Consequences of being a stress resilient child

Aida Hammami & Pernilla Spåls

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Handledare: Lis-Bodil Karlsson
Examinator: Ted Goldberg
Abstract

Aim; The aim of this study is to increase our knowledge of stress resilience children coming from backgrounds of substance abuse and to look at what consequences they may encounter, for not being able to express their emotions and deal with happenings experienced in their upbringing.

Method; A qualitative approach has been used with e-mail interviews to collect our material, with young adults whom see themselves as having a history of alcoholism in the nearest family when growing up and despite this managed well in life.

Result; We have concluded that resiliency is a way of coping with stressful situations. It is a way of repressing emotions when the emotions become too unbearable. When repressing the emotions you are denying the self the right to development, the right to exist as a person. And this leads to co-dependency.

Keywords; Resilience, Co-dependent, Attachment, Defence mechanism
The preamble

We want to thank each and every one that has participated to the creation of our study. A special thanks to our respondents that has contributed with their stories, without all of you this study had not been possible to finish. And a big thank you Lis-Bodil, we have learnt that a good sense of humor can take you far in the academic world.

THANK YOU!

Aida&Pernilla
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Chapter 1  Introduction

She is screaming and crying, bleeding from the nose and from her back head.
his beats are bouncing in my ears,
the anger from his voice is making me unmoveable.
I feel the salt from my tears running down my face,
why can’t anybody hear me and save me, please!
The pain in my stomach and head is unbearable,
What to do, I’m scared!
Dad is going to kill her this time; the alcohol inside him is going to kill my mom.
My body is shaking uncontrollable and I crawl deeper inside the wardrobe,
I’m scared, what to do.
The panic is making me hard to breath.
I hope he grows tired soon, so I can run and save her,
I’m scared.
It is quiet, is she dead, I hear the door slam and it is quiet. The crying inside me is exploding.
What to do!
She is lying on the floor with blood everywhere, she is not moving.
I’m scared, what to do.
My crying is uncontrollable, why dose not anybody help me!
Is my mother dead!
Eight a’ clock morning after, I pack my bag and go to school, I’m scared.
Why can’t anybody understand, that the wound inside of me,
is bleeding, tearing every piece of me apart, what to do.
I’m a bit down today, I blame the flu.
My mother is coming back home.
I’m scared, what to do.
Father is celebrating with vodka on- the- rocks,
I’m scared, what to do.
I wrote an A on the exams that morning, what to do!
Seven years later, father is dead and the scars are bleeding.
I’m scared, what to do.
I still write A on the exams and work full time and extras on the weekends.
I’m scared, what to do!
1.1 Background

This poem is a real lived experience from an everyday life of a stress resilient child, grasping the memories of growing up in substance abuse family, and the consequences then and years afterwards. The number of children who are growing up in high risk environments without ending up in own destructive patterns such as own substance abuse, criminality and violence is hidden statistics. Since they have not left any traces and been registered at any authority, because no destructive patterns have been shown outwards for the society to acknowledge. Alcohol has become about as usual to persons as taking a coffee on the way to work. Around 4, 4 percent of the Swedish people (300 000 Swedish people) (http://www.can.se/sa/node.asp?node=2640) are considered being alcoholics. In order to become alcoholics there needs to be a consumption of alcohol. About 90 percent of the adult population in Sweden drinks alcohol. Alcoholism is seen as a dependency disease, where you are drinking despite a condition when continuing is affecting you negatively with health problems and social consequences. Alcohol is seen as fun, social and is associated with party and celebration; if you do not drink, people wonder why, and you are sometimes seen as boring in many people’s eyes. To keep in mind is that alcoholism does not only affect the person in question, it strikes everything and everyone near that person badly, especially the children involved. In this essay we want to pay attention to those children whom have survived and manage well in life despite having one or two parent/s drinking (http://www.can.se).

We want to explain recurrent concept in the text before coming to the chapter where it is defined in detail. The phenomenon of being a stress resilient child is someone that from society’s eyes are seen as a well functioning child when growing up, despite coming from a childhood history of neglect, abuse, poverty, mental illness and domestic violence. In many occasions siblings to these children have been trapped in criminality, own abuse, violence and other deviant behaviors. Which all of the deviant behaviors are easily explained with consideration to the individuals past.

Much of the previous research for example Werner and Smith (1992) and Anthony (1974) are explaining the occurrence of the phenomenon of being a stress resilient child and in many texts there is a notion that there might be something behind it. The psychologist James Garbarino is describing the occurrence of resilient in the book Boys who gets lost, like this:"External social success – Doing well on the labor market, managing fine and to start a family – does not show the whole truth. Behind, could be internal injuries” (own translations from Garbarino, 1999, p.194). He is one of the authors that imply
that there could be something more to the phenomenon of resilience, some consequences, but not more than that.

1.2 Choice of subject

Children who are brought up under harsh circumstances and still come out as strong well functioning adults, are they a mystery, or are their heavy burden just not visible to the utter world. The question is whether they are known to the society or not, can suffer and pain be shown in different ways or are they actually feeling like the good, engage, responsible person as they seem to be. Due to our pre understanding we know from experience that life goes on and that life has been a struggle many times, things change, we have left home, and we have created our own safe environment where we can protect ourselves. We have discovered that we cannot deny or repress our past, it is always there reminding us. The research needs to continue, continue further with focus on what potential consequences there might be of being a stress resilient child.

With this study we want to start a discussion and nuance of the real meaning of being a stress resilient child from their own perspective. What does it actually mean to grow up under harsh circumstances and what are the consequences later on in life. What happens with all memories, experiences and emotions, in what form will they come out.

1.3 Connection to social work

1.3.1 Convention on the Rights of the Child and Swedish Social Services Act

All international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, CRC and its Optional Protocols are negotiated among United Nations Member States and are legally binding on the individual States that become parties to the instrument, whereas Sweden is one of the states members. United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child (2003-06-02), describes the right of the child in, Article 6, and says that every child has the right to survive, live and develop. This applies not only to the child's physical health but also the spiritual, moral, psychological and social development. In Article 3 it becomes clear that the child must come in first place. Article 2 states that all children are equal and that no child shall be discriminated. Article 12 of the CRC addresses the child's right to express their own views in matters that are affecting them with consideration to their age and maturity. These rights should apply to all children throughout the world regardless of society, culture or religion. These conventions are the
basic national and international rights of the child, which shall be seen as obvious. In the Swedish Social Service Act chapter 5, 1§, explain that the Social Services Committee shall;

“Ensure that children and youth grow up in secure and good conditions, in close cooperation with the home promote all-round personality development and a favorable physical and social development in children and youth; pay special attention to development of children and youth who have shown signs of adverse development”

This means that all children have the right to grow up under secure and good home conditions, which shall favor their physical and social development. If there are any signs of neglect of the Rights of the Child it shall be acknowledge and sanctioned. Our believes initially when starting this study was that these stress resilient children is seen of the society to be well functioning individuals. In this sense all the stress resilient children are neglected their rights according to the laws stated above, just because they do not speak about their problems.

1.3.2 Practical connection to social work

In the report from the social board about children’s wellbeing in Sweden, there is a governing idea that preventive work is the most cost efficient way in a longer perspective to save money and children suffering. But due to financial rescores the distribution of money needs to be done through prioritizing, and mainly it is spent solving acute problems. The report is showing statistics of the cost of how much it would cost the society if a person starts abusing alcohol or develop psychological disease, the report reveals that this could be a cost from 7 – 15 million Swedish kronor per person over a period of 30 years (Skolverket, Socialstyrelsen & Statens folkälsoinstitut, Artikelnummer: 2004-110-4, 2004, p.9).

