FROM THE ZONE OF RISK TO THE ZONE OF RESILIENCE: PROTECTING THE RESILIENCE OF CHILDREN AND PRACTITIONERS IN ARGENTINA, CANADA, AND IRELAND

Dermot Hurley, Liliana Alvarez, and Helen Buckley

Abstract: This three-site investigation conducted in Argentina, Canada, and Ireland, examines the concept of resilience within specific socio-cultural contexts of child protection practice. The study seeks to understand how child protection workers (CPWs) construct and utilize the concept of resilience and how they enable resilient capacities in children and families. CPWs were encouraged to share client narratives of resilience and to reflect on how these narratives impact them in working with clients. The paper explores how working with resilient clients helps foster resilience to compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress in CPWs through a process of shared or vicarious resilience. Lastly, the study questions the role of child protection agencies in protecting the resilience of the worker. Resilience in this context may be defined as the capacity to sustain professional competence and commitment under conditions of adversity. A key finding in the study is the critical role of resilient teams in sustaining the resilience of the CPW. The rationale for this study is based on the assumption that CPWs have to develop the capacity for resilience and be able to sustain their own resilience in order to be effective in their work. Knowing how child protection workers can remain resilient and committed to children is of great interest to social workers and other professionals involved in this work.

Keywords: resilience, child protection, vicarious resilience, resilient team culture

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For humans the space of a crack is enough to flourish.

– Ernesto Sábado

Resilience and Child Protection

There is a widely held view that resilience involves a complex interaction of individual and relational characteristics, personal agency, environmental factors, and cultural contexts (Werner & Smith, 1992; Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Ungar, 2004a; Rutter, 2007). Resilience focuses on the question of how people cope with hardship and develop competence under stress and has been defined as "the capacity to face adversity and be strengthened by it" (Melillo, Suarez Ojeda, & Rodriquez, 2004, p. 76). Similarly, a leading researcher in the field suggests that, "resistance to environmental hazards may come from exposure to risks in controlled circumstances rather than avoidance of risk" (Rutter, 2007, p. 208). In a thorough review of resilience research and practice, Ann Masten notes a trend away from deficit toward competence-based models of resilience practice and suggests that efforts to promote resilience have in common a focus on positive indicators of adaptation, risk moderators, social development, and the quality of relationships (Masten, 2011). Others suggest that a greater understanding of the social ecological roots of positive development is essential in promoting resilience (Ungar, 2011). This is particularly important in working with youth and families in the field of child protection where a high rate of burnout, compassion fatigue, and attrition has been consistently reported (Jayaratne, Chess & Kunkel, 1986; Reagh, 1994; Anderson, 2000; Conrad & Keller-Guenther, 2006; Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007).

Resilience research has kindled efforts to integrate resilience concepts into findings and has had an impact on child protection practice that is evident in the number of studies offering various strategies to promote resilience in children at risk (Ungar, 2004b; Flynn, Dudding, & Barber, 2006; Masten, 2006). The goal of these programs is to minimize risk factors that negatively affect children's development and increase positive adaptation through resilience-enhancing interventions. Researchers have emphasized the importance of promoting resilient capacities in children in a variety of ways, including: mentoring talents and skills (Gilligan, 2000); strengthening social, relational, educational, and personal assets (Daniel & Wassell, 2002; Daniel, 2006); fostering resilience through art, dance, and music (Pintat, 2006); specialized programs for aboriginal youth in care (Filbert & Flynn, 2010). Common to these approaches is the application of resilience research toward enhancing psycho-social functioning in children and youth. In addition to the above approaches, researchers strongly emphasize the importance of multilevel, coordinated, continuous, and user negotiated services in promoting resilience (Ungar, Liebenberg, & Ikeda, 2012).

Notwithstanding various attempts to promote resilience in child protection, there is some vagueness and lack of clarity in the application of resilience concepts, suggesting that resilience is not fully articulated within the field of child protection. McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot, and Wigley (2008) looked at social workers' understanding and use of resilient concepts in child protection practice in the United Kingdom and found that CPWs had difficulty conceptualizing resilience and linking the concept to Child Protection (CP) practice. Other researchers similarly identified a lack of knowledge of resilience theory among social work professionals, and noted the importance of integrating resilience concepts into assessment and intervention practice (Daniel, 2006). A debate continues among researchers about the specific mechanisms that contribute to resilience in vulnerable children, which prompts the question about how resilience is understood by CPWs and how they identify and support resilience in their clients.

