



# Resiliency- Protective factors in Academic Achievement among Refugee Primary School Pupils in Dadaab

Joel J P Ogutu

Department of Educational Psychology, Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kakamega, Kenya.

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of resiliency and protective factors in academic achievement among primary school pupils from refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya. The data was collected from 188 pupils (132 males and 56 females) and 22 teachers selected from standard five to eight classes in 22 refugee primary schools. Both school and participants were selected randomly. A questionnaire was used to measure resiliency and the mean mark (MM) of the first term to measure the academic performance of the participants. The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. T-test was used to compare male and female participants in resiliency and academic achievement. The ANOVA was used to compare the relationship between resiliency and academic achievement. The results of the study showed that there was significant differences between male and female pupils resiliency and academic achievement. Similarly, there was significant differences between pupils' resiliency and educational class levels. Further results revealed that most pupils in refugee schools achieved poorly in academics, while most girls dropped out of school due to cultural barriers. Majority of the pupils were ignorant of protective factors to safeguard perceived risks such as family and society related risks. From the findings, it was recommended that different authorities from UNHCR and related humanitarian assistance organizations or counseling services at the schools ought to improve pupils' psychological resiliency and provide support to help overcome risks and focus on academics with high level of self-efficacy to achieve.

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## Introduction

The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951, (in article 1A) defined a refugee as anyone who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (Oluwatosin, 2012).

Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya is one of the oldest and largest refugee camps in the world. It was formed in 1991 by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) at which time it was intended to accommodate a population of 90,000 people Somalis fleeing their war torn country from a war that continues to this day. However it is presently home to more than 500,000 people (Uytterhaeghe, 2013). Dadaab is a semi-arid town in North Eastern Kenya. Dadaab is located Garissa County approximately 100 kilometers from the Kenya-Somalia border. Until recently, the local population traditionally consisted of nomadic Somali camel and goat herders (UNHCR, 2013). Ninety seven percent of the people living in the five camps namely Dagahley, Hagadera, Ifo, Fafi and Kambioos that comprise Dadaab are of Somali origin. The rest are refugees from Ethiopia, Sudan, and other conflict embroiled countries in Africa. It is estimated that in 2011 alone, due to the continued violence between Al-Shabaab militia group and the Somali Government forces and the drought plaguing the country, more than 31,000 further Somalis have arrived in the camps, thus puts

a heavy burden on the limited resources available in the camps (Oluwatosin, 2012).

The United State Committee for Refugees and Immigrants gives the world total as 62,000,000 refugees. According to (UNHCR, 2013) over 500,000 refugee children from Somalia, Southern Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Burundi reside in Kenya. This has led to increased strain on access to primary and secondary education in the country's refugee camps. While education is legally open to refugee children in Kenya, and tuition in government primary schools is theoretically free, many young people still cannot afford the hidden costs associated with attending school. At secondary level, public schools increased their annual fees in 2011, making them out of reach for many families, even with government subsidies. In addition, refugee girls from Somali and Ethiopia are confronted with cultural barriers that deny them opportunity for going to school (Women Refugee Commission, 2012).

However, the continuous fighting in Somalia has caused displacement of people majority of who end up in Dadaab refugee complex. This flow of refugees has not been matched by a corresponding expansion of existing education and settlement facilities in refugee camps (Kenya Red Cross, 2012). Despite protection of refugees across Dadaab, cases of risks such as sexual and gender-based violence, domestic violence, theft, and child labour have not been fully addressed (UNHCR, 2013). The current study focused on resiliency and protective factors and its influence in academic achievement among pupils in Dadaab refugee primary schools.

Tele:

E-mail addresses: [joelogutu@yahoo.com](mailto:joelogutu@yahoo.com)

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## Reviewed Literature

Resiliency is a perception of inner strength that allows for the physical manifestation of strength and recovery from disruptions in functioning (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). The term is often used to refer to a person's capacity to adapt, recover from or remain strong in terms of hardship (Folkman, 2011). Further, resiliency implies coping with stressful events (Folkman, 2011), or adaptive coping in the face of multiple risk factors (Waller, Okamoto, Miles & Hurdle 2003). Reflecting on work of children in resource-poor settings, Boyden & Mann (2005), argued that resiliency provides a useful metaphor for the empirical observation that some children, possibly the majority, are surprisingly able to adjust to or overcome situations of serious adversity. The various components of resiliency can also be thought of having a "buffering" effect between risk factors and negative life outcomes.

