The Pathways to Resilience Research Project (New Zealand):
Whāia to huanui kia toa

Conceptual Development of the Pathways to Resilience Study

Technical Report 1

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way (Tolstoy, 1972)

Tolstoy made this observation in his epic 19th century novel Anna Karenina. In the many years since that observation, the dimensions of happiness, the factors that shape the capacity of families to achieve happiness (or in more contemporary terms, perhaps, wellbeing) and in the process to create the optimum conditions for the growth and development of children has been explored repeatedly. The ways in which communities can support families to care well for their children, the balance of responsibility between the family and the state over the care and protection of children and the ways in which factors both within and beyond the control of individual families shape the life course for children as they grow to adulthood are a focus of considerable interest and often heated debate (Minister for Social Development and Employment, 2012; Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2012).

Public debates have focused on how to enhance the welfare of the most vulnerable children including how much control the state should have on parents and whether or not the state, through the courts, should be able to forbid people to care for children because of the risks they pose, based on past behaviour, to the safety and wellbeing of children (Minister for Social Development and Employment, 2011). In education current debates focus on the mix of factors that will have the most impact on children's educational development (such as developing national standards for the assessment of children's progress, reducing class sizes and enhancing pre and in-service teacher training) and how to retain vulnerable youth at school so that they can achieve academically. Of primary concern is understanding the impact that different sorts of policies and practices will have on

the wellbeing of children and their families. The successful raising of children through adolescence to adulthood is a key task for society and one about which there is frequently strong disagreement in regard to how best to facilitate the work of families and communities.

It is within these contexts that this research is located. This research contributes to the debate about how best to support families and their children. It responds to both the uniqueness of individual family unhappiness (in Tolstoy's terms) and also the learning that can be generated from the systematic study of young people's lives when things have gone wrong for them and their families. In particular this research focuses upon young people aged between 12 and 17 years of age who at the time of the research were clients of two or more service systems (juvenile justice, child welfare, alternative or special education services, or mental health services). These youth faced numerous risks in their personal and social worlds; they were also strong capable young people with much potential and had navigated to resources and supports in their social networks (Ungar, 2007). The goal of the research was to better understand the roles that services and social supports played in mitigating risk and enhancing the capacity of youth to achieve good outcomes.

The research was funded by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment between 2008 and 2014. It involved a sample of 1494 youth selected from a range of communities across New Zealand. Approximately forty percent of these youth were involved in two or more service systems including child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health or additional or special educational services. These services were provided by statutory and non-governmental (NGO) providers. A description of the study population is provided in The Pathways to Resilience Study (New Zealand): Whāia to huanui kia toa: The Human Face of Vulnerability- Characteristics of the Pathways to Resilience Youth Population: Technical Report 3.

Linked to its parent study based at the Resilience Research Centre in Halifax Canada, these were the first studies anywhere in the world that investigated the ways in which experiences across service systems influenced outcomes for youth with complex needs. Taking ecological and youth-centred perspectives, the research not only considered multiple service experiences, it also took account of patterns within the social and material environment and interpersonal relationships within the lives of youth who were clients of multiple services. In this way it focused on explaining the ways in which youth "negotiated" for, and "navigated" (Ungar et al., 2013) towards the social determinants of wellbeing with their families and the service systems that provided them with support, treatment and care. Ungar and colleagues (2013) argue for resources to be activated around youth that reduce risks alongside support that enables youth to harness their own resilience resources to achieve good outcomes. Youth who are most at risk of poor outcomes are typically clients of more than one service (Garland et al., 2003; Hazen et al., 2004; Jones, Gutman & Platt, 2013; Loeber et al., 1998) however, neither the significance of links between education, child welfare, mental health and juvenile justice systems nor the ways in which youth and their families experience accessing resources and supports from multiple service systems have been systematically investigated. The current research seeks to address this gap in current knowledge.

The primary focus of the Pathways to Resilience research programme was to understand the role of service systems in mitigating the effects of adversity and in maximising the potential of good outcomes for youth with complex needs. Accordingly, the research focused upon service experiences of youth involved in more than one service system, the role which other supports and resources played in their lives and the link between these two sets of factors and youth reports of a range of different outcomes. This was accomplished through a mixed methodology; data was gathered on the risk and
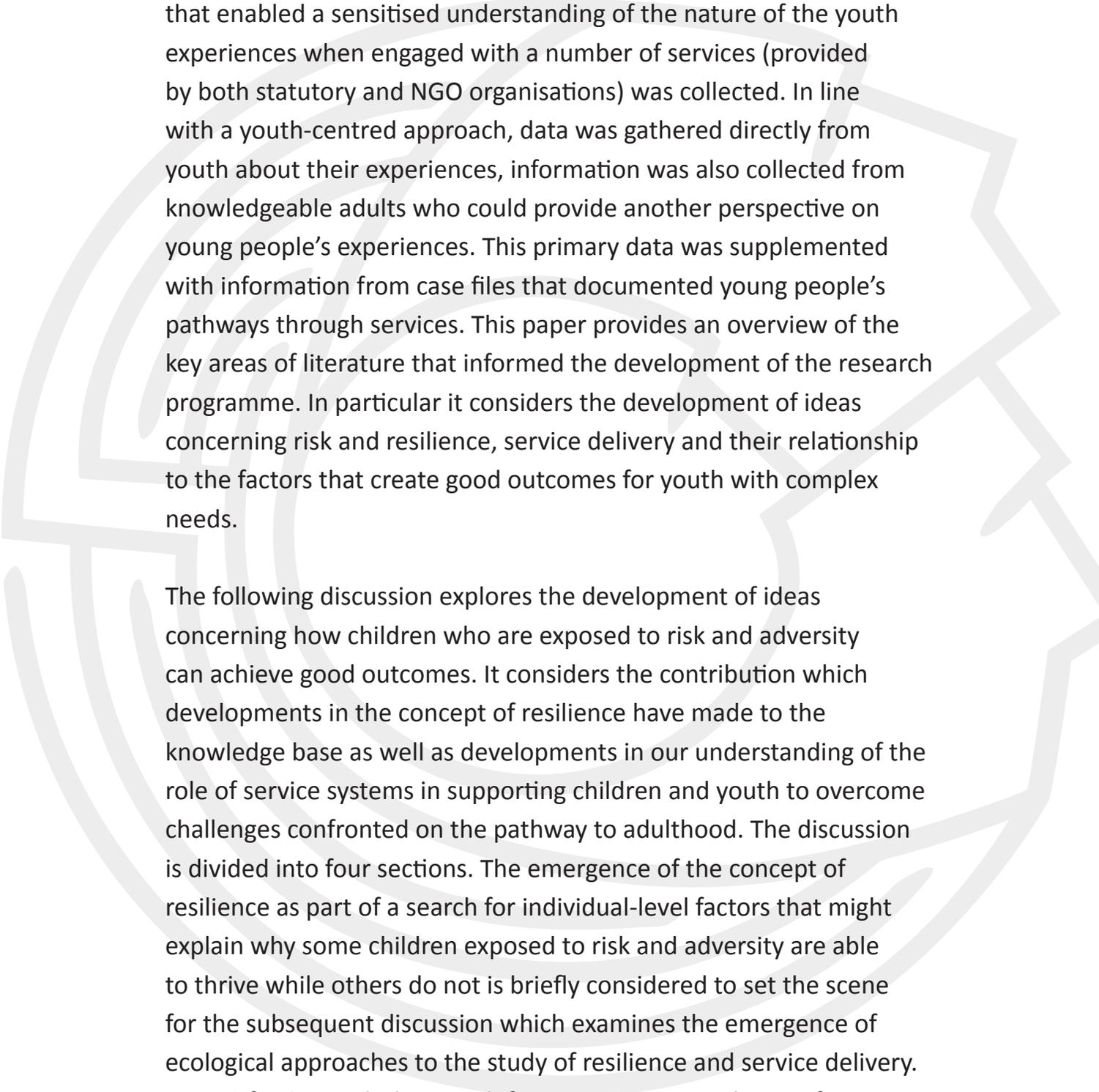
resilience profiles of the young people and information on the social ecology of youth was also captured. In addition, information that enabled a sensitised understanding of the nature of the youth experiences when engaged with a number of services (provided by both statutory and NGO organisations) was collected. In line with a youth-centred approach, data was gathered directly from youth about their experiences, information was also collected from knowledgeable adults who could provide another perspective on young people's experiences. This primary data was supplemented with information from case files that documented young people's pathways through services. This paper provides an overview of the key areas of literature that informed the development of the research programme. In particular it considers the development of ideas concerning risk and resilience, service delivery and their relationship to the factors that create good outcomes for youth with complex needs.