A recent systematic literature review looked at individual and organizational factors associated with resilience and burnout in child protection workers and identified a combination of personal development, coping styles, organizational culture, quality of training, supervisory support, and workload, as critical factors in sustaining workers' resilience (McFadden, Campbell, & Taylor, 2014). High rates of emotional exhaustion and burnout among CPWs are well documented (Anderson, 2000; Corovic, 2006; Bride & Figley, 2007) and must be seriously concerning for a profession that seeks to promote stability and relational continuity in the lives of children at risk. CPWs deal with adversity in many forms and are deeply emotionally affected by exposure to intense conflict that is ubiquitous in child protection work (Ferguson, 2004). Promoting practitioner resilience is becoming a priority in practice and a recent study links social work coping, relational skills, peer support, and supervision with sustaining resilience in health care and non-statutory practice settings (Adamson, Beddoe, & Davys, 2012).

On the positive side, there is growing evidence to suggest that working with resilient clients can strengthen a worker's own resilience. Early work in the field suggested that there is a heavy price to be paid for exposure to secondary traumatic stress such as compassion fatigue and burnout (Figley, 1995). More recently, Hernandez, Engstrom, and Gangsei (2010) explored the idea of reciprocity in therapeutic relationships and found that witnessing clients overcoming adversity can change a therapist's "attitudes, emotions and behavior in ways that the authors conceptualized as manifesting vicarious resilience" (p. 72). The concept of vicarious resilience, though poorly understood, offers a unique perspective on how resilience in practitioners who work with traumatized clients can be developed by proxy, through participation in the lives of resilient survivors of trauma and abuse (Hernandez, Gangsei, & Engstrom, 2007; Alvarez & Hurley, 2010; Hurley, Martin, & Hallberg, 2013).

The Study

This study examines how resilience is understood and promoted within CP practice. From a phenomenological perspective it explores four basic questions:

1. How is the concept of resilience understood within child protection practice?
2. What do CPWs see themselves doing to promote resilience in children and families?
3. How is the CPW impacted by the client's resilience?
4. What support does the CP institution offer towards sustaining resilience in the CPW?

From the author's perspective, child protection discourse in many jurisdictions has been dominated by deficit thinking and risk aversive practice which has been extensively critiqued in the U.K., Australia, and elsewhere (Lonne, Parton, Thomson, & Harries, 2008; Lonne, Harries, & Lantz, 2013). A resilience approach to child welfare practice is consistent with a strengths-based perspective and seeks to explore the link between resilience research and front line child protection practice (Russ, Lonne & Darlington, 2009).