Children who are highly resilient exhibit adaptive coping skills and often convert stressors into opportunities for learning and achievement. For example, in a sample of college students, Campbell, Cohan & Stein (2006), found that resiliency was positively related to problem-focused skills to address adversity. Scott (2008) also found that students who used problem-focused coping strategies performed better academically compared to students who used emotion-focused coping strategies. Therefore, a student's level of resiliency and the manifestations of that resiliency are related to effective adaptive resources to academic stress. Similarly, Clifton, Perry, Stubbs, & Roberts (2004), alleges that children with greater self-esteem are better able to cope with stress and achieve higher academic scores.

Reis, Colbert, & Hebert (2005), conducted a study on 35 high school freshmen and sophomores identified as academically talented to investigate resiliency factors attributed to high achieving students. At the end of the study, 17 of the academically talented participants had become underachievers; 18 of the participants had continued to do well, thus had developed resiliency. Furthermore, the high achievers had a clear, positive outlook for the future helped to prepare them for the future. The underachievers stated that school was boring and that their classes did not match their learning styles. According to Reiss, et al, (2005), poor children are exposed to multiple risk factors that forecast academic and health difficulties with higher probability than that of their upper-income counterparts. Risk is pervasive, and no dimension of a child's life is immune; thus, if children are subjected to one deterrent to development, it is highly likely that they will experience other risk factors concomitantly. Juang & Silbereisen (2002), posit that resilient learners have a higher academic capability which manifest into good academic performance.

Prior studies indicate that gender has a notable effect on a child's coping strategies. Despite being under stress, girls have been found to use resiliency factors such as seeking and getting support more than boys, (Hampel & Petermann, 2005). Girls more than boys cope with daily stressors by seeking social support and utilizing social resources. In contrast, boys use physical recreation such as sport to cope with adversity. Most studies of developmental change have found that increases in individual resiliency factors such as self-esteem are age-dependent among children than adolescents. For instance, studies confirm that self-esteem is lower in younger children. However, a few studies of 9-14 year old children and adolescents have found decreases in self-esteem with increasing age, suggesting that the relevant individual characteristics are acquired in middle childhood (Frost & McKelvie, 2004).

Protective factors in relation to resiliency, are those resources that minimize or mitigate risk (Morten & Marguerite, 2012). Protective factors can be internal or external to individuals. Individual physiological, emotional, and intellectual characteristics such as general health, intelligence, and coping ability are internal protective factors. On the other hand, families and other organizations, such as schools and health care agencies, are considered external protective factors that contributes to resilience (Mandleco & Perry, 2000).

Some researchers alleges that experiencing adversity is a necessary precursor for the development of resilience (Shannon, Beauchaine, Brenner, Neuhaus, & Gatzke-Kopp, 2007), previous exposure to violence (Christiansen & Evans, 2005), and lack of resources or parental support (Waller et al., 2003). Resiliency factors and related stressful events can lead to more negative outcomes for individuals while the various perceptions of these factors and stressful events can influence how it is viewed (Washington, 2008).

Previous literature shows, there are both internal and external factors that are important to consider when examining resiliency. These internal characteristics and environmental factors are referred to as protective factors. Protective factors can include individual traits such as self-esteem, intelligence, internal locus of control (Everall, Altrows, & Paulson, 2006), social competence, connectedness and memory of previous achievements (Bender, Thompson, McManus, Lantry, & Flynn, 2007; Oliver, Collin, Burns, & Nicholas, 2006). Many of these internal factors have a protective effect against negative outcomes (Anderman, 2002). Religiosity has been found to be an important protective factor and component for the development of resiliency (Bogar & Hulse-Killacky, 2006). According to Windham, Hooper, & Hudson (2005), religion provide a connection to the community, act as a buffer from feelings of hopelessness, foster a strong sense of right and wrong, and build caring relationships with family.

External protective factors include such things as family support, guidance, participation in extracurricular activities, and the outside influence of other adults, such as teachers or religious figures (Washington, 2008; Windham, et al, 2005). Another external factor that was found to be important involved previous exposure to stressors or risk factors. Studies have found that adolescents who had witnessed some violence or family conflict were less vulnerable to victimization (Christiansen & Evans, 2005). According to (Aronowitz & Morriion-Beedy, 2004; Crosnoe & Elder, 2004; Everall, et al, 2006; Wight, Botticello, & Aneshensel, 2005) external factors such as supportive relationships, strong ties to parents, and positive role models have a buffering effect against negative outcomes.