The following discussion explores the development of ideas concerning how children who are exposed to risk and adversity can achieve good outcomes. It considers the contribution which developments in the concept of resilience have made to the knowledge base as well as developments in our understanding of the role of service systems in supporting children and youth to overcome challenges confronted on the pathway to adulthood. The discussion is divided into four sections. The emergence of the concept of resilience as part of a search for individual-level factors that might explain why some children exposed to risk and adversity are able to thrive while others do not is briefly considered to set the scene for the subsequent discussion which examines the emergence of ecological approaches to the study of resilience and service delivery. Dissatisfaction with the search for a convincing catalogue of traits and characteristics that weighted the odds for children to 'triumph over adversity' stimulated the emergence of a wider search for
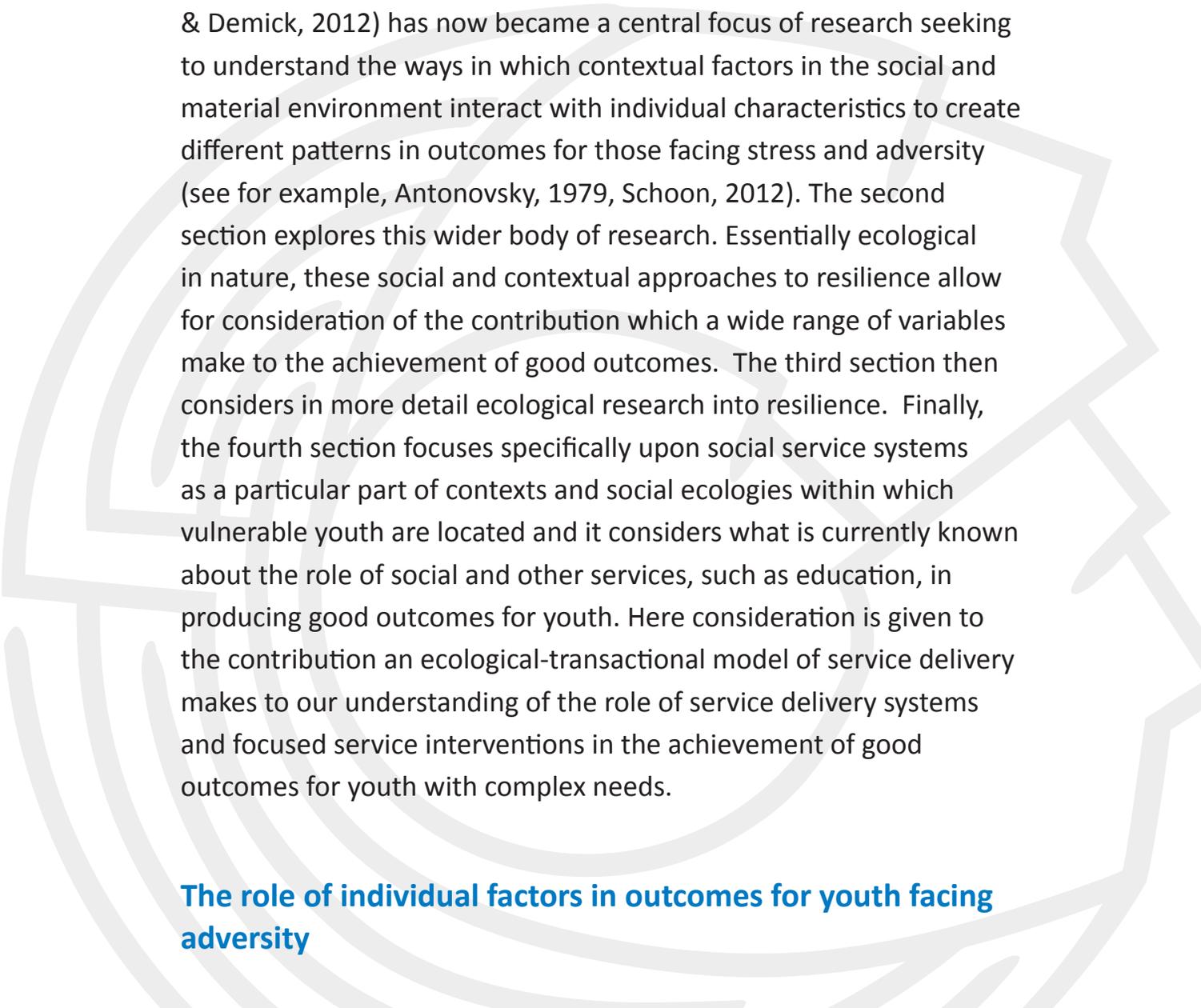
understanding concerning the ways in which resilience was related to positive outcomes. The person-in-environment exchange (Lipsitt & Demick, 2012) has now became a central focus of research seeking to understand the ways in which contextual factors in the social and material environment interact with individual characteristics to create different patterns in outcomes for those facing stress and adversity (see for example, Antonovsky, 1979, Schoon, 2012). The second section explores this wider body of research. Essentially ecological in nature, these social and contextual approaches to resilience allow for consideration of the contribution which a wide range of variables make to the achievement of good outcomes. The third section then considers in more detail ecological research into resilience. Finally, the fourth section focuses specifically upon social service systems as a particular part of contexts and social ecologies within which vulnerable youth are located and it considers what is currently known about the role of social and other services, such as education, in producing good outcomes for youth. Here consideration is given to the contribution an ecological-transactional model of service delivery makes to our understanding of the role of service delivery systems and focused service interventions in the achievement of good outcomes for youth with complex needs.

The role of individual factors in outcomes for youth facing adversity

The relationship between exposure to broad-based disadvantage during childhood and poor outcomes later in adolescence and adulthood is well established (see for example, Farrington, et al., 1990; Hawkins, et al., 1992; Hopkins, et al., 2012; Jones, et al., 2013; Loeber, 1990; Patterson, et al., 1989; Rutter & Giller, 1983). There is also an enduring concern with understanding the factors that give children facing adversity developmental advantages (Garmezy,

1971; Rutter & Madge, 1976; Werner & Smith, 1992). For many decades psychology focused on expanding our understanding of the characteristics of individual children who appeared to be able to thrive despite exposure to risk and profound disadvantage. The interest in understanding why some children appeared to develop well in the face of significant adversity; the mysteries of the so-called 'invulnerable child' (Anthony & Cohler, 1987; Supkoff et al., 2012; Schoon, 2012) have been the focus of much attention. For instance, intelligence and problem solving abilities bring certain advantages for youth exposed to adversity (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Herrenkohl, et al., 1994; Kandel et al., 1988; Masten et al., 1988; Seifer, Sameroff, et al., 1992). Factors and attributes such as the meaning children attribute to various risks as well as personality, temperament and behaviour (for example, novelty seeking, self esteem and neuroticism) and capacity to deal with challenges have also been noted as bringing advantages for youth exposed to adversity (Edwards, et al., 2005; Fergusson & Horwood 2003; Greenberg, 2006; Haeffel & Grigorenko, 2007; Hjemdal, et al., 2007; Luthar, 1991; Tremblay, 2005; Werner & Smith, 1982; Werner, 1989; Wyman, et al., 1991). In this regard, two routes have been proposed by which personality factors either bolster resilience or increase susceptibility to risk. Personality factors may influence the threshold at which the individual reacts to environmental adversity or they may influence individual behaviour and choices that then increase or decrease rates of problem outcomes (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003).

Biological and genetic factors have also been argued to play a role in positive development for children exposed to risk (Bartels & Hudziak, 2007; Caspi, et al., 2000; Caspi, et al., 2002; Perry & Szalavitz, 2006; Romeo & McEwen, 2006; Rutter, et al., 2009). Here the consensus appears to be that the genetic make-up of the individual can play a role in mitigating the worst effects of stress, or alternatively that factors in the environment can trigger a particular developmental

response that turns out to be positive (Rutter, 2006). However, it is also clear that while biological or genetic factors may predispose children to reacting to certain types of risks or weight the odds of certain types of outcomes, child development is highly plastic and so biological or genetic makeup does not determine outcomes (Brim & Kagan 1980; Clarke & Clarke 2003, Sroufe & Rutter 1984; Lerner 1984).

Gender has been examined to identify whether or not it plays a role in mitigating certain types of adversity. For instance, the effects of parental separation/divorce have been found to have less impact on females than males (Emery & O'Leary, 1982; Hetherington, 1989; Porter & O'Leary, 1980; Rutter, 1990; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Further, gender has been observed to make a differential contribution to resilience depending upon the nature of the risk concerned. For instance, Fergusson and Horwood (2003) observed that contrary to what had been argued previously, femaleness itself was not a generalised protective factor and maleness a generalised risk factor, instead a more nuanced understanding is required. They found that being female reduced resilience to internalising risk and increased resilience to externalised risk and the opposite applied for males.

Having begun five decades ago with a concern to understand the way in which the innate capacities of children enabled them to survive and thrive in hostile social environments, research is now focused upon a more nuanced and contextually geared understanding of the processes that can potentiate good outcomes. Whether research takes as its point of departure neurophysiology or or culture writ large, there is an emerging consensus that it is factors at a range of levels in interaction with each other and within children's environments that make the difference in moderating the impact of adversity and stressors on children's development. Contextual factors such as the quality of key relationships, the nature of

neighbourhoods, the impact of structural matters such as poverty, the role of educational resources and so on, must be added into the equation. Attention now moves to consider what is known about the role of contextual factors in good outcomes for youth with complex needs.

The role of contextual factors in outcomes for youth facing adversity

While research that has focused on individual-level factors has explained some of the variance in outcomes, there is good evidence that these latent capacities do not account for sufficient improvements in outcomes for youth exposed to risk to provide all the answers (Cicchetti, 2010; Sroufe, et al., 2005). A focus on the individual alone is not going to generate sufficiently robust explanations to give us confidence that the factors that play the most powerful role in the risk-resilience-outcome equation have been identified. There is growing evidence that suggests that resilience can best be represented conceptually as a person-in-environment exchange (Lipsitt & Demick, 2012, p. 48) rather than a one-way process.

Quality relationships and involvement in activities that extend social networks into pro-social domains have consistently been shown to play a key role in improving outcomes for youth facing high levels of adversity. Participation and involvement in community activities, particularly where these lead to meaningful relationships with non-familial adults have been found to bring some advantages to vulnerable children (Jenkins & Smith, 1990; Werner, 1989). This appears to work in two ways, by increasing their exposure to pro-social relationships and by reducing their exposure to 'delinquent' peers (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003). In a similar way, the capacity

to stay engaged at school brings benefits to youth who experience high levels of background adversity while disengagement heightens overall risk (Losel & Bliesener, 1994; Kia-Keating & Heidi-Ellis, 2007; Nuttman-Shwartz, 2012, p. 415). The nature of the relationships children have with other children has an impact on outcomes for children from high risk environments such that positive peer relationships contribute to overall resilience (Benard, 1991; Davis, et al., 2000; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Werner, 1989) while association with anti-social peers generates heightened risk (Keenan, et al., 1995; Laub & Sampson, 2003).