Sample

The research participants consisted of 60 social workers from three very different countries (Argentina, Canada, and Ireland). These workers had a varied range of experience and years of practice within the field of child protection. As well, more than 90% of the participants reported having removed a child on at least one occasion from a high-risk home and placing this child in care. Additionally, caseloads varied greatly in the three locations reflecting the multiplicity and complexity of practice within the particular cultural setting (see Tables 1 & 2). The sample was diverse in characteristics and experiences both within groups and across groups. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to select a wide range of participants with similar but quite distinct experiences within the field of child protection. Because the three locations differ significantly in how services are delivered, participants recruited across cultures allowed for work experiences to be filtered through important cultural lenses. Following a call for volunteers to participate in the project in Ontario, respondents were selected from a range of CP services, including crisis intake, specialized foster care, family services, adoption, domestic violence, and sexual abuse teams. A similar recruiting strategy was utilized in Argentina and Ireland.
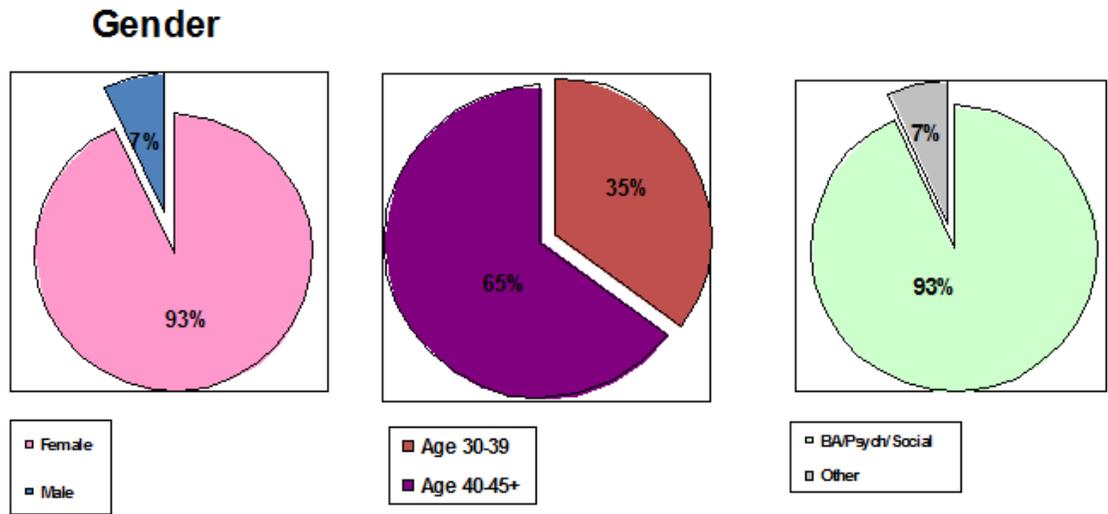
Figure 1. Survey Demographics, Argentina.
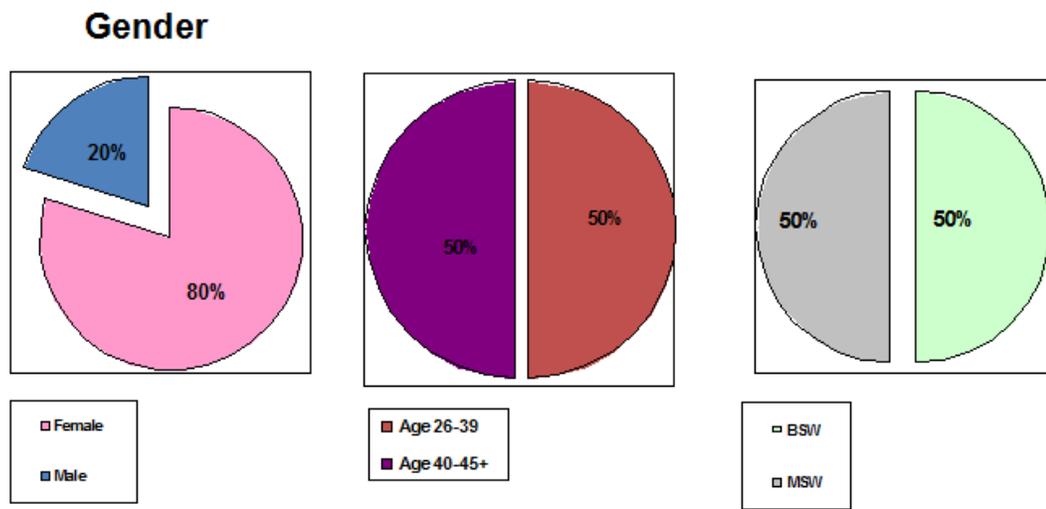
Figure 2. Survey Demographics, Canada.
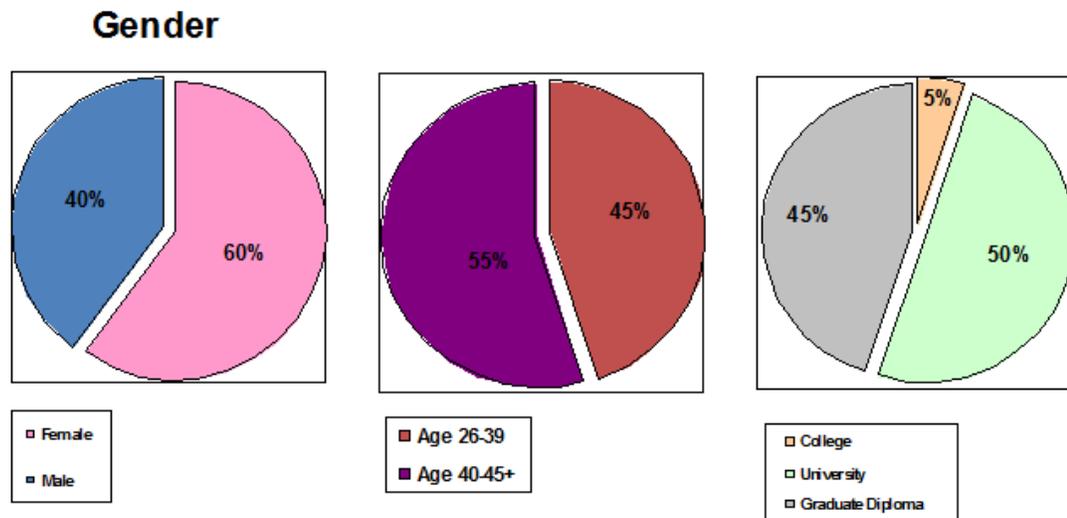
Figure 3. Survey Demographics, Ireland.