Recent studies indicate that families are pivotal in creating buffers against poverty-based risk (Edwards, Mumford, Shillingford, & Serra-Roldan, 2007). Family members may play a role as either a protective or a risk factor. For example, a study by Waller et al. (2003) found that children may find it harder to resist peer pressure from a family member than from another peer who is not related. Additionally, the researchers found that these family members can strongly influence children choices not to experiment with negative activities. Moreover, Rodgers and Rose (2001) posits that if a child at school is not feeling supported by her parents, a strong relationship with a teacher can provide that support and continue to influence the child's resilience

Community relationships can also serve as protective factors that are not sensitive to income (Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, Williamson, 2004). Caring, supportive relationships between

adults and youth are affirming to youth and, whether generated in schools, communities, or families, serve as a protective factors (Brooks, 2006). In the perception of the community, refugees are not considered to have asset to cope with adversity. As a result no attention has been given to resiliency ability of refugees and thereby resiliency or protective abilities of refugees has been ignored. According to Killian (2007) people are naturally endowed with the ability to cope with adversity provided that they get nurturing and supportive environment. Despite hardships in refugee settlement, studies indicate that many children overcome difficulties and grow up to lead productive lives and become resilient through protective factors. Some children have protective capacities that enable them to cope better with the ups and downs of life and become resilient (Killian, 2007). The sources of resiliency can be genetic, psychological and environmental factors (Margaret, Ted and John 2001).

### **Methodology**

#### **Participants and Procedure**

The present study was conducted in twenty two primary schools of refugee camps in Dadaab, Kenya, namely Dagahley, Hagadera, Ifo, Kambioos and Fafi. Questionnaires were given to pupils in the classes on the specific days during which the researcher visited the schools. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their right to consent to take part in the study.

The study reached out to 210 pupils and 22 teachers. Participants were randomly drawn using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The rationale to use stratified sampling technique was that it is best suited for such homogeneous and finite population and it gives equal chance for all refugees children to be considered in the study. To this end, stratified sampling was performed in two stages. First of all, the population divided into five groups (sub-group) on the basis of refugee camp schools population. In the second stage, 188 primary school pupils were selected from these camps randomly according to their ratio in total. By this way, proportional representation of each camp according to their ratios was ensured. In this method, representative statistics are reached since every camp consisted a sub-group and thus formed a homogenous subgroup.

The response rate was 89.5%. 10.5 % of the pupils did not return the questionnaires. Therefore, the final sample for analysis consisted of 188 pupils, 132 male (57%) and 56 female (43%) and 22 teachers. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 25 years with a mean age of 19 years ( $SD = 2.25$ ). In terms of level of education, 40 participants were class five pupils, 47 were class six level pupils, 54 were class seven level pupils and 47 were class eight level pupils.

#### **Research design**

The study used ex-post-facto research design. This is because, the children were already learning in refugee established schools, existing examination results were used, and the fact that the effects of risks protective factors and resiliency on academic achievement on refugee children had already occurred. The school settings studied had already influenced the children resiliency and academic achievement. However, this study was also correlation in design because it investigated the relationship between two variables: resilience, protective factors and academic achievement of refugee children.

#### **Instruments and pilot study**

The data for this investigation were collected using Student Resiliency Scale (SRS) developed by the researcher a model of Connon-Davidson resilience scale. These was to determine the

relationship between pupil resiliency, protective factors and academic achievement. The first part of the scales obtained demographic information about pupils such as gender, age, class level, social status of parents, and average academic grade point mark of the pupils. In the second part there were items regarding pupils resiliency and protective factors affecting pupils' resiliency. The response choices for the items were based on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 0-4; (where 0 is not true at all and 4 is true nearly all the time). Higher scores reflected greater resiliency. In addition, checklists were employed to measure protective factors affecting resiliency and academic achievement of the children in schools.

Data collection instruments included questionnaires for refugee school children and interview schedule for selected teachers. The questionnaires were considered ideal for collecting data from the children in schools because these respondents could interpret and record the questionnaires on their own with guidance of the researcher. The data on academic achievement was collected through end of term average score mark, self-reported by the participants at the end of each term of the year. The grades were used as the measure of students' academic achievement. After data collection, the questionnaires were sorted coded, and the data was entered into the computer for analysis.