Research has demonstrated that the family and the contextual circumstances that surround family life can also have a significant impact on outcomes. In this regard, attention has centred on factors within the family or caregiving network. Warm, nurturing parenting styles that create strong, supportive parent-child bonds provide protection from exposure to harm and risk and bolster coping capacities (Bradley, et al., 1994; Gribble et al., 1993; Herrenkohl, et al., 1994; Jenkins & Smith, 1990; Minton, 1988; Seagoe, 1975; Seifer, et al., 1992; Shurkin, 1992; Werner, 1989; Wyman, et al., 1991). Strong parental attachments mitigate the effects of exposure to family adversity (Egeland, et al., 1993; Fergusson & Horwood, 2003) and have a protective role in terms of contributing a more generalised resilience as well (Fonagy, et al., 1994). On the other hand, disrupted parenting (Farrington, 1996), parental mental health issues (Supkoff, et al., 2012), aggressive and hostile parenting (McCord, 1991), abuse and neglect during childhood and early adolescence (Kendall-Tackett, et al., 1993) all increase the likelihood of poor outcomes for children.

The nature of parent/child attachment and peer relationships together may play a role in shaping either vulnerability or resilience in the face of adversity (Benard, 1990; Benard, 1992; Davis, et al., 2000;

Fonagy, et al., 1994). Although as Fergusson and Horwood (2003) demonstrate, the processes at work here may be more complex than they at first appear because strong parental attachments appear to confer resilience advantages in terms of internalising risks but not for those related to externalising behaviours. Avoidance of negative peer associations provides some benefits in terms of reduced risks of externalising behaviours during adolescence (Farrington et al., 1990; Fergusson & Horwood, 1996; Fergusson, et al., 1995; Hawkins et al., 1992; Quinton, et al.,, 1993). Furthermore, Walsh (2012, p. 174) argues that resilience is nurtured through quality relationships and suggests that the focus on the negative impact of parental dysfunction on resilience may have blinded us to the compensatory role that other relational resources within a child's network might be able to play in terms of bolstering resilience. Hopkins and colleagues (Hopkins, et al., 2012, p. 438) agree on this point and note the importance for vulnerable youth of having access to at least one adult who demonstrates a capacity to care and provide support when parental capacity is limited. These authors also underscore the importance of vulnerable youth having access to a positive peer group (p. 431). Laub and Sampson (2003) suggest that being able to build positive peer relationships is an important turning point in terms of capacity to sustain changes. These works all draw attention to the critical significance of positive relationships and the availability of ongoing commitment by adults to the positive development of children and young people (Halvorsen, 2009).

There is a consensus then that youth exposed to high levels of multiple risks including risks created by economic impoverishment, family violence and neglectful or harsh parenting are at heightened risk of adverse outcomes (Bolger & Patterson, 2003; Evans, et al., 2005; Lansford, et al., 2002; Margolin &Vickerman, 2007; Owens & Shaw, 2003; Yexley, et al., 2002; reviews Gapen, et al., 2011; Holt, et al., 2008). High levels of ongoing exposure in childhood to adversity

on a wide front is related to corresponding increases in rates of both externalising and internalising disorders as children mature into adulthood (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003). For instance, youth exposed to six or more adverse factors during childhood had higher rates of externalising disorders (such as, association with a delinquent peer group) and internalising disorders (such as low self-esteem) that were 1.8 times higher. However even at high levels of exposure to adversity, not all youth so exposed develop problems. This suggests the presence of resilience processes and support systems that can mitigate the effects of exposure to adversity (Ungar et al., 2012).

Attention has also been paid to the particular challenges children who face extreme adversity confront. Ungar (2011, p. 3) identifies a range of investigations that have focused upon the experiences of child soldiers, children separated from caregivers as a result of war, forced child labour and children who are either the victims or witnesses of violence (Barber, 2006; Betancourt, 2012; Bolger & Patterson, 2003; Carey-Trefzer, 1949; Cox, et al., 2007; Denov & Maclure, 2007; Garmezy, 1983; Holt, et al., 2008; Liebel, 2004; Panter-Brick, 2002; Shamai, et al., 2007; Solomon & Laufer, 2005; Taylor, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996; Woodhead, 2004). A common thread in the findings from these works has been that exposure to violence per se is less damaging than is the separation from key caregiving figures, hinting again at the powerful role of attachment and positive, enduring relationships for children's good development. As argued above, these studies alert us to the significance of understanding the nature of the relationship between the child and the caregiving adults around them as they grow and develop. They also highlight the need to understand the local context and meaning system within which behaviour is embedded. In addition, the important role of community-based relationships in supporting the reintegration of children exposed to severe trauma has been identified as an important part of building resilience and enhancing outcomes

(Betancourt, 2012).

Operationalising cultural and social-level variables presents some significant methodological challenges for research (Rutter, 2012). Attention has been paid to teasing out the role of cultural and wider social factors in enhancing resilience in the positive development of children although the body of research here is less comprehensive than that focused on individual level variables (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007; Lee, et al., 2007; McCubbin,et al., 1998; Ungar, et al., 2007; 2008). The focus has been upon understanding the ways in which resilience can be enhanced when the specific characteristics, norms and values of a population are explicitly taken account of in interventions and support systems. For instance, Berliner and colleagues identified that changes in social systems and structures played an important role in recovery for youth exposed to adversity (Berliner, et al., 2012). LaBoucane-Benson (2005), Minton (1988), Seagoe (1975) and Shurkin (1992) have all highlighted the value of understanding resilience as a negotiated process that was situated within specific cultural and social milieu, while Schoon (2012, p. 147) made the case that the passage of time must also be considered part of the social ecology of resilience.

What these studies show us is that resilience is fundamentally an interactional and developmental construct and that processes and interactions that take place at one point in time influence the nature of subsequent adaptations and responses. Research draws attention to the contextually sensitive nature of resilience. For instance, a study of school disengagement by urban Black youth (Dei, et al., 1997) demonstrated that rather than the negative outcome, which on the face of it the dominant social discourse around school failure would suggest it to be, withdrawal from school was in fact an atypical but positive coping strategy. Despite the potential long term consequences of non-achievement of high school credentials, the young people in this study nonetheless experienced non-

attendance as a positive protective strategy. Educational success did not offer these youth a viable pathway to employment nor did it bring social status within their community. Other work has also identified that what might to an outside observer appear to be disordered or dysfunctional behaviour is in fact a positive adaptation to circumstances. For instance, Hine and Welford (2012) reported on research into girls' violence and in this regard argued that fighting was a survival strategy for young women who faced high levels of threat to their personal and physical wellbeing. In this sense their acts of violence needed to be read as expressions of agency and self-empowerment (p. 167) rather than as simply dysfunctional and destructive behaviour. As well as highlighting that resilience fluctuates over time in response to changes in the social and material environment, such understandings point to the need for a more finely-tuned understanding of outcomes that take account of the ways in which resilience will manifest itself differently depending on context. Our own research has shown the importance of a nuanced and sensitive understanding of resilience that takes account of contextual factors. This includes recognising that a resource at different points in a child's life can facilitate either development of resilience or increased levels of risk. Such an approach calls for caution in seeking single solutions or explanations. It emphasises that individuals can be more or less resilient and that such a status will change over time as a result of the complex interactions between individuals and their social and physical environments. In short, there are no single developmental pathways that predict good outcomes and such outcomes are profoundly time and context dependent. This research suggests that we should be less enthusiastic about looking for causes and effects and more interested in building a subtle understanding of the complicated ways in which interactional processes help children develop in many different contexts (Sanders, et al., 2012).
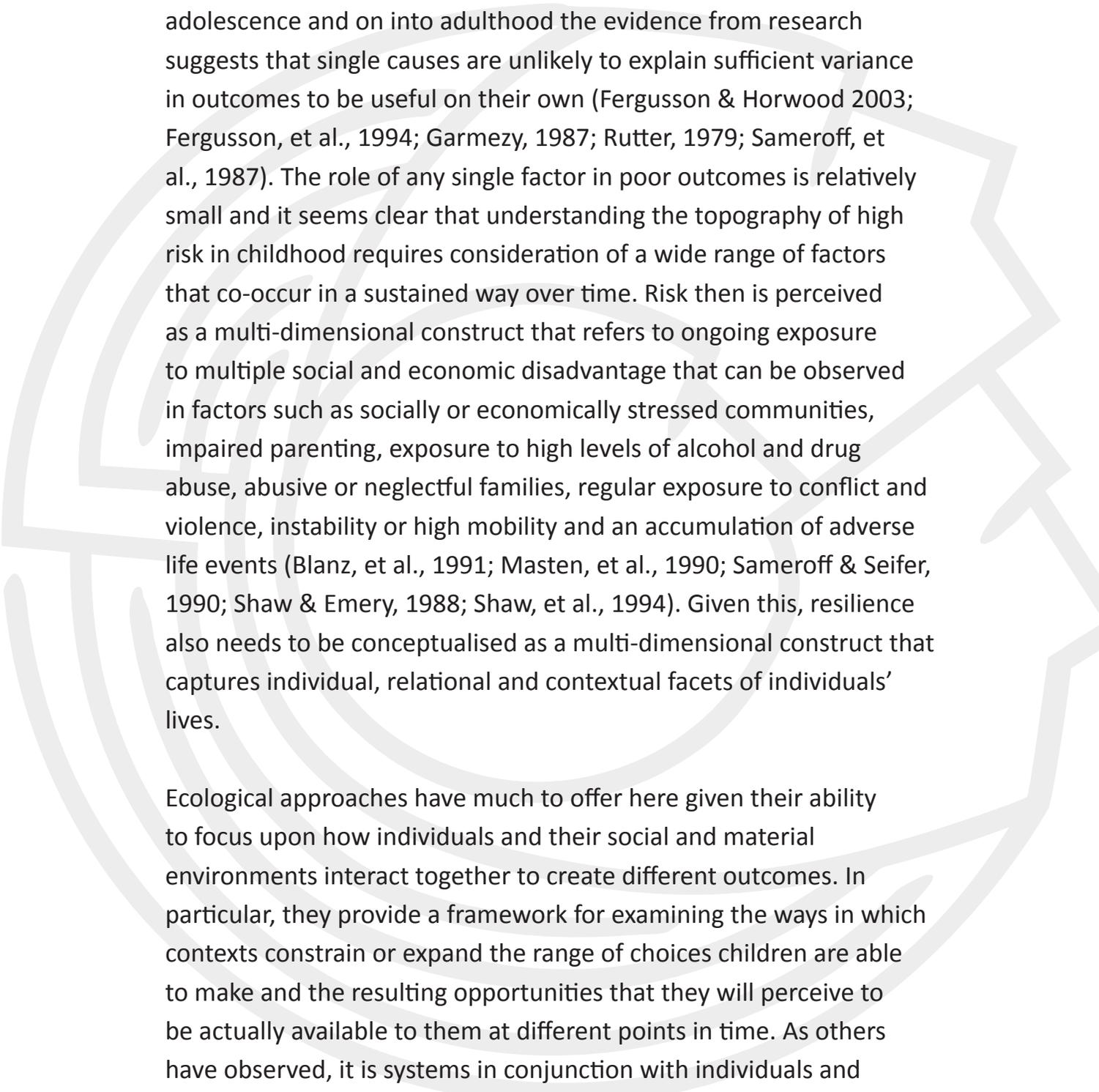
While policy and popular discourse has tended to focus on single factors in the search for explanations for poor outcomes in adolescence and on into adulthood the evidence from research suggests that single causes are unlikely to explain sufficient variance in outcomes to be useful on their own (Fergusson & Horwood 2003; Fergusson, et al., 1994; Garmezy, 1987; Rutter, 1979; Sameroff, et al., 1987). The role of any single factor in poor outcomes is relatively small and it seems clear that understanding the topography of high risk in childhood requires consideration of a wide range of factors that co-occur in a sustained way over time. Risk then is perceived as a multi-dimensional construct that refers to ongoing exposure to multiple social and economic disadvantage that can be observed in factors such as socially or economically stressed communities, impaired parenting, exposure to high levels of alcohol and drug abuse, abusive or neglectful families, regular exposure to conflict and violence, instability or high mobility and an accumulation of adverse life events (Blanz, et al., 1991; Masten, et al., 1990; Sameroff & Seifer, 1990; Shaw & Emery, 1988; Shaw, et al., 1994). Given this, resilience also needs to be conceptualised as a multi-dimensional construct that captures individual, relational and contextual facets of individuals' lives.