Table 1.
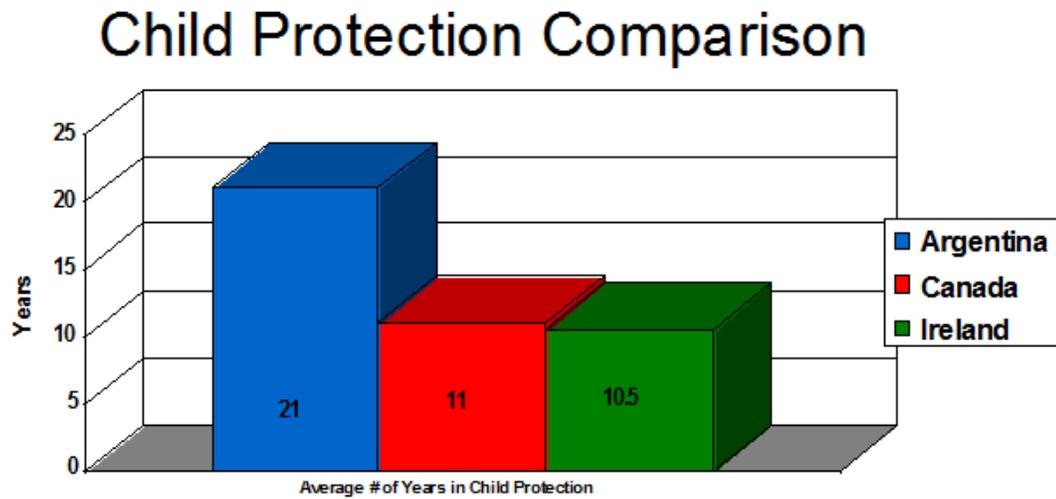
**Table 2.**
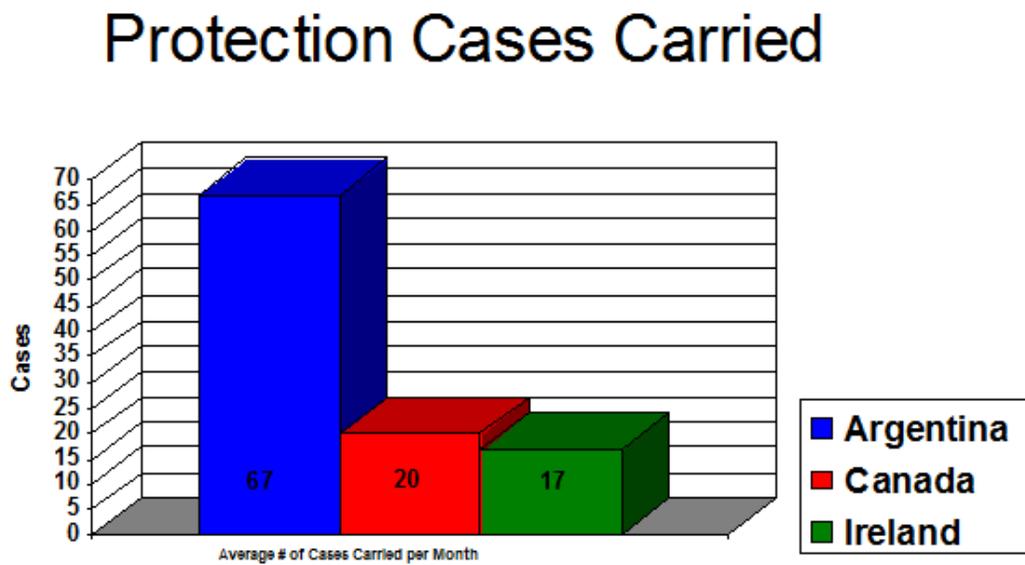
Method

The study employed semi-structured interviews based on questions (Spanish and English versions) related to how CPWs understand and utilize the concept of resilience in their work with children and families. Questions included in the interview guide were informed by the extant literature, feedback from a focus group session, and the extensive experience of the authors in child protection work. Ethics approval was granted by the Ethics Review Committee of King's University College at Western University, as well as senior management at the participating agency. Written consent was received at the beginning of each interview, and a guarantee of confidentiality was provided. All the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed by research assistants in both English and Spanish in Buenos Aires and in London, Ontario.

Data Collection & Analysis

In-depth interviews (1 to 1.5 hours) were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide allowed for some thematic consistency across interviews while preserving the uniqueness of each interview session. Data analysis and interpretation utilized a systematic approach for the management of textual data consistent with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). A generic framework was used that involved careful reading of the text, coding, clustering topics, and identifying emergent themes (Cresswell, 2008). Thematic analysis was conducted manually, frequently with accompanying playback, in order to identify recurring patterns and themes in the interviews. Care was taken to ensure accuracy in translating from Spanish to English and English to Spanish, and professional translators were employed in Ontario and Buenos Aires to minimize inaccuracies and maximize linguistic and conceptual equivalence.