Pilot study was conducted in four primary schools in Dadaab camps so as to check reliability of the research instruments. The instrument construct validity was assessed using a factor analysis to investigate the interrelationships among the variables and internal consistency for reliability was calculated by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. In applying this method, the pupil resilience and protective factors Cronbach's alpha coefficients for these subscales were calculated as .68 and .69 respectively. Question items that had lower inter-item analysis or low discriminative index were discarded. The content validity of the items were verified by two psychologists from the Department of Educational Psychology Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology in Kenya.

#### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive and influential statistics were used to analyze data. The descriptive statistics used were frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations, the inferential statistics used were t-test for independent samples and ANOVA. A t-test was used to find out the gender differences on resiliency of the pupils. This is because the t-test has superior quality in determining difference between two means. Hypothesis testing procedures were based on  $\alpha=0.05$  level of significance. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis of the data.

#### **Results**

Preliminary findings indicated that out of 188 pupil participants 62.76% were orphans being supported by their relatives particularly grandparents, aunts and fellow siblings. Out of the total 188 pupil respondents, 44.68% reported to have ever experienced failure in academic achievement in school. Dropout rate for female children stood at 67.85% compared to their male counterpart at 46.21%. With regard to risks 85.7% of female pupils experienced risks in terms of cultural discrimination and frustrations. Moreover 55.6% participants reported that they lived in poor family status.

The first aim of this study was to explore the impact of gender on resiliency among primary school pupils. To achieve this objective the participants responded to the items in the resiliency questionnaire. A t-test for independent samples was used to compare the mean of gender and resiliency.

**Table 1. t-test on gender differences in resilience of children**

Gender	Mean	t	Sig
Male children	44.91	0.121	0.118
Female children	46.92		

The result of the analysis in table 1 showed there was significance difference in average resiliency scores between male and female school children  $t(186) = 0.121, P < 0.05$ . The mean resiliency score of male and female participants had significance difference of 44.91 and 46.92 respectively. It was concluded that male and female pupils in refugee primary schools differ in resiliency. Further analysis revealed that among the 188 refugee school pupils, the mean resiliency score was 44.12% with standard deviation of 8.97%. The maximum and minimum scores were found to be 25- 65 which showed a wide range.

The second aim set in this study was to compare resiliency and educational level among pupils in refugee primary schools. To achieve this objective the academic performance of the participants was obtained through self-report questionnaires. To compare these two mean scores in resiliency and educational class levels between pupils ANOVA was conducted.

**Table 2. ANOVA on resilience of children in educational level**

Source of variation	sum of square	mean square	df	F	Sig
Between groups	541.207	266.306	3		
Within groups	18728.359	98.896	185	2.634	.64
Total	19269.566		188		

The results of the study in Table 3 reveal that Pupils resiliency and educational levels differed significantly among the four class educational levels,  $F(3,185) = 2.634, p < .05$ . Pupils resiliency in class seven educational level is ( $M = 9.00$ ), class six ( $M = 8.7$ ), class eight ( $M = 7$ ) and class five ( $M = 6.8$ ). This implies that significant difference in resiliency exists between children in lower class and higher class of learning. Further, the mean resiliency score of respondent whose educational level ranged from class 5-6 was 39.92 with standard deviation of 8.6 while the mean resiliency score of respondents whose educational level ranged from class 7- 8 was 40.92 with standard deviation of 8.37.

**Table 3. Frequency and percentages on response to protective factors**

N/S	Items	Frequency	%
1.	Attachment with family members	129	68.6
2.	Support from other caregiver	112	58.6
3.	Sense of belonging in family	89	47.3
4.	Relation with peers in school	88	46.6
5.	Relation with teachers	79	42.1
6.	Positive school environment	111	59.1
7.	Provision of material support by UNHCR	113	60.1
8.	Involvement in school activities	67	35.6
9.	Access to community facilities	102	52.3
10.	Positive community co-existence	125	66.5

Regarding protective factors, pupils' interaction within their social environment was considered on the basis of three levels; the family household, school and (UNHCR support). At each level, children were found to access both material and relational resources at varying percentages. From table 3, on family protective factors, about 68.8% respondents reported that they had good attachment with members of the family household,

58.6 had cordial support from other caregivers other than nuclear family members, while 47.3% had a sense of belonging in the family. With regard to school environment, 46.6% and 42.1% reported that they had good relation with peers and teachers in schools respectively, while 59.1% perceived positive school environment. Protective factors with regard to UNHCR support, provision of material support stood at 60.1%, involvement in school activities 35.6%, access to community facilities, 52.3% and positive co-existence within community stood at 66.5%. This implies that attachment with family members, positive school environment and positive community co-existence were rated high as protective factors that influenced pupils' resiliency and academic achievement in Dadaab refugee primary schools.