Ecological approaches have much to offer here given their ability to focus upon how individuals and their social and material environments interact together to create different outcomes. In particular, they provide a framework for examining the ways in which contexts constrain or expand the range of choices children are able to make and the resulting opportunities that they will perceive to be actually available to them at different points in time. As others have observed, it is systems in conjunction with individuals and relationships that together create the opportunities for change; these wider systems of support possess the resources vulnerable youth need to create opportunities for positive adaption (Ungar, et

al., 2012; Lerner, 2006; Zautra, et al., 2008). Understanding context requires attention to how adults around the child (parents/caregivers, relatives, professionals, informal contacts) and factors in the wider cultural and social environment combine to enhance or constrain outcomes. It is this understanding that is embodied within an ecological understanding of resilience.

Ecological understandings of resilience

In the 1980s Rutter (1987) argued that resilience was a process rather than a single characteristic or set of characteristics inherent in particular individuals. The accumulating evidence suggests that the contribution which any single factor (individual characteristics, family adversity, and peer group) makes in mitigating poor outcomes is relatively small (Fergusson & Horwood 2003; Fergusson, et al., 1994; Garmezy, 1987; Rutter, 1979; Sameroff, et al., 1987). Ungar (2011) has argued that the focus upon identifying and documenting the contribution different protective and compensatory factors make to good outcomes at different ecological levels has led to a degree of reductionism where the focus has been upon isolating and measuring the role played by one or two factors, to the exclusion of the role that combinations of variables might play in mediating observed outcomes. The mechanisms that allow resilience to potentiate good outcomes are complex and require a focus that moves beyond consideration of single or small numbers of factors. Accordingly, the focus has shifted from a search for single factors to a more broad-based exploration of resources, characteristics and processes that may operate together or in tension and which are located in a range of places from the individual right through to the structural level (Bottrell, 2009).

Longitudinal studies have been particularly important in laying the
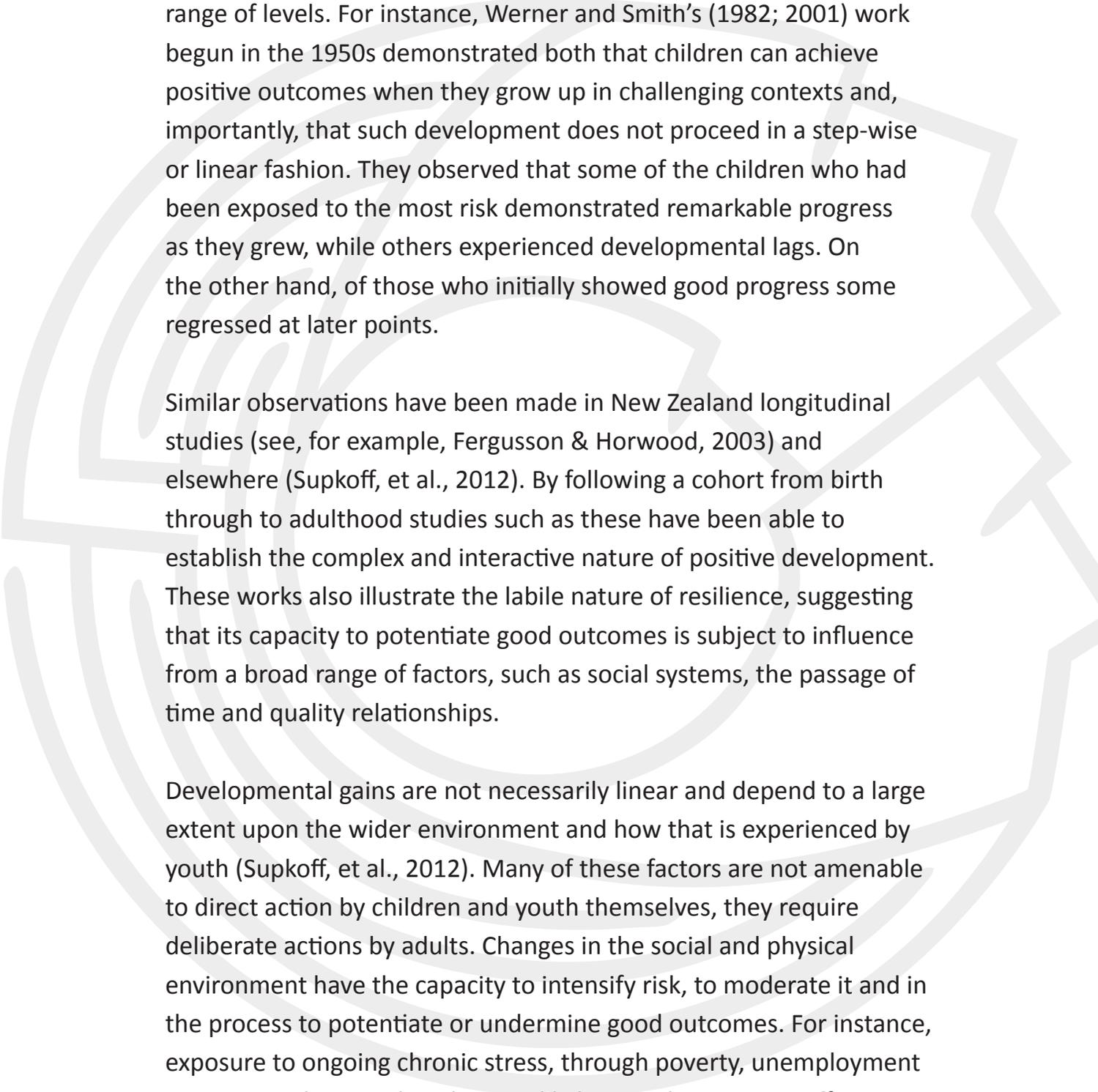
foundation for an ecologically-oriented understanding of resilience that allows examination of the role of diverse factors operating at a range of levels. For instance, Werner and Smith's (1982; 2001) work begun in the 1950s demonstrated both that children can achieve positive outcomes when they grow up in challenging contexts and, importantly, that such development does not proceed in a step-wise or linear fashion. They observed that some of the children who had been exposed to the most risk demonstrated remarkable progress as they grew, while others experienced developmental lags. On the other hand, of those who initially showed good progress some regressed at later points.

Similar observations have been made in New Zealand longitudinal studies (see, for example, Fergusson & Horwood, 2003) and elsewhere (Supkoff, et al., 2012). By following a cohort from birth through to adulthood studies such as these have been able to establish the complex and interactive nature of positive development. These works also illustrate the labile nature of resilience, suggesting that its capacity to potentiate good outcomes is subject to influence from a broad range of factors, such as social systems, the passage of time and quality relationships.