In order to ensure that different points of view were fully explored before consensus was achieved on emerging themes and categories, drafts of all transcriptions were read independently by members of the research team. The basic analysis, including an independent audit, was conducted at the home institution of the Principal Investigator (PI) and portions of the transcript and corresponding emerging themes were shared by e-mail between the primary authors. Following transcription, the researchers worked intensively with the text, coding the emerging themes and identifying patterns in the coded material. Discussion among team member enabled refining of coding frames, such that as initial themes emerged from the data these were coded by team members, who were careful to avoid subjective bias by practicing phenomenological bracketing. Codes with similar content were clustered into categories from which final themes

emerged. These were then organized into a framework with matched sections of text illustrating the main thematic findings. Two colleagues (both professors of social work) who were not involved in the study conducted an independent audit of the themes. They did this by reading segments of data and independently comparing these with the coding frames. The inter rater reliability between the research team and the independent auditors was 0.85. Every effort was made to identify commonalities, differences, and contradictions between the respondents allowing for a fuller and more critical appraisal of emerging categories and themes. As well, care was taken to triangulate data via journal entries and field observations, and member checking was undertaken with respondents to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in all three locations.

Member Checking

In the Canadian portion of the study, the Principal Investigator ("DH"), conducted all of the recorded interviews with a co-investigator acting as an observer and note taker. In Argentina, the PI co-interviewed with a Spanish-speaking colleague ("LA") as well as a trained interpreter who attended all of the small group interviews. The Irish interviews were conducted solely by the PI who travelled to a number of child protection units around the country. The PI, a trained systemic family therapist with over 25 years experience in clinical interviewing, engaged the interviewee in prolonged collaborative open-ended discussion, frequently summarizing comments made by the participant in the form of ongoing informal member checking. Formal member checking occurred when the research team presented their initial findings to the host agencies and invited the participants to comment on the initial themes that emerged in the research. This form of respondent validation via cross-checking interim research findings added greater authenticity to the study findings. Prior to the submission of the manuscript for publication, selective participants were contacted and asked to provide input on whether the final selection of themes accurately reflected what had been discussed in the interviews. A follow-up focus group was also conducted with a group of senior CPWs at Brookes College, Oxford to obtain feedback on the emerging themes, which further helped the team to refine the choice of final themes for publication.

Constructing Resilience

This portion of the paper focuses on common themes that emerged in the interviews across the three sites of the study with some themes more strongly emphasized in one location than another. To show how themes and categories were developed from textual data, we have included an example from the Spanish portion of the study to illustrate the process by which final themes emerged from the analysis (Table 3). In this section of the paper the authors have chosen to use the exact words of the respondents which are presented in italicized speech and quotation

marks interspersed with connecting commentary by the authors so as to maintain a sense of narrative flow and coherence.

As the sample shows, the construction of resilience among CPWs in the study is based on a number of ideas that we were able to conceptually link to practice. Resilience is seen described by participants as a multidimensional concept involving a complex interplay of family history, developmental factors, social supports, eco-systemic, and cultural influences (see Table 4). These descriptions point to the notion that our participants believe that there may well be an innate human quality that develops in times of adversity, facilitated by environments that help sustain resilient capacities.

Table 3.

CONSTRUCTING RESILIENCE (Argentina)	
EMERGING THEMES	**TEXT**
Resilience in practice	*"The concept of resilience is not in our heads but it is built into our work...we have it incorporated beyond the word, first we work with the people not with the concept! We ask what are their skills and possibilities, then we say, oh this is resilience!"*
Personal Resources (CPW)	*"You must be resilient yourself in order to promote resilience in others... you must develop your own resources and make them available"*
Social Networks/ Pathways	*"It's about developing networks that link people to resources you have to find ways of helping kids become more resilient, by developing skills and talents or by just giving of yourself"*
Ordinary Magic/Strengths	*"It's really the day to day stuff ...I try to focus on those aspect that make resilience possible. I ask what would be the magic that could get to the strength?"*
Dynamic Relationship	*"Resilience begins when a child feels and understands that the social worker is working with them on their life project, to*

	make their life better"
Collectivist /Social Messaging re resilience	*"First we have to be resilient ourselves...without that all is lost...I see resilience not only in others but also in ourselves, in the work team, without this in Argentina all projects are finished before they've begun"*
Resilience shared between CPW & family	*"The social workers here in Argentina work most of the time in the houses of the people, we see what happens to them and how they live, how they sleep, how they live...it's where one sees the culture of people and how families grow and develop"*
Zone of Risk	*"It also produces in us another type of commitment, when one goes to someone's house...a commitment and a risk, because we go to marginalizes zones, to zones of risk, and because of it they also value the fact that we go to them"*
Internal resources	*"We investigate what talents and capacities the child has so that they can be developed further...we try and build on whatever resources the child has"*
Ingenuity & taking advantage of adversity	*"We went to a house where a family were living in garbage, the mother would point out all the good things that living in garbage had...they could raise pigs; there was no water and for light they hung up some cables and were making fire with branches that they were taking off some trees"*
Limitations	*"I think resilience only by itself is not enough...I think it's part of a package, if you work only with the concept of resilience it is not sufficient"*