There is known that long term psychological strains or stressors and repeatedly negative life events in the family increases the risk for psychological illness for the child. And if a parent for instance suffers from substance abuse there is seen that the parent is not consistent in their parental role which could lead to psychological illness for the child. Many social economical risks increase the likelihood for the child to develop in a negative direction (Ibid, p.34).

We see everything as we mentioned as a distinct connection to social work as our research is aiming to look at emotional consequences in the adult life when growing up with substance abuse in the family. The social worker comes in contact with exposed and resilient children. In order to understand and acknowledge children who are resilient, social workers needs adequate knowledge to respond to these children. The social worker need to be aware of even if the child is considered being stress resilient, it is not an uncomplicated situation. The social worker needs to look at the
whole picture not just the obvious according to the Social Services Act, the convention on the rights of the child and other regulations, this to not risk that yet again neglect or abuse these children.

1.4 The aim of the study and research question

The aim of this study is to increase our knowledge of stress resilience children coming from backgrounds of substance abuse, and to look at the potential consequences they may encounter for not being able to act or bring out emotions and happenings experienced in their upbringing. The following research question will be answered:

- What are the consequences of being an adult with the experiences of being a stress resilient child?

1.5 Central concept and definitions

The definitions of describing a child who has grown up in high risk environments and against all odds developed to a well functioning adult are many. We have decided to describe some of the most occurring concept so the readers can get an understanding that this problem exists internationally and national we all have different understanding of what it contains.

The child psychiatrist Anthony (1974) introduced the concept of the *psychologically invulnerable child* into the literature of developmental psychopathology to describe children who, despite a history of severe and prolonged adversity and psychological stress, manage to achieve emotional health and high competence. Also as Rutter in Werner & Smith (1992) mean that resistance to stress in children is relative, not absolute. The base of resistance is both environmental and constitutional, and the degree of resistance varies over time and according to life’s circumstances.

The most common concepts used when talking about children who have grown up under harsh and high risk circumstances and managed well in life is stress resilience. The definition of the term stress Resilience that we will use is:

“Good outcomes regardless of high-risk status, constant competence under stress, recovery from trauma, and using challenges for growth that makes future hardships more tolerable. Resilience describes people who are expected to adapt successfully even though they experience risk factors that ‘stack the odds’ against them experiencing good development” (Werner & Smith, 1992, p.2).
In Sweden we also have a concept that is describing the children that has the ability to cope and develop despite growing up under stressful situations which is *Maskrosbarn* and it comes from the Norwegian concept *lövetannbarn*, which is the Norwegian name for dandelion flower.

“A Dandelion flower symbolizes both the child's strength and durability with roots that always finds nutrition and takes hold in the soil that is both thin and scanty. A dandelion flower will always find new ways to get around and survive” (Cronström-Beskow, 1996, p.16).

Cronström-Beskow (1996, p.16) mean that a stress resilience child has certain abilities and special skills which help them through childhood until adulthood. Stress resilience children shall not be understood as super people, whom can survive everything. They have put a lot of time and force to work on their personality and it all has had its price, which many of the scars are not visible. In the United States the term *super kids*, *stress resilience* and *invulnerable* are used when talking about children whom grow up in high risk environments.

### 1.6 The disposition of the essay

The essay is divided into nine chapters. We start with presenting an introduction and background to the area of being a stress resilient child, followed by the study's aim and the research question. This is followed by the second chapter where the methodological process is describing our preunderstanding, choice of literature, philosophy of science, design and data gathering, sampling, data analysis, reliability, validity and generalization, the ethical considerations that we have used and our limitations. The third chapter contains the earlier research. Our theoretical starting points are presented in chapter four, where a short introduction to the choice of applied theories is presented, followed by our main theories. As well as in the fifth chapter our results are presented in detailed with the used themes. In the sixth chapter our analytic part take place where we have connected our results to applied theories. The essay concludes with discussion in chapter seven, where we authors tie our whole research together with our findings, pre-understanding in relation to our chosen previous research as well as with our own reflections giving feedback on social work, our process aim and question.
Chapter 2 Method

2.1 Philosophy of science

This essay is a research study with the intention of gaining knowledge. We have used a qualitative approach when collecting the data. The study has been guided by a phenomenological and hermeneutical standpoint. Phenomenology is a scientific approach where the focus is on understanding the phenomenon from the subjects’ perspective, their lived experience. To have a good pre-understanding is important for phenomenology. This is possible to achieve by reading earlier research, in depth interviews, detailed descriptions and observations of people that have experienced the phenomenon. Hermeneutics is about studying the interpretation of a text,

“The purpose of hermeneutical interpretation is to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of a text” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.50).

The subjects’ context is important to take into account. We all come from different backgrounds with different beliefs, meanings and values that is important to understand and account for before coming to a holistic interpretation. As we are using preset themes in this study our focus was on understanding the themes from the actors’ own lived reality of being a stressed resilient child, and come to a holistic understanding of the emotional experiences (Ibid, p. 26-32). When we came to analyze the empirical material we were inspired by the hermeneutical circle, the process of our analysis with help of hermeneutical circle is explained more in depth in § 2.5.

2.2 The choice of literature

The literature has a great variation of early research, articles, factual study books and autobiographical fiction. It has been text both in English as well as in Swedish. The words used when searching for the literature in the databases Social Services abstract, Sociological abstract and Libris where: resilience; child and resilience; resilience and consequences; super kids; codependent; and coping strategies. The hits on resilience showed most results.

The names of the authors of the books we have used, where mainly taken out of reference lists from the early research. We noticed that it where the same authors occurring time after time and realized that they were significant for our chosen topic. We searched on the authors names on Libris and got hits of the relevant literature as well as on related literature, which has been of great
importance to the gathering of our data. Our aim when searching for material has been on finding literature which really grasp the underlying meaning of being a resilient child and emphasized the outcome later on in life. Of several books read only the ones we found special have been used.

2.3 Design and data-gathering

Difficulties were faced when recruiting respondents for our study. The original thought was to recruit respondents from Maskrosbarn which is an organization in Sweden that is helping and supporting individuals who sees themselves as being resilient. This was not possible as the organization did not have the time to see us. We managed to recruit respondents through friends and earlier contacts. The original thought was to conduct a focus group interview with a narrative approach, which for our study had been good considering that we focused on getting in depth answers. As this was not possible we changed our direction and used e-mail interviews. The e-mail approach was the only possible option due to geographical distances between us and the respondents. The aim was to interview three to four young adults. The respondents all seen themselves as having the history of alcoholism in the nearest family when growing up, and despite a high risk background managed well in life. The e-mail interviews have been semi-structured and we have used four themes; 1) the self and the relation to others, 2) emotions and trust, 3) control and coping and 4) determination and ambition. The questions used have been developed according to the mentioned themes (see appendix 1). The questions and the themes have been carefully selected after reading early research, articles, factual studies and autobiographical fiction. The questions have been of open character which has encouraged the participators to express themselves as freely as possible despite not knowing us as researchers.

2.4 Sampling

To collect the data we contacted the organization Maskrosbarn which is a nongovernmental organization for stress resilient children. The organization offers support, they provide with summer camps, leisure activities and a contact person for the children. We have had e-mail correspondences with the managing director and founder of the organization. The intention was to get respondents for the study through them. After a few weeks it was clear that they unfortunately claim that they did not have the time to assist us with an interview due to a very heavy work load.
We proceeded by contacting potential respondents through friends and other contacts such as old school teachers and colleagues. We managed to find some interview persons who were willing to share their story. The geographical distance and the inflexibility in time schedule of some participators made us choose e-mail interviews. An e-mail with focused but still open questions was sent out to the respondents for them to complete and send back. The ethical part of the study was explained prior to the questions were sent out, some over the phone and some via e-mail correspondence. Firstly we allowed the respondents to read the questions and made ourselves available to clarify the questions if such was needed. After receiving the answers we had some follow up conversations over the phone with some of the respondents to verify some of the answers.