Developmental gains are not necessarily linear and depend to a large extent upon the wider environment and how that is experienced by youth (Supkoff, et al., 2012). Many of these factors are not amenable to direct action by children and youth themselves, they require deliberate actions by adults. Changes in the social and physical environment have the capacity to intensify risk, to moderate it and in the process to potentiate or undermine good outcomes. For instance, exposure to ongoing chronic stress, through poverty, unemployment or ongoing abuse and neglect are likely to undermine any efforts to build capacities or assets in other areas of a young person's life. Similarly, crisis or stress points, such as the sudden loss of a key

person or a major transition (for example, changing schools) can negate the impact of efforts in other areas to build resilience (Phelps, et al., 2007; Walsh, 2006). As Ungar suggests (2011, p. 2), attention needs to be given to a wide range of factors *inter alia* changes in household or school, new relationships, the loss of people who are important to the youth, absence of strong bonds with caregivers, presence of factors such as alcohol and drug abuse and violence, characteristics of neighbourhoods in terms of both resources and risks as well as changes in employment and material status, as all of these have the potential to influence outcomes (Ungar, et al., 2012).

There is an emerging consensus that factors at a range of levels in interaction with each other make the largest contribution to modifying the impact of stressful environments on children's development (Cicchetti & Garmezy 1993; Cicchetti & Sroufe, 1987; Luthar, et al., 2000; Sameroff, 1983; Schoon, 2012). So, for instance, research is exploring the impact of neighbourhood characteristics and chronic adversity upon children's brain development (Arnsten, 2009; Gunnar, 2007; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000), as well as the interaction between different types and amounts of risks and outcomes (Taylor, et al., 2002) and the ways in which both risk and resilience may vary depending on culture and context (Ungar, 2008). The emphasis on processes and contexts inevitably calls for a conceptualisation of resilience that is culturally sensitive (Ungar, 2011, p. 8). Importantly, cultural relativity requires acceptance that developmental milestones are not universal across cultures and contexts. While the effects of globalisation cannot be ignored, neither can the role of locally-based meaning systems, values and practices in defining what characteristics of children, families and communities are valued at any point in time (Berliner, et al., 2012), and therefore what will be the most meaningful and therefore most useful resources to call upon to moderate observed risks and enhance resilience. As Ungar (2011, p. 9) observes:
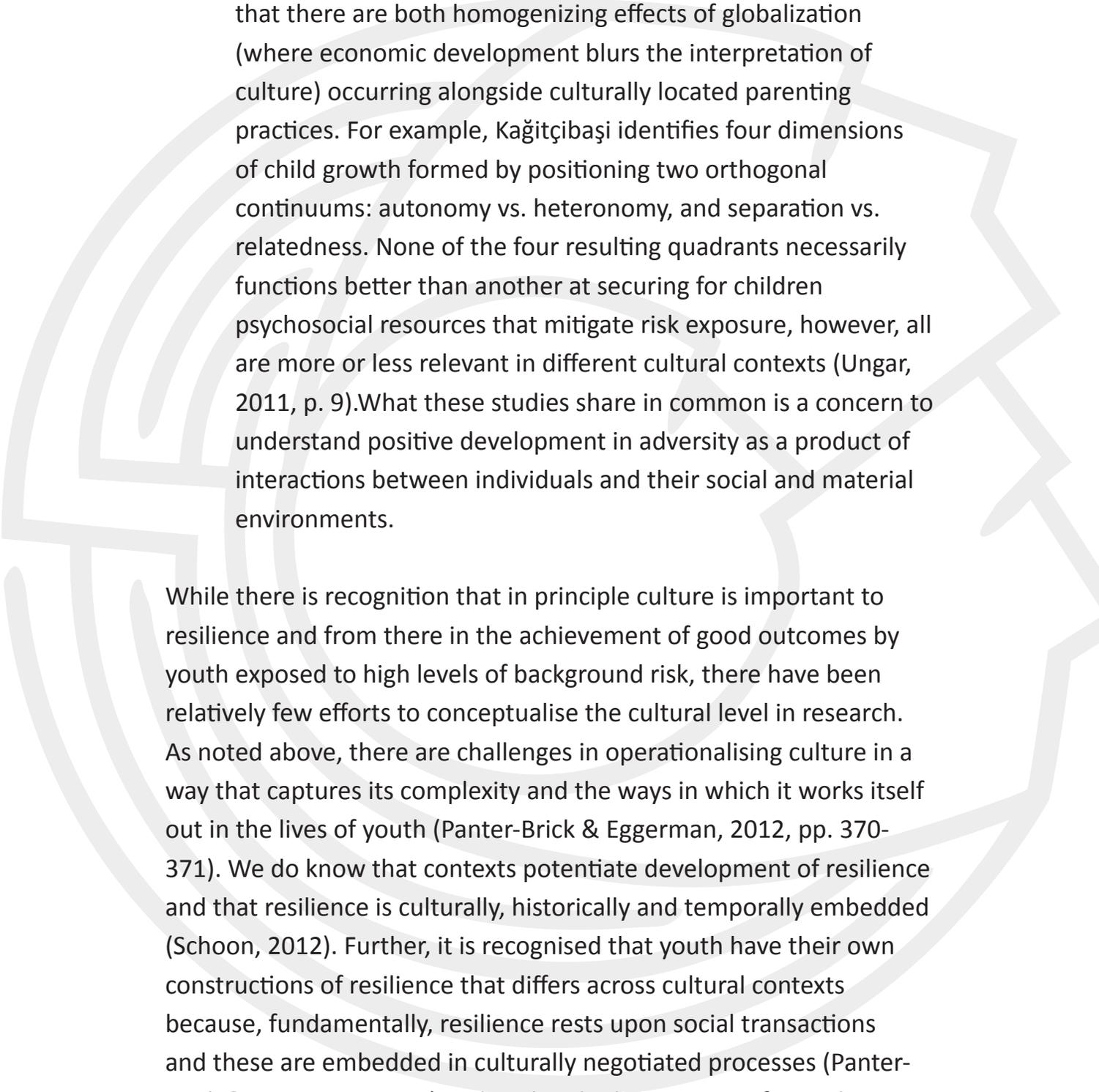
Multi-country studies by Kağitçibaşi and her colleagues (Georgas, Berry, van de Vijver, & Poortinga, 2006) have shown that there are both homogenizing effects of globalization (where economic development blurs the interpretation of culture) occurring alongside culturally located parenting practices. For example, Kağitçibaşi identifies four dimensions of child growth formed by positioning two orthogonal continuums: autonomy vs. heteronomy, and separation vs. relatedness. None of the four resulting quadrants necessarily functions better than another at securing for children psychosocial resources that mitigate risk exposure, however, all are more or less relevant in different cultural contexts (Ungar, 2011, p. 9).What these studies share in common is a concern to understand positive development in adversity as a product of interactions between individuals and their social and material environments.

While there is recognition that in principle culture is important to resilience and from there in the achievement of good outcomes by youth exposed to high levels of background risk, there have been relatively few efforts to conceptualise the cultural level in research. As noted above, there are challenges in operationalising culture in a way that captures its complexity and the ways in which it works itself out in the lives of youth (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012, pp. 370-371). We do know that contexts potentiate development of resilience and that resilience is culturally, historically and temporally embedded (Schoon, 2012). Further, it is recognised that youth have their own constructions of resilience that differs across cultural contexts because, fundamentally, resilience rests upon social transactions and these are embedded in culturally negotiated processes (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012). Cultural and religion matter for resilience and for outcomes. The challenge is that these variables exist in social interactions rather than as fixed attributes. In this connection Panter-

Brick & Eggerman (ibid) elaborate upon the complex ways in which cultural definitions of what is appropriate, right, wrong, good or bad also define certain experiences as life and opportunity-limiting. In trying to understand the differential impacts of everyday violence and trauma alongside the traumatising impact of living in a war zone, they describe the experience of a young Afghani woman who lost family members to horrific war violence and who also had to have a lump removed from her breast requiring her to travel to unfamiliar Pakistan for an operation. They recount:

> ...this girl was clearly wrought by an acute sense of failure and injustice. Her grief, with respect to the deaths of her father and her grandfather could be articulated in terms of a socially-sanctioned ideology of martyrdom. However, she could make no sense of a lost year of schooling, given the anxiety and fear of being taken out of school before she could get a prized school-leaving certificate, as she attains a marriageable age. In her words she had lost 'all I had ever worked for'. What mattered, in this experience was the wider impact of the operation: she had a physical, emotional and social scar, due to a break in the scaffolding of her life – a rupture of meaning and moral order (p. 378).

What the above extract illustrates is that from an ecological perspective the achievement of positive outcomes may be less a product of the innate capacities of individuals than of socially and contextually mediated processes and relationships. For instance Betancourt (2012) draws attention to the critical importance of a functioning social services structure in Sierra Leone in terms of assisting youth who were child soldiers to integrate back into their communities of origin post-conflict. The link between the accumulation of risk and poor outcomes is not straightforward (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003; Garmezy, 1971; Rutter & Madge; 1976;

Werner & Smith, 1992) because as noted previously some children raised in very challenging environments appear to go on to become relatively well adjusted adults and it is not clear why this should be the case given the risks that they have confronted (Fergusson & Horwood, 2003, p. 132). Poor outcomes in adolescence and later in adulthood appear to result from the accumulation of risks over time rather than from the impact of a single or limited number of risk factors (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012, p. 376; Supkoff et al., 2012, p. 137). While an ecological approach gives cause for confidence that there are multiple sites at which to intervene to disrupt risk and boost resilience and in this sense that potential for change exists across the life course as a result of reciprocal transactions between a changing individual and a changing social-historical context (Brim & Kagan 1980; Lerner 1984; Sameroff 1983), there is evidence that this plasticity is not limitless (Clarke & Clarke 2003, Sroufe & Rutter 1984).