The following excerpts are from interviews across all three locations and will be identified as such by (A, C, I) after each quote. *"Resilience is a very unique idea, I think it's a*

mixture of things like biology, environment, family development and culture" (C). Resilience is described as a universal attribute that requires the development of internal resources. *"I think we're all born with different strengths and resilience is one of them, but you really have to work at it!"* (C). Personal resources are frequently identified: *"Resilience is the capacity by which a person can get out of a crisis situation, despite a bad environment and still achieve a good result"* (A). CPWs *"try to deal with the inner resources, abilities and potentials to identify them and to enhance them"* (A). Universality was mentioned many times as in the following statement: *"Every human being has something in there that's worth working with or exploring and having them build up some type of resilience to whatever life's thrown at them"* (C). An internal capacity for survival was seen as significant in the development of resilience as in the following: *"It's not just the supports we put in place, a kid can be from an environment of severe neglect and one has this persistence and this tenacity which makes them very successful while another is still stuck at the start"* (C). Resilience is conceptualized as a developmental process that builds over time, *"resilience, for me is a continuum, I think it's about building on strengths that you have as an individual, a worker, a parent, or child, it relates to everybody"* (C). It is the ability to move forward despite adversity and focus on strengths: *"There's a tendency in social work to look at the negatives, it's very confrontational especially if you're going to court you build your evidence against someone, whereas I think resilience is more of a positive focus and I think there's a move towards that, I think it gives you a different perception of the situation, like how can I be instrumental in making a positive impact on this person?"* (I).

Coping with adversity is a characteristic frequently associated with resilient functioning. For example, one CPW spoke about the *"mystery of resilience"* in reference to children who have an extraordinary capacity to manage stressful situations: *"it's amazing when you see even with placement breakdowns, and they're still going to school or they're still trying to make friends, you know…what factors are giving them the strength to keep going when you think of all the negativity, I suppose for some children they have greater adaptability and strength to do that and others don't!"* (I). There is an understanding among social workers that resilience is related to intrinsic qualities of the child, as well as family support and environmental responsiveness. Growth promoting experiences are viewed as a natural consequence of dealing with adversity and in many ways are the expected outcomes. *"Resilience is being able to make the best of a bad situation, and still come out on top"* (C). Facing up to difficult situations in life triggers resilient capacities and greater emotional stamina. *"I suppose it's being able to manage to override difficult situations in your life, when bad things happen, through no fault of your own, you're able to pick yourself up and get on with getting the best out of your life"* (C). This sense of personal struggle is pervasive in the descriptions given by social workers and suggest that making the best out of a bad situation is a shared human trait that makes it possible for people to survive and move ahead in life despite adversity: *"it's something that everybody has, an inner*

strength, of course you have to work at it…resilience means finding strength from somewhere and taking advantage from the situation" (C).

Ultimately it is the individuals themselves who recognize their own resilience, which is embedded in their self-concept. *"I think it's the person's view of themselves, it's their ability to see their strengths"* (C). One CPW who spoke primarily in metaphor likened resilience to *"tools for life"*; she gave the following explanation: *"suppose we were asked in life to set a table for a banquet and you're given the tools, four forks, four knives, spoons, glasses, napkins blah, blah…and they were the tools that you were given at birth in order to be able to set this table, but some people are asked to set a table for a banquet but they're only given a fork and a knife and maybe a spoon, so how can they possibly do the things that they're expected to do to be a normal, average member of society when they we're given the tools in the first place?"* (I). An important distinction made between resilience theory and practice is captured in the following phrase, *"the concept of resilience is not in our heads but it is built into our work, we have it incorporated beyond the word, first we work with the people, not with the concept, we ask what are their skills and possibilities? Then we say, oh this is resilience!"* (A). Resilience is also viewed through the lens of gender, particularly in Argentina: *"I have the feeling that women have greater adaptability to change, the fact that women have less opportunity than men makes them more resilient"* (A). The willingness of families to acknowledge problems and accept support is a key element in what is viewed as resilient functioning. Any effort by the client to change the conditions that sap resilience is generally seen by CPWs as evidence of resilience at work. CPWs expect setbacks and are realistic about change, in fact the coupling of realism and resilience is central to how resilience is constructed by CPWs in the study, *"even though she had serious mental health issues she worked with us and tried her very best to be there for her children"* (C).

Table 4.