The actors who have participated in our study can be described as following. We have changed some information in order to not disclose our respondents.

- Interview person 1 is male in his twenties, has grown up with one parent who is substance abuser and the main drug is alcohol. He still has contact with the parent who is an active alcohol addict. He has child and a wife.
- Interview person 2 is a male in his twenties, grown up with one parent in a big family, father in jail for domestic violence. The mother is a substance abuser, main drug is alcohol. He is single.
- Interview person 3 is female in her thirties has a deceased parent who was an active substance abuser, also with alcohol being the main drug. She lives with a partner.
- Interview person 4 is female in her thirties, has grown up with one parent and one sibling, mother substance abuser with alcohol as the main drug. Have a good contact with her mother whom now is sober and well functioning. She is in a stable relationship and has children.

2.5 Analysis of our data

We have used the hermeneutical circle when analysing our collected material. This approach has been used as we wanted to describe the respondents’ emotions and connect these with their experiences. When using the hermeneutical stance it is important for us as researchers to understand the meaning and put ourselves in the situations described by the actors. This according to hermeneutics is vital in order for us to understand the meaning in what has been said or written. The focus was on interpreting the meaning of what had been described of the respondents.
According to the hermeneutical stand “the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole” (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p.92). The whole also includes our pre understanding as researcher as described earlier in the text. Cultural and historical contexts are also important to see the whole picture and to understand the part in connection to the whole. Our themes were created with the help of our theories, earlier research and autobiographical fiction from adult children of alcoholics that sees themselves as resilient. We have used our chosen themes for easier enable the structuring of the gathered empirical data (Ibid, p.93).

Prior to sending the e-mails we added questions under each theme for the respondents to answer. When receiving the answers and the texts we started by reading through the material and made obvious comments of relevance and similarity in their stories. We divided the texts under each theme, and came to draw some conclusions after seeing the holistic picture with the part related to the whole. We repeated the process with all our four themes. Above all we have used psychosocial theories such past reality integration theory and attachment theory (which will be described in chapter 4) in order to describe and analyse the findings from different angles.

2.6 Reliability, validity and generalization

Our standpoint has been to in detail question ourselves the whole way through our research to ensure that we have been measuring what we intended to measure. To always stay focused and professional to the subject and to asked questions that are of relevance to our aim. The validity in our essay has been acknowledged by us authors from the start of producing knowledge to the end result (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.247-249).

Reliability has been assured by in detail explain our way of proceeding, as well as using the same themes and questions for all respondents when collecting the data. As we have conducted e-mail interviews a second contact has been initiated with two of the respondents to clarify some of the answers. Our focus when producing the interview questions was to have clear and straight questions related to our aim. Also to have questions that give the respondents the possibility to share their own lived experiences. Open questions are important so that our research can be reproduced with similar result (Ibid, p. 244 -246, 327).

Validity is about justifying what we have found and descriptions of how we have found this out, what sampling we have used and how we have come up with the produced knowledge and results.
Also to state what strengths and weaknesses our study may have in the sampling process. In order to be able to justify and convince our readers that our production of knowledge is something that is valid. It is about answering what is the truth in our research (Patton, 2004, p. 246). Since we have our own pre understanding, we have been aware of our contribution to the production of knowledge. Reflexive objectivity view is important for us as researchers in order for us explaining and to be clear about our pre-knowledge and pre-justices that can influence the interpretation of the knowledge (Ibid, p.242).

To achieve and ensure validity it is important with thick descriptions which means that we need to get a lot of data. To gather thick descriptions a phenomenological and a hermeneutical approach has been applied. It has given us a thick knowledgebase to work with, in our research. We have also strived to measure what is on the participators mind, they have given us their true experience of a happening and this can be shown with our quotations from the gathered material. The findings from the research and our interpretations have been strengthened and grounded in previous research, theoretical knowledge and other empirical data (Larsson & Sjöblom, 2009 p. 277).

As we are two authors of this report the analysis part has been done separately to ensure the categorisation and the respondents are understood in the same way so called investigator triangulation (Patton, 2004, p. 562). More than one theory has been used, this has increased our possibilities for us to grasp multiple perspectives when interpreting a single problem and. By different perspective we mean, different scholars of stakeholders. Our point is to acknowledge how different assumptions and premises are affecting findings and interpretations made in the research. Because different perspectives represents different ways of seeing the reality of the phenomenon investigated. This will also strengthen our findings by showing that there have been similar and different findings earlier (Ibid, p. 256-257).

The disclosed result have been hard to generalize since it is conducted at a small scale but by using quotations, earlier research and our theoretical standpoint we have been able to draw some conclusions and general assumptions about the findings and the concept This is important so the potential readers, peer reviewers, information users can feel the information/knowledge produces is valid and that valid measurements has been used (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 262; Patton, 2004. P. 246).
2.7 Ethical standpoints

Ethical considerations has been encountered for by informing the participators about the informed consent which is that the respondents are carefully informed about the aim of the study and what it is going to be used for and also our pre understanding of the subject resilience. Also the consent requirements has been considered, this means that all our respondents has been informed that they all have the right to decide what to disclose or not and that it is voluntary to participate and that they could withdraw at any time.

The third aspect take into account are the confidentiality requirement which is one of the most important requirements. This includes that the respondent should feel secure that information that could lead to identification of the respondent can be obtained from others should not be disclosed in the essay. We have informed that we will not disclose their names or talk about them to anyone except from our supervisor and between ourselves. Also the user requirements has been encountered for which means that the information and material that has been collected only should be used to agreed essay and no other distribution or usage will be done (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 68-70).

We highlighted the fact that this could be emotional and bring up memories from the past; we have made it clear that they do not have to answer questions that are emotionally to hard (Ibid, p. 71-74)

When sending out the e-mails to the respondents we had an ethical part attached that explained all the aspects of the study, the aim, what rights they have when participating as explained above. And what the study was to be used for. We have also had telephone contact with the respondents where we have explained the usage and the ethical aspects.

In this study we have made a short introduction of which the interview persons are and we have chosen to call the Interview person 1, 2, 3 and 4. This to protect their identity, so the respondent and the people connected to the study cannot be recognized (Ibid, p. 74-76).

2.8 Pre understanding

Years of a never ending fight for an everyday survival and nights of making plans for being able to see the dreams, the dreams of the future: waking up in the morning and live an everyday life with no abuse, violence and with breakfast on the table, the dream of wanting a normal life. This
sounds quite tough, but it is our inspiration to making this research study, to stress and lift up that no human is invulnerable.

We believe that all human beings have different survival strategies, outward or inward actions, which is highly individual. This is our stand point as researchers and we do know that our view is not objective, but on the other hand no researchers stand point is objective towards one’s own work since, there is always a reason to why you as a researcher has a special interest and want to explore a phenomenon further. We do not see our stand point as a limitation rather as our own experience giving us a more in-depth understanding when facing potential consequences of being a stress resilience child. But above all, we are not satisfied with existing research, where no consequences of being a stress resilient child are presented. We have during the whole research tried to have a critical approach towards our pre understanding this by validating our collected material throughout the process.