In this research risk and resilience were understood ecologically – that is to say they were operationalised as an interlinked set of multi-dimensional constructs that were measured in a range of ways to capture their individual, relational and contextual facets (this is described in more detail in Technical Report 2). Of central importance was Ungar's work on the "navigation" towards and "negotiation" for resources that promote good outcomes (Ungar, 2007). This ecological definition of resilience highlights the two key processes of navigation and negotiation that both require agency, interaction and availability. Navigation refers to individuals expressing intentionality, motivation and movement. It implies the presence of an acceptable destination; navigation involves moving towards something, or with an end point, or next step in mind. It also calls for belief that movement towards that next point is achievable. It carries with it the implicit assumption that resources at the destination will be available, accessible and meaningful, and so it calls for more than just an intentional individual moving forward. The context and the

people who control resources within that context are also required to engage in this navigation process. This presupposes availability of resources that the individual is able to take advantage of rather than merely their presence in the environment in any form.

Negotiation focuses upon the interactional processes by which meaning is attached to resources. Resources become functional and useful through a process of meaning-making. Individuals and groups interact over securing them as assets that can be utilised in promoting positive growth and development (Ungar, 2007). Here it is important to realise that services are not resourceful in a resilience sense per se, but rather that they become valuable when they are meaningful and accessible. The research had a particular concern in exploring these processes and understanding how youth lives intersected with systems of service delivery to create different patterns in outcomes. In this regard, the focus was upon understanding the different ways in which service engagement could be demonstrated to facilitate good outcomes. The next section thus considers the particular roles that services can play in harnessing resilience resources and acting upon risks to open up new options to youth facing challenges in steering a safe course to adulthood.

Services as a specific set of contextual factors that assist youth facing adversity achieve positive outcomes

If, as argued above, the resources around a youth exposed to high levels of ongoing risk have the potential to significantly weight the odds in favour of positive outcomes; it becomes important to consider how services, as one particular set of ecological resources, can best respond together to such youth. It is clear that youth facing significant disadvantage are often clients of multiple services (Garland et al., 2003; Hazen, et al., 2004; Loeber, et al., 1998). This
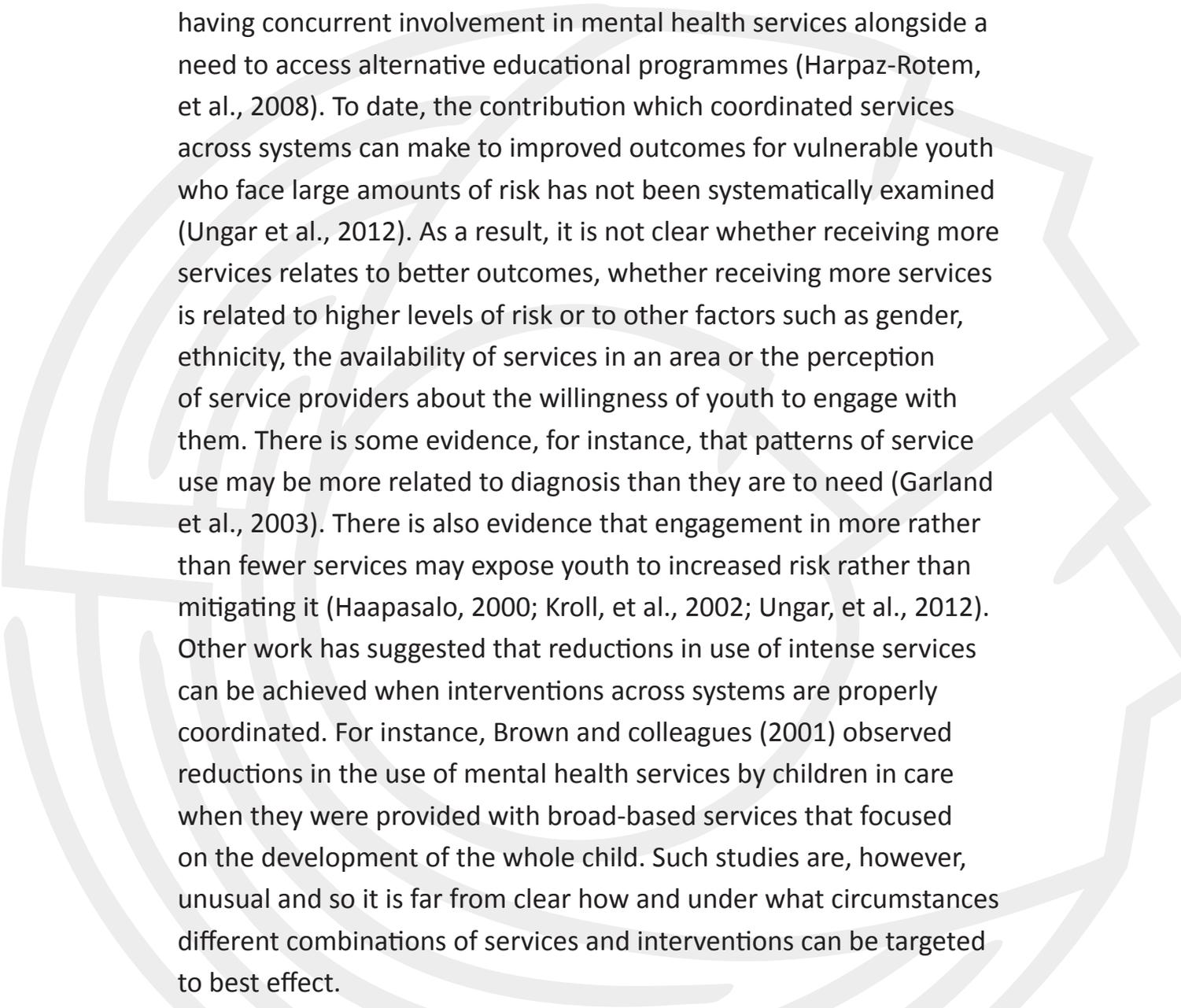
is particularly the case for youth in the welfare or juvenile justice systems who are often engaged in both of these systems as well as having concurrent involvement in mental health services alongside a need to access alternative educational programmes (Harpaz-Rotem, et al., 2008). To date, the contribution which coordinated services across systems can make to improved outcomes for vulnerable youth who face large amounts of risk has not been systematically examined (Ungar et al., 2012). As a result, it is not clear whether receiving more services relates to better outcomes, whether receiving more services is related to higher levels of risk or to other factors such as gender, ethnicity, the availability of services in an area or the perception of service providers about the willingness of youth to engage with them. There is some evidence, for instance, that patterns of service use may be more related to diagnosis than they are to need (Garland et al., 2003). There is also evidence that engagement in more rather than fewer services may expose youth to increased risk rather than mitigating it (Haapasalo, 2000; Kroll, et al., 2002; Ungar, et al., 2012). Other work has suggested that reductions in use of intense services can be achieved when interventions across systems are properly coordinated. For instance, Brown and colleagues (2001) observed reductions in the use of mental health services by children in care when they were provided with broad-based services that focused on the development of the whole child. Such studies are, however, unusual and so it is far from clear how and under what circumstances different combinations of services and interventions can be targeted to best effect.

The lack of a clear understanding about which types of intervention and which combinations of service are likely to lead to the best outcomes for very vulnerable youth reduces the capacity of services individually or collectively to deliver services in the most effective ways possible. An emerging literature is beginning to indicate that formal resources such as services provided through the welfare,
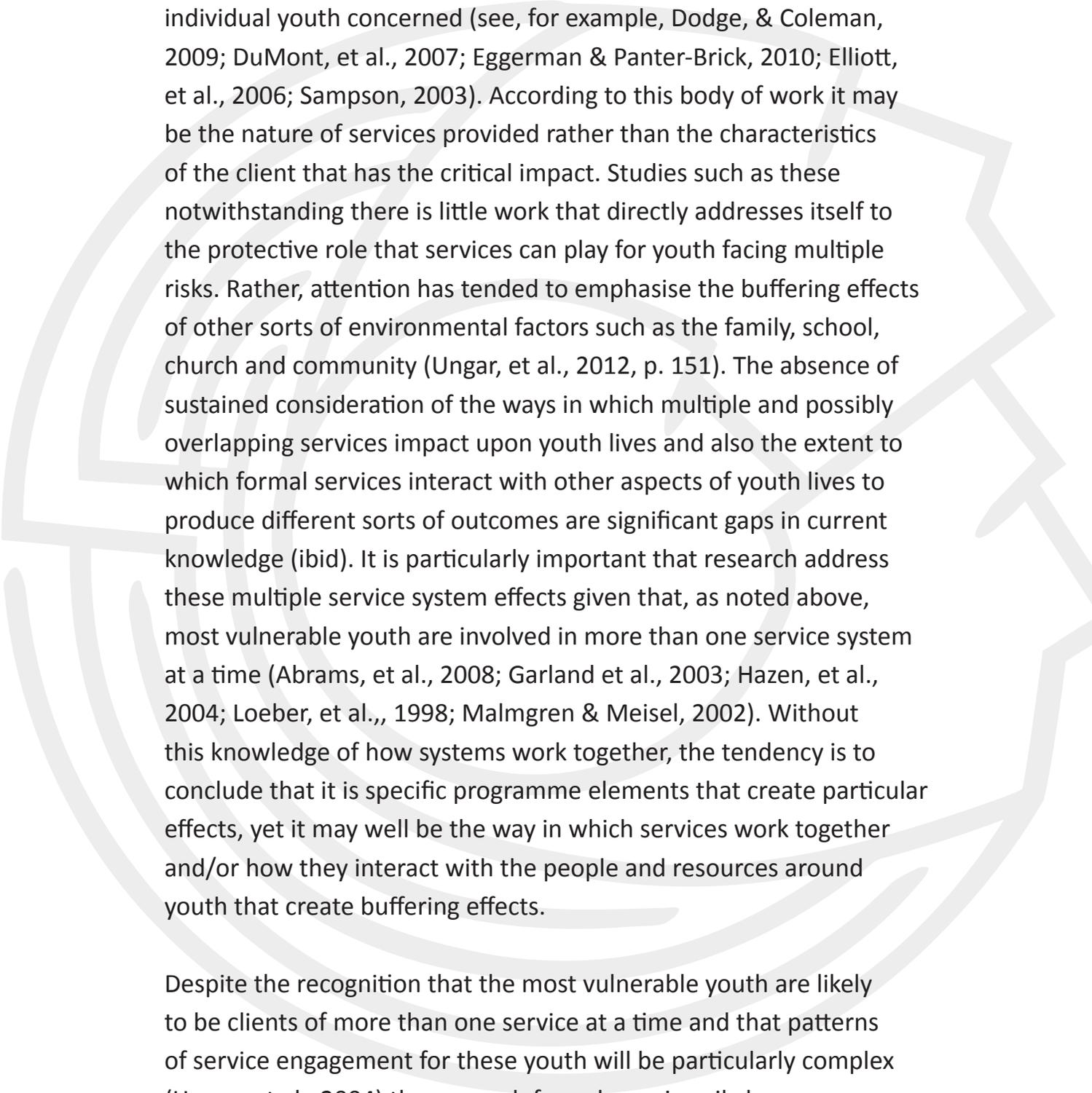
education, juvenile justice and health systems can play a critical role in enhancing outcomes irrespective of the characteristics of the individual youth concerned (see, for example, Dodge, & Coleman, 2009; DuMont, et al., 2007; Eggerman & Panter-Brick, 2010; Elliott, et al., 2006; Sampson, 2003). According to this body of work it may be the nature of services provided rather than the characteristics of the client that has the critical impact. Studies such as these notwithstanding there is little work that directly addresses itself to the protective role that services can play for youth facing multiple risks. Rather, attention has tended to emphasise the buffering effects of other sorts of environmental factors such as the family, school, church and community (Ungar, et al., 2012, p. 151). The absence of sustained consideration of the ways in which multiple and possibly overlapping services impact upon youth lives and also the extent to which formal services interact with other aspects of youth lives to produce different sorts of outcomes are significant gaps in current knowledge (ibid). It is particularly important that research address these multiple service system effects given that, as noted above, most vulnerable youth are involved in more than one service system at a time (Abrams, et al., 2008; Garland et al., 2003; Hazen, et al., 2004; Loeber, et al.,, 1998; Malmgren & Meisel, 2002). Without this knowledge of how systems work together, the tendency is to conclude that it is specific programme elements that create particular effects, yet it may well be the way in which services work together and/or how they interact with the people and resources around youth that create buffering effects.