CONSTRUCTING RESILIENCE: CENTRAL THEMES		
ARGENTINA	CANADA	IRELAND
Child as active agent in resiliency project and self	Resilience based on child temperament and internal	Resilience based on stubborn determination to survive, &

protection	capacity for survival	self advocacy
Resilience shared between CPW, family & community based on rights of child	Resilience as an enabling-dynamic relationship between CPW & child	Resilience as a supportive relationship based on interests and talents
Resilience embedded in social and cultural messaging, seen as essential to survival	Resilience as a developmental process that can accumulate or diminish over time	Resilience as access to tools for life; education, health & recreation
Vicarious resilience as a consequence of interaction with resilient clients	Shared resilience between CPW & child based on mutual decision making	Shared resilience between CPW & child based on sharing life narratives

Data analysis (Table 4) revealed four broad themes related to the construction of resilience by CPWs which include: (a) resilient characteristics of children, (b) an enabling/dynamic relationship, (c) access to resilience-enhancing resources, and (d) shared/vicarious resilience.

Resilient Children

There was strong uniformity of opinion about what constituted resilient functioning in children. Resilient children are seen as possessing tenacity and persistence based on temperament, traits, and genetic endowment. Characteristics most often noted about resilient children include stubborn determination, ability to overcome the odds, a willingness to work on problems, and resourceful self-advocacy, *"she had a strength about her that I thought, she's going to make it in the world, she somehow figured out from a young age what she had to do to survive, but I don't think she recognizes her own resilience"* (C). In contrast, some children are described as possessing greater self reflection, *"I think it's a child's view of themselves, it's the ability to see their strength(s) which is often demonstrated through an interest or skill or something else outside of the family"* (C). A general consensus exists between CPWs that resilient children have some important characteristics that set them apart from other children. They are described as hardy, inventive, resourceful, and tenacious, a combination of factors that workers often find challenging. For example, one worker spoke at length about a 14-year-old female client who *"can be very intimidating, it's extremely difficult to work with her at times, her mom and dad were heroin addicts and she actually witnessed her father being shot…she's*

had to fend for herself, she's been in and out of care, but she's incredibly resilient!" (I). Another worker spoke of the unique impact a particularly resourceful child had on everyone he met: *"There was just a steadiness about him, he's like a child that just knew, it's not that he was being cocky or overconfident, he just seemed to have walked the earth before"* (I). Resilient children are able to remain connected to others in school and extracurricular activities and use resources effectively toward building a positive sense of their own identity. Many workers made reference to the fact that *"a resilient child is a child who knows their own mind"* (I); *"Resilience must be noticed, children must feel it in themselves"* (A), and resilient children are their own best resource in accessing qualities of the worker *"they don't say it but it's really kids resourcing themselves... it's part and parcel of the job, you have to make yourself a resource externally, where you're getting a positive response the only thing to do is build on it"* (I).

The participants also described resilient children as having a sense of connection to their local communities even when the relationship with biological parents is damaged or severed: *"I had one client who used to talk about the lady who owned the pizza parlour across the street and when her mom was drunk and passed out she would go sit with this woman and watch her make pizza"* (C). Another worker spoke of the importance of connecting kids to what they most value in their communities: *"he said to me I do not want to live in Buenos Aires, I want to go to the countryside where I was born. Now he is working with horses and taking care of pigs, he is free, not medicated and he is happy...his eyes change when he speaks about the fields and the animals"* (A). Such comments underscore the importance of understanding and preserving vital links in a child's social ecology in order to promote resilient functioning (Ungar, 2011).

Children who have faced adversity and have been hurt by it try and control unfolding events in their life in whatever way they can. Workers noted that these adverse and hurtful experiences also contribute to some difficulties in working with resilient kids. Statements like *"she's been through so much, she can be very difficult to work with"* (C), add substance to the notion that resilient children can be challenging and are not always open to a therapeutic relationship. Sometimes the challenges from these children take the form of demanding self-advocacy, which they are often skilled at. They workers spoke about resilient children being effective in getting what they need: *"The thing that amazed me was that he would tell me every day that he had no socks or underwear to wear and I would give him fresh ones daily and I could never figure out where they went, until a worker said to me 'he's only saying that to get a new pair of pants and socks every day!' Because he never brought any back, but you know that was something good in his life, I mean we all like fresh clean socks on our feet"* (I). On the theme of self-advocacy another worker poignantly remarked about a boy she was seeing: *"kids may not appreciate what you do to protect them, one child said to me, 'What do I want all those things for if I can't have a family?'"* (A). Similarly a 12-year-old youth living on the street told his worker, *"I don't want to live in a house where I won't be able to see the sky over General Paz*

(Avenue) every morning" (A). Missing, perhaps, in the CPWs comments in reference to these children, is an understanding of the profound sense of loss children feel in living without their families and the importance that objects and places assume as emotional substitutes for what has been lost.