2.9 Limitations

The findings of this research have been limited to a particular age group 24-32years of age. This broad age span and small samples limit us in the sense that we cannot see however there are any differenced if belonging to the age group 24 or e.g. 32, or if different maturing stages matters in the process of handling stress and coping with emotions. Generalising the findings is something that has been difficult since the research have been conducted on a limited scale. Initially the thought was to conduct the interview in a focus group which would have given us a much thicker material, but with the negative response from the organisation Maskrosbarn this was not possible. We managed to find alternative interview persons through friends and other contacts to interview via e-mail which was also a limitation as we desired thicker descriptions and more material to work with. And also due to us finding the respondents through friends could be seen as a limitation as there is a mutual denominator that knows both us as researcher and the interview persons as they might have been restricted in telling us the uncensored truth due to us having mutual friends.
Chapter 3     Earlier research

3.1     Introduction

Emmy Werner the child psychologist and the child psychiatrist James Anthony have been constantly recurring names when we have searched for earlier research on the phenomenon of being a stress resilience child. They are considered as spokesmen’s for the research on stress resilience children. Werner has done longitudinal studies, which mean that she has studied a group of people over a long period of time. Since stated researchers above all are the ones which have revealed the phenomenon of stress resilience children, we find it important and appropriate to give a small overview of the studies. We are also presenting studies that are more recent and focus on psychological effects of stress.

3.2     The origin of the concept stress resiliency

Emmy Werner is a professor at the University of California, and is a child psychologist. She is one of the first whom coined the concept of the phenomenon stress resilience children.

Emmy Werner began working on an interdisciplinary longitudinal study, which she was responsible for during 40 years. The Kauai-study follows a group of children whom were born with different kinds of injuries from pregnancy, birth or from the neonatal period, i.e. the first four weeks in a human life (Werner & Smith, 1992, p. 1-3).

The study encompassed about 700 babies born on the island of Kauai in the Hawaiian archipelago. Werner and her colleagues surveyed risk and protective factors of the men and women who were born on the island in 1955 at ages 1, 2, 10, 17/18, 31/32 and 40. They were interested in the "high-risk children" whom already from birth were exposed to complications. The children had multiple risk factors in their environment, such as poverty, alcoholism and mental illness. It was shown that 1/3 of all the children were exposed of a higher risk of developing child psychiatry symptoms. Since they either had injuries from birth, their family relations and socio-economic situation were create handicapped. Despite all this the researcher noticed that about 30 percent of the “high risk children” developed remarkably healthy, they came to develop a healthy personality. A healthy personality was defined as competent, confident and caring adults (Ibid, p. 189-191).

Werner put all her focus in trying to understand why all these children could manage life against all odds and much of her work has surveyed stress resilience framing factors. Some of the framing
attribute factors that she concluded is characteristics for a resilient child is; strong identity, very active, affectionate, good natured, easy to deal with, outgoing, tend to solve problems on their own. And one important protective factor is that the child had someone or something that gave them appreciation this could be a parent, church, school (Werner & Smith, 1992, p.55-58).

Child psychiatrist James Anthony published studies of children, who grew up with a psychotic parent in black urban slum in the United States. His focus was the children who survived well, despite the fact that they had been exposed of great stress during their upbringing. For these children, he (amongst others) coined the term "Superkids" after the comic character Superman. They meant that these children had some special invulnerability, which made them in somehow able to handle harsh circumstances in their upbringing without being torn apart.

What these researches has in common with Werner is their mutual aim in investigating individuals whom their upbringing has been characterized with harsh situations and circumstances similar to patient’s backgrounds within social services and psychiatry. Whereas Anthony’s researches has investigated individuals whom have survived their backgrounds and therefore never been patients or clients for the social services and the psychiatry, in order to make clear their compensational or stress resistance factors. Anthony was one of the founders who introduced the concept of invulnerable child into the literature of developmental psychopathology. He concludes that the protective factors to become resilient are independent, and that no child is invulnerable (Anthony & Cohler, 1987; Anthony & Koupernik, 1974).

3.3 Social Support, Attachment, and Psychopathology in high risk formerly maltreated adults

R. Muller and K. Lemuieux have completed a research that aims to examine the relationship for social support, attachment security and psychopathology for adults that are high risk abuse survivors. In the study there were 66 individuals that suffered physical or sexual abuse in the past participating. They were all asked to answer questionnaires that measured their position in variation of scales. The findings of the study were that the most significant predictor of psychopathology (which means the conditions and processes of a mental disorder (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/psychopathology)) was that a negative view of self was developed when connecting it with other relevant risk factors, such as weak attachment, no or little social support.
The negative self is connected to patterns of lack of self respect, lack of autonomy in relations to others, and believes that the self is unworthy of love and support. This leads to problems in interacting and creating relations to others. Muller & Lemuieux and other researcher on the field is arguing that interpersonal functioning is fundamental and lack of this ability to relate to others increase the likelihood of developing psychopathology (Muller & Lemieux, 2000).

3.4 The Intergenerational Effects of Trauma from Terror, a Real Possibility

To see however attachment can be a pattern that fails in generation after generation we have looked into the research of (Kaitz et al, 2009). When taking the importance of attachment in childhood further for clarifying additional underlying causes and effects. We can read about potential risks of children whose parents have been traumatized by terror. Discussing considered factors that may mediate the transmission of trauma effects from parents to children. Mediators which are considered are; parents traumatic distress, disturbed parent-child interactions, trauma related disturbances in parents thinking and effects of stress on children are neutral functioning. What also are discussed are environmental and genetic factors that may moderate the transmission of intergenerational effects and promote children’s risk and resilience. The discussion in the article is grounded on interviews of women who were pregnant or gave birth some time after direct exposure to a terror attack. The intergenerational transmission of trauma (ITT) can be defined as the shown impact of trauma experienced by one family member on another family member of a younger generation, regardless of any direct exposure or not. It can be marked by symptoms’ of children who did not witness the same traumatic event as their parents, with consequences causing distress and dysfunction to their victims. Concluding with the intergenerational transmission of violent trauma is clearly an important and understudied public health problem. It is important that efforts on policy level are directed at recognizing, understanding and treating the effects such violence can have on victims and their children, with effective means help parents identify and cope with their own and each other’s emotions, cohesion and organization at an individual level, so no legacy of terror and violence is carried by the children into the future (Kaitz et al, 2009).

This we also see as a distinct connection towards social work as there is research indicating that people that have been traumatized in the past and suffer low social support for instance are more likely to develop psychopathological diseases.
3.5 Using Strengths-Based Practice to Tap the Resilience of Families

Benard, B, writes about how the research and practitioners interest in resilience the last decade, how human problems are increasingly attracted to what has become a new paradigm, a new way of thinking about the work with human beings, focusing on assets instead of deficits and on working in partnership with, instead of doing to. Redesigning welfare systems to build on family strengths and work in partnership families and community-based organizations. Strength-based movement, suitable since children and families has been living with multiple stressors and in risk environments for years, with only focus on protective factors. Develop and asses practice to protect children and families in harm but also promote their healthy and successful development despite multiple risks and stressors the face every day (Benard in Saleebey (4ed.), 2006, p.197).
Chapter 4  Theoretical standpoint

4.1  Theoretical background

Before presenting our chosen theories we want our readers to understand the background of psychodynamic thinking, and to follow our reasoning behind the process of choosing and applying the theories in focus. We think with the help of chosen theories and the collected empirical data, we can draw parallels and see how the resilient child has been given the sufficient emotional support in childhood when growing up in a dysfunctional family with alcoholism.

The theories can help us show upon where the possible consequences emerge from and how they are expressed. We have selected theoretical parts from the psychodynamic paradigm as this we found most relevant to answer our research question and fulfill our research aim. Our theoretical base will be with the focus on the past reality integration with the connection to attachment theory. Central founders to these theories are the psychoanalyst Miller, Bowlby and Ainsworth.