Despite the recognition that the most vulnerable youth are likely to be clients of more than one service at a time and that patterns of service engagement for these youth will be particularly complex (Hazen, et al., 2004) the research focus has primarily been upon understanding populations within individual services and with defining components of individual services that contribute to

enhanced outcomes (Ungar, et al., 2012). Studies that focus on the individual components of service delivery assume that other interventions or supports are either absent or neutral in effect. The programme is understood to be the mechanism which enables individuals to become more able to cope with stress or to recover from exposure to adversity. For example, Quinn (2004) examined the effectiveness of intensive home-based family interventions for youth involved in the juvenile justice system; Peplar and Slaby (1996) reported on the effectiveness of school based anti-bullying programmes, while Burford and Hudson (2000) examined the impact of family group conferences in child welfare. While valuable in building understanding regarding the characteristics of specific programmes that are helpful, these types of studies do not help us understand the dynamic nature of risk laden lives nor of the contribution that different mixes of interventions can make to outcomes for youth. By not taking account of wider system factors and their interactions with individual level variables, conclusions tend to emphasise changes that need to be made by individual youth rather than adaptations or alterations that can be made to the social context around them to remove or reduce the risks and to create spaces which would be more supportive of change. Moreover, little attention is paid to how change can be sustained in the long term and the ongoing role of services in providing support as the individual's environments and experiences change over time. There is some evidence that rather than individuals changing, it is the adaptations and modifications in the environment that lead to beneficial effects for youth by protecting them from and reducing the overall quantum of risk to which they are exposed (Cicchetti, 2010; Sroufe, et al., 2005; Betancourt, et al., 2010; Browne et al., 2001; Obrist et al., 2010; Saewyc & Edinburgh, 2010). As Ungar suggests: *"The individual's personal agency and latent capacities to cope can explain only a small amount of the variance in outcomes"* (Ungar, et al., 2012, p. 151). Services have the potential to remove or mitigate

the risk and stress around youth rather than just bolstering their capacity to 'bounce back' from exposure (Betancourt, et al., 2010; Obrist, et al., 2010; Saewyc & Edinburgh, 2010, Ungar, et al., 2012). The ability of services to remove or reduce risks is a promising avenue for investigation in terms of building our understanding of the social ecology of resilience. Rather than focusing on components of services that individualise risk, such research would explore the way in which services, individually and collectively, decrease exposure of youth to risk.

The development of research concerning the contribution services make to good outcomes has followed a similar pattern of development to resilience research beginning with an emphasis upon the capacities of individuals to take advantages of positive resources (Ungar et al., 2012; Luthar, 2003; Masten & Obradović, 2006; Obrist, et al., 2010) with less concern regarding aspects of social and material environments which could be adapted to better meet the needs of individual children. Even the important longitudinal studies have not so far systematically addressed the ways in which services delivered through multiple service systems interact with the characteristics of the individual child as well as their social environment to produce different sorts of outcomes (Ungar, et al., 2012). The connections, for instance, between being able to stay at school and reduced risk of offending need to be given equal weight to an assumed predisposition to criminal behaviour (Henry, et al., 1999). Many factors that shape the development of young people and which influence outcomes are beyond the direct control of youth, rather they are related to the actions of caregivers and other adults around them. This suggests a need for a different approach to our understanding of the 'invulnerable child' because invulnerability is clearly related to issues beyond the young person (Anthony, 1987; Cowen & Work, 1988; Ungar, 2011). Such approaches would be less concerned with the resilience of individual youth than with defining
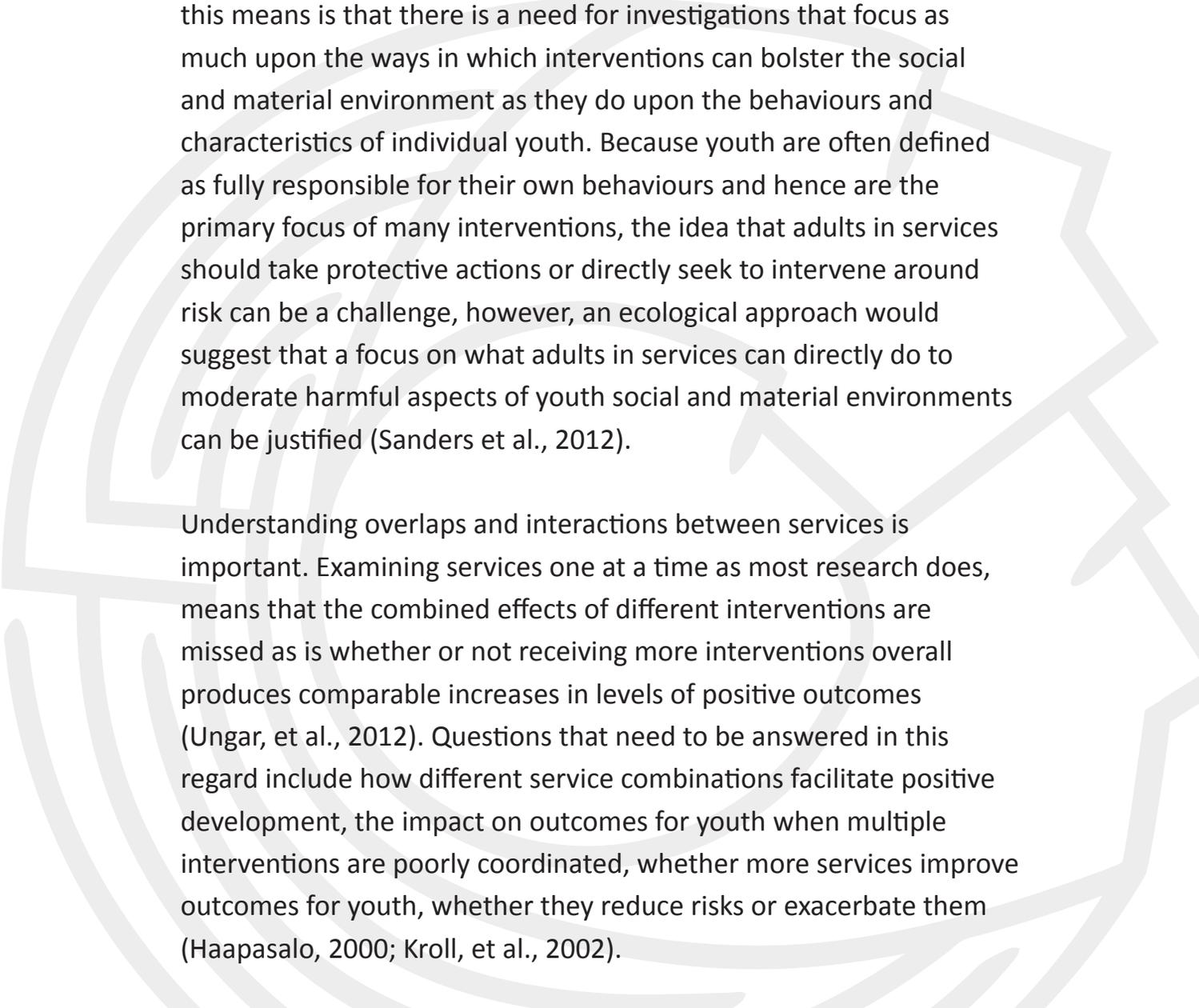
the capacity of the environments in which they live to produce the resources and supports required to improve outcomes. What this means is that there is a need for investigations that focus as much upon the ways in which interventions can bolster the social and material environment as they do upon the behaviours and characteristics of individual youth. Because youth are often defined as fully responsible for their own behaviours and hence are the primary focus of many interventions, the idea that adults in services should take protective actions or directly seek to intervene around risk can be a challenge, however, an ecological approach would suggest that a focus on what adults in services can directly do to moderate harmful aspects of youth social and material environments can be justified (Sanders et al., 2012).

