggles: death of father/mother/ husband/siblings, being left alone on the streets, mother in jail, work as a child, separation from husband?)
2. *Paano naging maayos ang buhay mo sa kabila ng mahirap na pinanggalingan mo?* (How come your life turned out well despite of all these struggles?)
3. *Paano nakatulong sa iyo ang: trabaho noong bata ka pa, pag-sarili ng karanasan mo, barkada, pag-asawa, Diyos, ang mga taong nakakatanda sa iyo?* (How did the following help you: work as child, keeping your experience to yourself, peers, marriage, God, significant adults?)
4. *Ano pang nakatulong sa iyo noong bata ka pa?* (What else was helpful to you when you were still young?)
5. *Ano pa ang ginawa mo noong bata ka pa para mabuhay ka?* (How did you survive as a child?)