Psychodynamic therapy contains many theories which are all different. Sigmund Freud can be seen as the main founder, and the other theories emerge from his thoughts. Freud argued that the individuals’ action is controlled to a large extent by the personality’s unconscious parts. All action has got a meaning, but the individual might not necessarily understand the meaning at the time. The action that does not make sense can be controlled of experiences or of emotive happenings in the past. Freud coined the concepts unconscious; where the thought and action cannot be explained, preconscious; where the individual is unaware of the thought and memories repressed but can be remembered with the help of therapy and last conscious; which is when the action is rational. These concepts were developed to explain how the psyche is operating (Havensköld & Risholm Mothander, 2009, p.55).

4.2  The attachment theory

Attachment theory derived from the pediatrician John Bowlby’s work. He started to follow and study children that was institutionalized and found that they showed different emotional problems such as the inability to create lasting relationships with others. He argued that this was because of lack of opportunity to create a good attachment/relation with the mother/mother figure in early childhood (Crain, 2005, p.44). His studies showed upon the importance of good relations for an
infant and its caretaker. During long separations and los of the caretaker the child developed an insecure attachment that affected the child’s emotional development.

Mary Ainsworth who was a developmental psychologist continued studying the attachment strategies that the child was using depending on its relation. She identified different levels of attachment; 1) Securely attached infants have got the ability to seek for support, to accept comfort and shift attention. 2) Insecure/avoidant infants characterized by ignoring the support, repressing fear, separation regrets and self developed coping strategies. 3) Insecure/ambivalent infants characterized by high level of attention, hard to comfort after separation, hard to let go of a negative feeling and constant need of confirmation (Ibid, p.55-57). Attachment is a fundamental need to survive; our whole life is about building and maintaining relations. The way we build and maintain relations can be seen as a consequence of our attachment.

4.3 Past reality integration

Past reality integration a new form of psychotherapy which was developed by psychoanalyst Alice Miller as inspiration. The past reality integration consider repressed and denied emotions from our childhood strongly affecting our reactions as adults. Children are completely exposed of the mercy of the parents or other legal guardians. The past reality integration believes that children will gradually build up a psychological immune system, which at an unconscious level keep, the unbearable pain away from the consciousness, so that we do not feel it. This allows children to grow up and survive the strong emotional (Jenson, 1998, p. 29-30).

This mental immune system becomes a defense system which is still active when the child has become adult and independent. When in adulthood encounter a situation that in some way similar to the painful past it activates one or more defense mechanisms. The old defense mechanisms are still trying to defend ourselves from what was dangerous in the past, although this is usually not dangerous anymore, because the dangers are no longer there. The defense mechanisms allows us here and now thinking and doing things that are no longer necessary, and this often makes life difficult for us as adults (Jenson, 1998, p. 51-52).

The theoretical past reality integration model explains how psychological issues occur and it begins with describing a newborn child with a mind blank as an unwritten sheet. When the child’s needs are not met, it becomes like wounds; most of the children do not get the possibility to
process difficult situations. Then the pain and wounds leave traces on the previously unwritten sheet. In order to be able to survive this and grow up, we are forced to use different strategies to shield us from the pain. The past reality integration model mean that we build up a defense wall and as adults, we are using a shared consciousness; an adult mind and a (childhood mind) childhood pain with the defense wall between (http://psykologdanielkraft.se/integrationsterapi.pdf).

The defense mechanisms are state of mind, thought- and behavior patterns which has the function to prevent us from feeling the painful emotions from childhood. Examples might be feelings of helplessness and lack of self-confidence, condemnatory attitude towards others, anger, fear or excessive performance needs. In adulthood, long moments in the adult mind is common; go to work/school, feed one self, and being adequate to ones surroundings. But sometimes symbol charged situations which touch upon something which have happened in childhood may encounter and result in a defense reaction. This happens often very quickly and unconsciously. To be in a defensive State is very stressful, it can be expressed in urgency of one’s needs getting met, or feelings of being excessively self focused and feelings of emptiness and worthlessness (Jenson, 1998, p. 56-59).

The defense mechanisms are divided in these categories: Fear is the deepest layer of defense. Fear gives the child an illusion of being able to escape from a situation where their needs, which they need to survive is not met (physically or emotionally). For the adults fear can be expressed as: not daring to go to parties, fear of speaking in front of others, fear of diseases or that something bad shall happen to loved ones.

Primary defense- is the first cognitive defense; when the child’s needs are not being met. The child feels shame and guilt, the child is thinking: I do not get what I need because something is wrong with me. The child is not able to see objectively on situations, where it is the parent who is being irresponsible. As an adult thinking: I am not good enough, or easily feel guilt and shame. Past reality integration believes that the cognitive defense makes the person feel depressed, leads to a lack of energy or feeling of life being too heavy.

False hope- the child is thinking: If I am really good, I will get what I need. As an adult, a person under the influence of this defense can make great effort since he/she still believes it can give him/her what they missed out as a child: love, warmth and acceptance. False hope according to
past reality integration lead to: perfectionism, physical stress symptoms such as pain in the neck, and shoulders, repetitive strain injury and burnout.

*False power*- The child is thinking that it is because of you, I do not get what I need. For an adult this defense mechanism can be expressed by feeling that others wants to do you harm, that you are being punished, or that other people are following you. This can lead to irritation, anger, stress symptoms, aggressive thoughts or acts and feelings of superiority.

*Denial of the needs*- the child thinks: I need nothing. To be influenced by this defense mechanism past reality integration believes that this is leading to decreased emotional reactions than normal. Headache, dependencies, and eating disorders are considered to be consequences of this. Past reality integration mean that a person can use several defense mechanisms in their lives as well as sometimes some of them are more dominant than the others (http://psykologdanielkraft.se/integrationsterapi.pdf).
Chapter 5  Presentation of results

We have interviewed two men and two women via e-mail; all identify themselves as individuals who have grown up under circumstances where at least one parent has been using various substances and mainly alcohol. The themes used when presenting our data are: 1) the self and the relation to others, 2) emotions and trust, 3) control and coping and 4) determination and ambition.

5.1 Theme 1 - The self and the relation to others

With this theme we want to understand how the respondents feel about themselves and how they experience their commitments and their relation to others, and also to establish if the respondents have been given sufficient support from the surroundings.

When asking the respondent about their commitment and relations to others it was clear that the respondents all feel that they were willing to help and please others; “I am the little helper, I want to make everyone happy and be available for the once in my nearest space, If someone feels bad I am trying to cheer them up” (IP 3). “I help out a lot even though I know people won’t help me back” (IP1) “When I was younger it was very important that people liked me. I get (and sometimes still get) stressed out if I felt that someone did not like me” (IP 4).

We continued by asking the respondents about how they think that they have been influenced by growing up in a family with abuse;” I hate having people around my house” (IP 1). I have problems giving negative critique to someone, and is very scared of conflicts, I think that I will be disliked if I say no”(IP 3).

We could also see that the respondents feel differently than other people by seeing themselves as being more mature and more keen to learn; “I feel much different than others, more mature in some situations, are observant and learn a lot from others experiences and problems” (IP 2),“I feel different than others” (IP 3). “I often think that if they don’t learn it’s none of my business but when they ask stupid questions I think, please just look one more time. People are so lazy” (IP 1).

We asked if the respondents often feel that they are victims of life's whims; “absolutely, probably we all do from time to time. To read diaries from my teens are painful today as they all describes a feeling of hopelessness. Nothing I did could change the fact that my mom was drinking. Periods when life went well something always popped up so my mom fell back into drinking” (IP 4). When my mother is drunk and wanting to start a fight, I keep feeling, why she is doing this to me” (IP 1).
Three of the respondents’ feel that there has been a significant other which means “a person, such as a family member or close friend, who is important or influential in one's life” (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/significant+other) or a reliable parent in their upbringing but still feel that the support given has been insufficient. One respondent feels that there has been no one in the upbringing for support and that this has been lacking; “Yes, but I feel that the adult world was a bit flat when I was growing up. Many people knew how I had it at home but did nothing. They were good to me, though they never took hold of the problem that I was too little to deal with. It can really annoy me today” (IP 4). “try to find one of those, if you can”, I once opened up for my school teacher but she reported us to soc, this resulted in hell at home”. I had a contact person that I used, to go to movies and stuff (IP 1).