Understanding overlaps and interactions between services is important. Examining services one at a time as most research does, means that the combined effects of different interventions are missed as is whether or not receiving more interventions overall produces comparable increases in levels of positive outcomes (Ungar, et al., 2012). Questions that need to be answered in this regard include how different service combinations facilitate positive development, the impact on outcomes for youth when multiple interventions are poorly coordinated, whether more services improve outcomes for youth, whether they reduce risks or exacerbate them (Haapasalo, 2000; Kroll, et al., 2002).

From an ecological perspective, services represent one key aspect of the social and material environment surrounding vulnerable youth that are able to directly influence outcomes. Currently, our understanding of the ways in which services can create facilitative environments that enhance the capacity of children to cope with risks and stresses is still in its infancy. However, if, as the mounting evidence suggests, good developmental outcomes in the context of

exposure to risk are a product of the individual youth in relation to their changing social and material environments (Ungar, et al., 2012), then the role of multiple services in this process needs clarification. In principal, positive development for vulnerable youth should be amenable to intentional interventions, but equally it will be able to be disrupted by interventions that do not target the critical factors impeding positive development, that do not respond to youth in appropriate and meaningful ways or that work at cross-purposes to each other. Particular areas that require investigation include the ways in which different combinations of interventions (such as social workers, child and youth care workers, psychologists, nurses, educators, police) provide children with opportunities to realise their potential, to recover from adverse events and to cope with future challenges (Zautra, et al., 2010). The role of services in mediating or mitigating risk and enhancing the capacity of vulnerable youth need to be considered as part of the social ecology of vulnerable youth (Ungar, 2012, p. 15-16).

If theoretical developments concerning resilience have developed to the point where it is recognised that a focus on individual capacities alone is no longer adequate and there is a need to look at person-environment exchanges (Gunnar, 2007; Kent, 2012; National Research Council & Institute of Medicine, 2000; Supkoff, et al., 2012) then it can equally be argued that there is a need to think about social service interventions in interactional and ecological ways. This calls for attention to move from a consideration of single interventions or treatment modalities to how interventions combine together to produce different effects for children and youth under different sets of circumstances. Ecological transactional theory has been advanced as one way to sharpen this focus on the ways in which numbers of interventions can promote positive change in vulnerable families (Bottrell, 2009; Brandon, 2010). At this time, ecological transactional theory has been primarily used to inform assessments

and interventions but it has potential to assist with the formulation of research endeavours. These endeavours can seek to understand how multiple service involvements can be better calibrated to take advantage of resilience resources of youth and their families/whānau and which also ensures that the range of professionals who typically become involved in complex interventions can work collaboratively to maximise the potential of good outcomes.

Ecological-transactional perspectives offer promising avenues for investigating the ways in which systems of care and support work together to produce different outcomes with youth facing adversity. These perspectives build on ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and social ecological approaches (Ungar, 2012) and focus on the interactions, or transactions, between key contexts or domains within an individual's networks and experiences. Ecological transactional theory argues that children function within multiple contexts, or ecologies, and that these all play an important role in child development, influencing each other through complex sets of interactions (Overstreet & Mazza, 2003). The focus upon the effects of multiple contexts and how the interactions and transactions within and between these contexts relate to specific experiences and outcomes is valuable. Brandon (2010), for example, used an ecological-transactional approach to understand the factors that should be incorporated into assessment and subsequent interventions in serious neglect and abuse situations. She examined the interactions and transactions within families and between families and their wider contexts. In order to understand the nature of neglect and abuse and to design effective interventions, she argued that it was necessary to explain the transactions between caregivers, children, the wider family and wider social and community contexts.

Ecological-transactional approaches examine the different systems

(macrosystem, exosystem, microsystem and ontogenic system) around individuals. They consider how individuals understand themselves in relation to these systems, the ways that these understandings then inform their behaviours and the ways in which these nested systems influence the choices available (Overstreet & Mazza, 2003, p. 68). Of particular interest in ecological transactional approaches is identifying the impact of one system on another over time as well as the interactions or transactions between these systems (Brandon, et al., 2008; Howe, 2005; Cicchetti & Valentino, 2006; Nuttman-Schwartz, 2012; Overstreet & Mazza, 2003). Attention is paid to defining aspects of the environment that act as risk factors and those that act as protective factors. For example, in their study of the effects of exposure to community violence (ECV) Lynch and Cicchetti (1998) highlighted the way in which the macrosystem (such as poverty, scarce resources) provided a fertile environment for the emergence of community violence and the creation of vulnerabilities that had an impact on individuals, including negative impacts on child development (Panter-Brick & Eggerman, 2012; Hopkins et al., 2012; Supkoff et al., 2012). In order to mitigate the effects of community violence other systems needed to come into play, such as schools and community services (Berliner et al., 2012). In this way, both direct and indirect transactions within youth ecologies had an impact on children. In the case of community violence, direct factors were those that impacted immediately upon the ontogenic system of the child; for example living in a neighbourhood with high levels of community violence had a direct impact on child development when the child was involved in these events. Indirect factors included disruptions to family systems as a result of community violence, such as parents not being able to care for their children, these then disrupted positive and healthy child development. Overstreet and Mazza (2003) developed the idea of moderator factors and demonstrated that service interventions, such as intensive family support, mitigated the effect of exposure to violence and redirected children's

developmental pathways towards more positive developmental outcomes. Moderator factors can be located at any of the ecological levels and can act to change the impact of negative contexts, experiences and systems, such as community violence or abuse and neglect of children (Brandon, 2010; Brandon et al., 2008). The presence of moderator factors helps explain the impact of both distal and proximal influences on children's experiences as well as how multiple factors operate within specific contexts to create different outcomes, both positive and negative.

The ecological-transactional approach provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences and circumstances of at-risk youth. In this study of young people's use of services (statutory and non-governmental, and including educational services) and their role in supporting positive outcomes the ontogenic level represents what the young person brings to the service encounter (including their resilience and risk profiles); the microsystem includes the young person's family/whānau and peer relationships and also their engagement with school and other learning environments; the exosystem includes their neighbourhoods, their community networks as well as their engagement with services; and the macrosystem incorporates their cultural and wider systems such as government and organisational policy and structures that impact on their daily lives. This research contained specific components that enabled exploration of the role of each of these systems and of the interactions between them. With regard to the role of moderator factors, this study is interested in understanding how formal service systems (including statutory and non-governmental services) may function to mitigate the impact of negative experiences. The research captures data that allows us to examine the ways in which youth achieve good outcomes when in receipt of services from multiple programmes or organisations, to examine the role that service provision has on outcomes for youth including whether more services

equates with better outcomes, the factors that have the most influence on the development and outcomes for at-risk youth as well as the ways in which the combined efforts of multiple services remove or reduce risks and improve outcomes for multiple service using youth.

Conclusion

Having begun five decades ago with a concern to understand the way in which the innate capacities of children enabled them to survive and thrive in hostile social environments, resilience research is now focused upon a more nuanced and contextually focused understanding of the way in which factors interact together to potentiate good outcomes. Contemporary research seeks to build an understanding of the ways in which individual traits combine with relationships and wider social processes located at the family/whānau, community and governmental levels to create different patterns in outcomes for youth who face high levels of risk. Positive growth in the face of adversity is influenced not only by carefully planned and intentional interventions and supports; unplanned occurrences and chance also play a role. In dynamic lives that are shaped by the unpredictability of risk, things simply happen that in the end can contribute to either good or bad outcomes, often depending at least in part upon how others in the environment react. Theories and interventions need to be able to account for the unplanned occurrences because in such dynamic environments the frequency with which serendipity reshapes lives is likely to be high. It is this within this dynamic ecology of risk and resilience processes that this research is located. Resilience is a key concept in this research. Following Ungar and Liebenberg (2011) it is understood as a mediator between risk-laden environments and good outcomes for youth. In this sense, enhancing resilience is not a goal in itself

for interventions; rather the focus is upon understanding the components of resilience that can be demonstrated to play a valuable role in increasing the capacity of youth to achieve better outcomes and the role that services can play in this process. The following definition (Ungar, et al., 2013, p. 151) of resilience informs the current research:

> Defined ecologically, resilience is the capacity of young people to navigate their way to the resources they need during crises, and their ability to negotiate for these resources to be provided in meaningful ways (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). Resilience is both individual processes that increase survival and the protective processes instigated by larger systems to provide opportunities for individuals to cope under stress (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011; Lerner, 2006; Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2008).

Ecological approaches emphasise that it is a combination of the things individual youth do in order to increase their capacity to survive in the face of adversity, the capacity of wider systems to reduce the impact of or exposure to risk and to provide opportunities for new coping responses to emerge within both the individual and their relational environments (Lerner, 2006; Zautra, et al., 2008) that makes the difference in terms of outcomes.

> In practice, this means that the environment makes good or fails on its promise to a child to provide prosocial developmental pathways, reflecting social policies and the localized politics of communities that determine which children are provided with which resources (Ungar, 2011, p. 10).

Sameroff and Rosenblum (2006, p. 119) have demonstrated that it is not the individual characteristics of particular children that best predict outcomes, but rather the cumulative environmental risks

children face over time and the ways in which their communities operate that shape outcomes (see for example, Chandler, et al.,, 2003). Accordingly, the focus of this research is upon the ways in which individual, familial, community and structural factors combine together to shape the possibilities for youth facing adversity to do well.

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