### Discussions

However, majority of refugee children 74.9% in Dadaab achieve poorly in academics. Besides, dropout rate for female children stood at 67.85% compared to their male counterpart at 46.21%. This implies material and human resources to promote and evaluate academic achievement are lacking while girls were subjected to cultural barriers such taking care of younger siblings and general negative societal attitude towards educating girl child that killed their morale to work had in school. From the results 85.7% of female pupils experienced risks in terms of cultural discrimination and frustration. This may imply that cultural practices put barriers on social freedom of female gender. This also shows that most children in Dadaab refugee camps suffer from family, school and commonly related risk factors. Most participants 55.6% confirmed that they lived in poor family background. This shows that UN refugee council has not done much to uplift the economic standards of the refugees in Daadab.

Resiliency a cross- gender was statistically significant between male and female pupils  $t(186) = 0.121, P = 0.05$ . The mean resiliency score of male and female respondents differed significantly (44.91 for male and 46.95 for females). This may be that female pupils were more resilient than male pupils since they be more flexible than their male counterparts. This findings concur with Hampel & Petermann, (2005) who found girls more than boys to cope with daily stressors by seeking social support and utilizing social resources around them. In contrast, boys uses mostly physical recreation activities such as sport to cope with adversities.

With regard to educational class level of the children, resiliency ability had significant difference. Respondents between class 5- 6 and those between class 7- 8 had  $F(3,185) = 2.634, p < .05$ . Pupils resiliency in class seven educational level is ( $M = 9.00$ ), class six ( $M = 8.7$ ), class eight ( $M = 7$ ) and class five ( $M = 6.8$ ). The mean resilient score for participants in class 5 – 6 was 39.92 almost equal to 40.92 for those in class 7- 8. This would mean education class level had strong influence on resiliency. This concur with Margaret, et al (2001) who stated that people acquire resiliency abilities that could be improved through effective training and development. The findings further imply that age level of the pupils affects resiliency. The results agree with Frost & McKelvie, 2004 who found that increases in individual resiliency factors such as self-esteem are age-dependent among children and adolescents (aged 5 to 17 years). For example self-esteem is lower in younger children. Similarly Luther (2007) stated that resiliency can also change over time based on the child's developmental stage and subsequent expenses. Therefore this difference could be due to the effect of development and as age of child increases, he or she becomes mature in physical and cognitive ability.

With regard to protective factors in the household, school and UNCHR support an average of about 64.4% of children in Dadaab refugee camp perceive protection with their household, school and wider society. This implies that substantial number of refugee camps perceive protection. This further implies that substantial number of refugee children in Dadaab have managed to cope with risks due to support they receive from household, school and UNCHR. This corroborate with Brooks, (2006) who found, supportive relationships between adults and youth whether generated in schools, communities, or families serve as a protective factor. However, for female pupils who feel less secure could be that the society does not give equal opportunities to all gender. This concur with Women Refugee Commission, (2012) assertion that refugee girls from Somali and Ethiopia are confronted with cultural barriers such as early marriage and discrimination in education that deny them opportunities for educational advancement.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Our findings provide justification for the impact of resiliency and protective factors in academic achievement of pupils in refugee primary schools in Dadaab. This implies that resiliency has the potential to impact on academic achievement and that and protective factors influence resiliency of refugee children. Children in refugee camps or living in highly risk environment need interventions in order to nurture resiliency. This should target multiple systems since research indicates that resiliency and protective factors present a crucial influence on pupils' academic achievement. Intervention should address many different resiliency levels. The findings and conclusions however stresses the need for special response to by the UNHCR and government of Kenya to promote education in refugee schools. From the study findings, it was recommended that different authorities from UNHCR and related humanitarian assistance organizations or counseling services at the schools ought to improve pupils' psychological resiliency and provide support to help overcome risks and focus on academics with high level of self-efficacy to achieve. Further, counselling of school pupils in Dadaab refugee camps should focus on positive treatment for reduction of PTSD symptoms, depression, and grief, and an increase in hope, optimism, self-confidence, problem-solving, and communication skills.

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