The respondents explain that they are keen to help others despite not given any help back, they want to please and satisfy others needs. They are scared of conflicts as they want to be liked by other people. The respondents explain that they feel different than others; they feel that they have a will to learn new things. Two of the respondents feel emotional states such as hopelessness in front of the drunken parent. Three of the respondents has answered that they have had someone in their upbringing that they can trust. Two have answered that the social support has been insufficient, and one respondent answered that when initiating contact with school teacher this made the situation at home worse.

5.2 Theme 2 - Emotions and trust

With this theme we want to put emphasis on the respondents’ access to feelings to see if the feelings have changed, and what could have brought up this change. We also want to establish if the participants trust other people.

What is obvious in the answers when asking about their access to their emotions we can see that the access has changed during the life span; “ticking bomb sometimes” but now being older it is different from then as he now try to feel the feeling and realize that no one is perfect and people make mistakes” (IP 2). “during my childhood I felt like shit, as young adult I felt half good and as an adult I feel great” (IP 3).

We could see that different happenings have been described as triggers that have led to a shift in emotions; “A big change is my brother’s death. I lost a lot of feeling there, after that everyone told me I was insensitive. He meant a lot to me. My mom left without saying where to, I was left without a home, didn’t know if she was alive or not, she moved with protected identity so I could not get in touch with her, my step dad was in prison so he couldn’t take care of me, I was 18 at the time. I had to go and live with my dad. We developed some kind of
relation, but he has never stood up for me” (IP 1). “My father, that was an alcoholic, died suddenly when I was 24. I then let go of all my dreams that it would be me that cures him” (IP 3). “My dad chose to leave me and my brother with our mom when they divorced, I was 10. This is a significant turning point in life as I realized what problems my mom had. My dad’s betrayals that have been constant during my upbringing – even though I asked many times to move there he didn’t let me. When I was in my twenties I realized that I had to accept my dad for what he was (a nice person but unable to give support) or end our relationship. I chose the first option, and slowly started to feel better. It was not an easy decision as it forced me to deal with my presumptions what a dad should be like. But his with my convinement that I could not change my mom, just support her if needed, is the foundation that makes me feel good today. It is good to know that the only one, who really looks after myself, is me – of course with the help of others but the responsibility is mine” (IP 4).

When asking about their access to their feelings, the existing patterns is that the respondents have problems getting in touch with their feelings; It’s hard, do not freely show feelings, I think it is because all the fights and shit that I had to put out with, “not feel, not to let so much in, and not engage in too deep conversations” (IP 1). “to not feel, save myself by not being there, superficial attitude” (IP 2).

We can see in the answers from the respondents that there are an existing pattern of trust issues and that the ability to trust in people has been affected negatively; “I only trust a few people in my life”. I always think that no one wishes me well, all want to harm me and destroy my life, I am constantly on watch and are suspicious and think everybody is lying” (IP 2). “I have many superficial friends but few very close once”, feelings of betrayal if someone is breaking a promise made”. I am often seen as a person who does not take things seriously and can transform most to humor” (IP 3). “I’ve been good at not trusting people. I was not talking about the problems at home until I was 17, so for many years, I was quiet and pretended that all was well” (IP 4).

We can see that a change in the respondents’ feelings has occurred. For IP 3 this changed when her father suddenly died, she is nowadays feeling good as the responsibility of curing her father has disappeared. In three of the respondents’ lives there has been a significant happening that has been described as process. This has both been towards the better and to the worst when it comes to the development of feelings. The respondents describes that they are suffering lack of trust in other people, they have the feeling that people will betrayed them. They state difficulties in expressing feelings, and talking about feelings with others.

5.3 Theme 3 - Determination and ambition
With this theme we want to look at what driving forces and ambitions the respondents have and if their self esteem and self confidence has been affected by growing up with an alcoholic parent.
The respondents all agree that to get praise, and that others will like them and an important accomplishments in life; “I want to be best, I want to be liked, I want to have so much knowledge that they cannot cope without me” (IP 1). “I know what I want, everything else than what has been, is a success, everything other than abuse is success” (IP 2). In my working life I would say that success is when you get appreciation and praise for your performance, to perform well and get credit for the achievement” (IP 3). “Of course I am driven by the desire to succeed. The feeling of having performed something in a good way is important. And of course others’ appreciation” (IP 4).

According to our respondents to grow up with a parent who are abusing alcohol has affected the self esteem and the self confidence; “self confidence – there are people that have much better self confidence”. I am not looking for eye contact with anyone. I think I can perform but I know that there are always people that are better” (IP 1). “I have little self confidence; it has been affected a lot. My upbringing has affected me emotionally, my self esteem, hard on the outside” (IP 2). "Self-esteem and self confidence, I have been working with it for many years. Today I can say I have good self-esteem and often good self-confident. Not always, however. There are situations where I can really feel small and insecure, but I guess it’s the same for everyone” (IP 4)

All the respondents state that it is important to feel appreciated and to get praise for their achievements. This is something that they all agree, is to strive for. They do things so people will like them. The ambition in life is to become best, and to get confirmation that they are good enough. They claim that they have or have had bad self esteem and self confidence.

5.4 Theme 4 - Control and coping

With the help of this theme we want to see if the respondents have a need of controlling situations, to achieve this we have asked about what strategies that they are using in everyday life.

The way that the respondents identify themselves with work and achievement is a way of controlling situations; “Everything is about what I do, if I don’t do anything nothing happens and the other way around. I don’t know who I am without a job” (IP 1). “I can control the circumstances, I live for today” .I always take control over different situations in any way I can. Sometimes it doesn’t change anything but at least I have tried” (IP 2). I am convinced that most of the practical things like job, living and economy can be solved” (IP 4).

The respondents prefer to know what is going to happen, they prefer to have routines and clear focuses of what to do; “Duty above all. Most is routine work. When unplanned things pop up without a warning I get really stressed out!”(IP 3). “I do not sit around waiting for someone to solve my problems, it is definitely strength. To lose yourself in a routine can be directly relaxing and gives me the opportunity for reflection. But I am in myself a very routine-driven person - breaking my routine too much makes me unhappy”. This can also be seen as a way to
survive, to have clear routines and to know what is going to happen during the day gives you a certain control over the situation” (IP 4).

We can see that the respondents all feel secure when they have routine chores at home and at work with directions to follow and aims to strive for. The respondents are describing that they take control over situations, and are trying to control whatever is possible to control. If they cannot control the situation the feeling of being stressed occurs. They take control over their own action. We can see that there is a need of controlling situations in order for them to feel safe. And one identified coping strategies is to follow set routines.

5.5 Conclusion

In reported themes above we can establish that the emotions of our responders have been described as shifting over time and that there is a problem with showing the emotions. There is a lack of trust in others described; the respondents are scared of letting other people in by expressing feelings. We can clearly understand that they are in need of controlling situations to feel safe. The need of helping others is vital as the respondents want to be liked and appreciations from others are seen as important.
Chapter 6 Analysis

In this chapter we present our interpretation of the result from our collected data, in relation to our chosen theories. Our interpretations are presented under each applied themes, at the end of this chapter we have concluded our holistic interpretation of all collected data from our respondents.

6.1 The self and the relation to others

Being exposed to trauma during childhood have made them grow up fast and being forced of taking enormous responsibility over themselves and their families early on in life. They feel different compared with other people in their surroundings; more mature, adjustable and prepared for unexpected situations, since it is what they know. But the painful memories and experiences are always reminding them of their past.

It has affected their relation as well towards other people since they have issues with letting people into their lives, to let down the guard and expose their inside and to not see that anybody would want to do them good. Despite this the respondents do their utmost to satisfy other people needs. This can be compared with what the Past reality integration calls the primary defense. The defenses can appear as not good enough feeling or easily appearance of guilt and shame.

Our interpretation is that there has not been enough secure attachment during their early childhood. This emotional distress they are living with can be explained by what Bowlby calls insecure attachment, where there has been lack of opportunities to create attachment and relations for them in their upbringing, to get a motherly attachment, what also Mary Ainsworth writes that an insecure attachment is something affecting ones relations through the whole life, since the way we build relations is a consequence of our attachment.

6.2 Emotion and trust

When saving themselves during their childhood, repressing the traumatic experiences and emotions has been the only way of surviving the day, month and year in a substance abusive family, something that they have done for years and have become experts on doing, since there has not been any other choice for them. Their access to their feelings has change over time, during them growing older and there has been trigger that has led to emotional change as betrayal, death and abandoned. Whereas they in childhood had very little contact with their emotions and in adult
life much better access to them and now a day’s more or less feel their emotions without showing it to the utter world. Since the utter world is not trustful and genuine. Where our respondents only feel trust in few people close to them in their adulthood because of much betrayal and promises not kept in their childhood, a quiet and hard front side, hiding what is unbearable.

Freud explains that an individual’s actions is very much controlled by the personality’s unconscious and that all actions made have a meaning the individual might not understand at the time in the same sense as past reality integration mean is our mental immune system, which at an unconscious level keep, the unbearable pain away from the consciousness. Past reality integration calls it defense mechanisms, which has the function of preventing us from feeling painful emotions. Whereas repressing feelings and not have any access to them as our respondents have done is the first level of fear.

6.3 Determination and ambition

To constantly having the desire of wanting to be best and to always deliver in order for achieving satisfaction inside themselves, must be stressful and many times painful. Appreciation and results are what counts for even being able to touch upon some confirmation and good enough feeling, to always do what is best for others in order for them to feel admired. Having the determination and driving force to succeed in life, knowing what to do and feel that they are capable of achieving new things despite low confident in themselves is the desire for one minute being acknowledge, and not just acknowledge of anyone but by their parents; love and attention they never had in their upbringing. Seeking and needing confirmation, the insecure ambivalent level of attachment strategy. Whereas the past reality integration calls it the false hope defense mechanism, which result in perfectionism, physical stress symptoms and burnouts. As well as in conjunction of never fell good enough; the primary defense which can lead to lack of energy and the feeling of life is being too heavy sometimes even for them.

6.4 Control and coping

Coming from a chaotic upbringing where spontaneous dangerous situations accruing on a regular basis, which was not predictable, makes other things that are always the same, routine and under control, become safe and secure. Taking control over one’s own destiny with practical things you can change and guide strengthens the feeling of having own power and control. Instead of living
with the feeling of being totally abandoned they take control over their own situation. Since there is no one else to help out, and if it is not done by themselves no one else is going to help them out, they must take care of themselves. This is resulting in that our informants are being identified and also identifies themselves with work and achievements, since the lack of trust in other people are enormous. Then strategies of not letting people in to close, get into deep conversations and having a sometimes superficial attitude outwards becomes a safety net. This in order to save themselves from further pain, then routine work, directions and knowledge of what shall come makes them feel comfortable and can keep on moving. What the past reality integration describes as the denial of needs, defense mechanism, which often result in a decreased emotional reactions than normal, with consequences as headache, eating disorders and dependencies. The behavior patterns our respondents have and live after is consequences of applied defense mechanism. They are forced to take in their upbringing, which is still defending them in their adult life, but the differences now is that it is defending them from what was dangerous in their past not in their present situations. This then becomes more a hinder in their daily lives with feelings of helplessness, bad self confident, judging attitude towards others anger and fear. Their behavior patterns are a reaction of conscious adult mind meet unconscious childhood mind. The Past reality integration is calling this False Power.

6.5 Conclusion

The behavior pattern our respondents have and live after are consequences of applied defense mechanisms: they were forced to take their upbringing in order to protect themselves from the unbearable pain. The defense mechanisms are still protecting them in their adult life, but the difference now is that it is defending them from what was dangerous in their past not in their present situations. This then becomes more an obstacle in their daily lives with feelings of helplessness, low self confidence, low self esteem, condemning attitude towards others, anger and fear. Their behavior patterns are a reaction of their conscious adult mind meeting unconscious childhood mind, which can be very stressful for them with feelings of being excessively self focused, feelings of emptiness and worthlessness.
Chapter 7  Discussion

7.1  Findings

Our results and analyses show that consequences are many both positive and negative. One major negative impact is the lack of trust in oneself and in others. There are problems committing in relationships as there are trust issues. This also leads to lack of self esteem and self confidence. We as human beings have a need to belong in groups with other people. When we isolate ourselves it becomes dangerous. The constant need of control and to take control in all situations possible is also an energy consuming coping pattern. Surprises are uncomfortable for a child who has grown up under circumstances that they cannot control, hence the strong control need for things that are possible to control. This becomes an obsession and is taking over all daily routines, if something does not turn out as planned then it is a disaster, the world falls apart and the child feels a strong feeling of helpless, gets scared, confused and feel angry.

According to our interpretation in relation to previous research stress resilience is interlinked with co-dependency. This is a problem that many individuals experiencing when living in relation or in family with someone who has a substance abuse problem. Co-dependency is a serious condition which makes the individual develops defense mechanisms that are destructive. The defense mechanism leads the child to repress their emotions, which leads to other problems later in life as we have seen in the analysis part. Whilst many prefer to talk about their ability to cope and that they have goals in life and nothing is really impossible for a resistant child. We see it as a destructive pattern that is repressing emotions and ending up in own abuse, co-dependency. The differences that we have found are that when a child is seen as resilient it has been shown that they have had an attachment with another person during their upbringing, whilst being co-dependent this advantage has been missing. This resulted in that the resilient child has been given the opportunity to talk about his or her problems and the parent/s problems.

Another consequence is the ambition to always become better and best. This driving force is something that is pushing and pushing, even though physical problems occur there is no way of stopping the need to be best! This is a price that these children who are seen as resilient will pay eventually in one way or another. They live to work, as work is the place where confirmation of being good and sometimes best can be given. All the other social factors as family, friends and other activities get suffering. We should work to live not live to work!
This in our opinion can be seen as a negative consequence as there has been a lack of trust in relationships; the emotions have been repressed throughout their childhood.

The aim of this study was to increase our knowledge of stress resilience children coming from backgrounds of substance abuse, and what consequences they may encounter for not being able to act or bring out emotions and happenings experienced in their upbringing. Our research question is; what are the consequences of being an adult with the experiences of being a stress resilient child? With the information above we feel we have achieved our aim and answered our research question as our aim was to increase the knowledge about stress resilient children and look at potential consequences.

7.2 Connection to previous research

When we read about the earlier research in the field of resilience the variation in defining the concepts differed. The variation was something that was slightly confusing from the start, the meanings was fairly similar but with some variations. But the main idea was always the same. That was to look at the strengths in a child that made the child able to resist different forms of stress. In this study we have defined the stress situation as growing up in a home with a parent or both parents being dependent on alcohol.

Repeatedly occurring names in developing the concept of resiliency internationally are Emmy Werner and James Anthony. Werner put all the focus in understanding what has made the child resilient. Werner and Antony came to conclude sufficient factors that made a child resistant. One of the most important factor was that a child had the opportunity to attach to a significant other and also that the child showed some personal attributes like being outgoing, believe in themselves and bright.

Many of these factors can be seen in our respondents’ answers. So we dare to suggest that they all have attributes for being resilient. Muller and Lejuene are in their study; Social Support, Attachment, and Psychopathology in high risk formerly maltreated adults explaining the importance for social support and attachment as a preventive factor for psychopathology. They claim that there are developments of a negative self. The negative self is something that we can trace in the answers of our respondents as they have not developed the ability to trust other people and have problems building relations, the respondent is committed to satisfy other needs instead of their own. According to our study this is something that is developed in children when lacking
support and attachment in their upbringing. We can see that the respondent’s answers are indicating that they have not been given the sufficient support from society as they describe the lack of people helping them. We need to highlight how important it is to see these children and help them as early as possible even though they are not visible. Acknowledging that children never stops repressing due to already established defense mechanisms, and the repressed emotions needs to be brought up to the conscious in order to be healed.

Benard in his chapter about using strengthen-based practice is writing about a shift in paradigm, to work with the individual not for. This means that the work should be done in corporation with the person in question. The life situation for a resistant child could be improved by an adult giving time and focus to listen to the child. This could possible prevent the child from developing unbenevolent defense mechanism as a consequence of growing up with an alcohol dependant parent. This even though there are no visible signs of destructive pattern. As Kaitz et al. points out in their article Intergenerational effects of trauma shows us that the lack of sufficient support may not always be consciously transferred from one person to another. So a family that has no obvious problems could still have children that have hidden psychological problems, due to the parent or parents having experienced trauma in the past. In our study this just made it more clear how important it is to look at the strong and well functioning child and its way of handling stress.

7.3 The research process and the methodology

Our findings in this study are something that we feel is important to develop further. When initially starting this process of writing this essay we had only had the concept of resiliency in our minds. Resiliency is something that we can establish by reading earlier research is seen as something positive, strengths in a child to survive under hard circumstances. Our teacher then asked us; But what is the problem then. This is a good question, as when viewed on the outside with an objective understanding there are no problems, not at least visible problems. And for us, this was an important problem!

We started to read all possible research about resiliency, were surprised when nothing was described in the matter of what potential consequences they might suffer. As we have a good pre-understanding in the subject we found this strange. We come to conclude that in our findings that there are consequences, both positive and negative. A positive consequence can be the driving
force to survive, and the ambition to achieve things even though encountered adversity and setbacks.

We can also see negative consequences with being resilient and this would be to repress feelings, lack of trust, issues with a constant control need, and so on. What we can come to conclude is that resiliency is a way of coping with stressful situations. It is a way of repressing the emotions when the emotion becomes too unbearable. When repressing the emotions you are denying the self the right to development, the right to exist as a person. This leads to co-dependence. Co-dependency is a serious illness that needs professional help. We think that being aware of the difference that it could be for a child who is seen as resilient to be helped as a co-dependent is enormous. This is why these findings are so important for future work.

It is possible that the result of the essay could have been different if the opportunity to have a focus group interview had been achievable. Perhaps the empirical material could have been thicker and more consequences could have been confirmed. But with follow up calls and e-mails questions we think that the result was in depth and that the material was sufficient to answer our question and aim. As the study was done in Sweden with Swedish respondents and researchers all the material therefore needed to be translated into English. We were aware that the different languages used, possible could have been a limitation. The translation of the text could possibly have led to that the meaning has been missed out in some sentences, due to the variation of meaning in different languages. To act different in a situation like this we could have had more people involved looking at the translation. If this could have ended up in a different interpretation we are not sure.

To strengthen the results and feel sure about our interpretation, we have read a lot of autobiographical literature from people that are identifying themselves as, resilient, also used earlier research and theories to strengthen the results. Our pre understanding in the subject has been valuable. This has led us to easily have been able to put ourselves in the respondents position which is important from a phenomenological standpoint. As we have been subjective in our standpoint from the beginning of the research, we have been aware about the potential impact our pre understanding and prejudices could have on the result. But by acknowledging this from the start to the end we have been questioning our interpretations constantly to get valid results. We have felt that we have been able to understand the underlying meaning in what has been said and written.
7.4 Future research

People in our society get more and more stressed out (own assumption) so this connection to social work is for us obvious. By noticing the children who are not visible in the society, we as educated social workers can make a difference, in acknowledging them in time. In order to prevent co-dependency and further development of destructive defense mechanisms efforts needs to be made in time. Since we as educated social workers will in many cases be the first point of contact with high risk families and other individuals at risk. If we should not acknowledge these children we are neglecting their human rights. We will with more knowledge be able to make a difference for the children that do not scream out for help, and maybe for adults that are successful but on the edge of breaking down. Perhaps with more knowledge we will be able to identify co-dependency and its consequences in time and help people to stop “burning themselves out” and help them to stop controlling all possible situations as a survival strategy. Possibly help people to start trust again and to build healthy and long lasting relationships with partners and others.

This is all possible with the right knowledge and with more knowledge; we need to know where to start looking, and also how to start preventing. Socialstyrelsen report about children’s ill health in the society is showing us the indication that there are thoughts about preventing work being the best possible way, to build a better society. But if not knowing how and where to look this fails. This is why we think that the way forward to get a sustainable society with well functioning inhabitants is that the research needs to continue.
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Appendix

9.1 Appendix 1- Interview guide

Vi har kommit fram till att det finns en heldel tidigare forskning på vad som definierar ett maskrosbarn och vad det innebär att vara ett maskrosbarn. Men det vi saknar och tycker är viktigt att ta fram och lyfta upp är vad som händer sen, senare i livet. Efter att ha vuxit upp i en dysfunktionell familj och miljö och ändå klara sig bra, är det möjligt, vad händer med allt bagage senare i livet och hur har man hanterat sin bakgrund.


Om du har frågor kan du kontakta oss på vsn08pbk@student.hig.se eller vsn08ahi@student.hig.se
Tack på förhand!
Med vänlig hälsning
Aida&Pernilla
Intervjuguide

- Dina relationer till ursprungsfamiljen, till din egen familj, till arbetskamrater, och vänner:
  Kan du se ett mönster i ditt sätt att förhålla dig till andra människor?
- Hur har din uppväxt påverkat din relation till människor?
- Kan du peka på några svåra situationer som du haft att ta ställning till genom åren och som du ser avgörande vändpunkter?
- Har du ofta känt att du är offer för livets nycker?
- Eller har du snarare känt att du för det mesta har livet i din hand, att du har förmåga att styra omständigheterna?
- Vad driver dig framåt?
- Vad får dig att eventuellt vilja ge upp?
- Vad i ditt liv betecknar du som framgångar? Vad som misslyckanden?
- Känner du att du är annorlunda än andra eller är du ”som folk är mest”?
- Vad ger dig idag styrka, arbetslust, livslust? Vad verkar i motsatt riktning?
- Om du ser på dina aktiviteter under en valig dag- från det du går upp på morgonen till det du går och lägger dig- skulle du vilja säga att mer än hälften av din dag består av rutinsysslor och rutinarbete eller mer hälften består av tankar, känslor och arbetsinsatser som känns engagerande, intresseväckande till och med lustfyllda?
- Väljer du själv för det mesta vad du ska göra eller får du dig ålagt (av andra, av pliktkänslor) vad du ska göra?
- Hur tror du att din självkänsla och ditt självförtroende har påverkats av att växa med en alkolist i familjen?
- Hur är din tillgång till dina känslor?
  - Har den förändrats?
  - När?
  - Ge exempel på vilket sätt?
- Har det funnits någon pålitlig vuxen?
- Vilka konstruktiva strategier har du utvecklat?
- Vilka destruktiva strategier har du utvecklat?
- Har du använt någon av följande överlevnads strategier:
  -inte prata -inte känna -inte lita på