Clearly there are limits to a child's resilience and one worker remarked that *"you can't develop resilience if you keep on getting knocked down...it's like an elastic band that can only be stretched so far, so many times"* (C). There is also the concern among some CPWs that too strong a focus on resilience can have negative implications since it suggests that children are invulnerable and can handle whatever adversity or stressors they may encounter in life: *"too great a focus on resilience makes it seem that all kids can bounce back"* (I); or, *"I think resilience only by itself is not enough, I think it's part of a package…if you work only with the concept of resilience it is not sufficient"* (A). It is noted, with considerable concern, that there is greater expectations placed on children who are seen as resilient since typically they are more likely to be the first in a group of siblings to be returned to parents, which can inadvertently increase their risk for further maltreatment. The irony is not lost among CPWs that children in care have a much better chance of receiving services than had they remained in their own home: *"resilience could really be enhanced for children and families by reallocating funds for in-home parental support and child care"* (I).

Enabling / Dynamic Relationships

Resilience is related to ongoing casework with families where collaboration, trust, and empathy are key ingredients of an effective working relationship. The emerging consensus from the research is that resilience is seen as a dynamic relational phenomenon that develops through significant interactions with children and families over time. *"We've had many ups and downs but I still feel connected to this family, even when mom is really depressed she makes an effort to work with us for the sake of the kids"* (C). It means being alert to possibilities for improving clients' lives by recognizing their personal resources: *"I don't have great expectations but I look for what there is, never for what is missing"* (A). Child protection requires an emotional investment by the CPW in the context of mitigating risk and supporting resilience. Some participants saw a connection between providing stability and emotional support and the resilient functioning of their young clients: *"I think she was so resilient because we were able to give her a lot of stability as well as emotional support"* (C). Continuing along this theme, CPWs spoke about the importance of searching for resilient qualities in working with children and families. *"I recognized something in her that she didn't see in herself, so we were able to get her into a soccer program that really brought out her natural talent"* (I). Some workers saw a strong connection between strengths-based work and resilience concepts and frequently used the ideas interchangeably.

Supporting self-efficacy and family decision-making is a natural part of the resilience orientation of the CPW. It includes a notion of children developing the capacity for self-reflection and self-knowledge through the relationship with the worker, which is seen as fundamentally related to resilience building: *"Resilience must be reflected, clients have to see it in themselves"* (C). As this worker noted, *"there is no absolute standard to judge whether someone is resilient or not, some kids fall under the radar, we need to look at how we fail to see resilience"* (C). The importance of identifying what is sometimes referred to as "hidden resilience" (Ungar, 2004b), which suggests that some behaviors deemed problematic by society can contain the seeds of resilience even while masking competencies and talents, was highlighted. This belief is reflected in the following: *"the boy drugged and stole from his parents who had very little themselves; he sold family heirlooms and things from the neighbors so he ended up before the judge who sentenced him to a juvenile institution. One day he told me that he was fond of cooking, so I spoke to the judge who agreed to give him a chance…I was able to get him a training position in El Gourmet in Santa Fe, he became a chef and is not working in a hotel; that sometimes happens"* (A).

Resilience is seen as dependent on a relational process with key individuals in the child's world. One Irish CPW reminded the interviewer that *"it's not always the relationship with the worker, I mean there are other programs in place that are much more resilient, you know like the Big Brother, Big Sister Program, which is really a mentoring program but equally I think that you could underestimate your own importance in promoting resilience"* (I). In order to overcome the effects of abuse and victimization, a child or adolescent requires developmentally attuned adults who understand that promoting resilience is *"a step in a resilient chain"* (C). Thus workers described resilience not simply as an outcome; rather they saw it as an ongoing process that occurs in the context of caring and supportive relationships which is greatly facilitated by a secure attachment to parents or foster parents: *"My role is to be a facilitator for that child, to have a healthy bonding relationship with whoever is going to be their caregiver"* (C). Generally CPWs who participated in this study appeared to be aware that resilience is not a fixed quality and that it fluctuates with changing circumstances. They are also tuned into the idea that lapses in resilience can occur with loss of support and that resilient lacunae exist where a child shows resilience in one situation but not in another. These views accord well with the observation that resilient functioning is not necessarily sustained or consistent over time (Masten & Powell, 2003; Rutter, 2007). Our research identified the importance of developing a resilient relationship between a CPW and a child. This sentiment is captured in the following statement: *"Resilience is possible when a child feels and understands that the social worker is working with them on their life project, to make their life better"* (A). On the other hand, workers also noted that relationships with clients frequently test the resilience of both parties: *"We're trying to work with the parent in order to encourage them to reach a certain standard to care for their child, but if*

they're not good enough we have the power to remove that child" (I). Speaking of the profound contradiction that is ubiquitous in child protection work, one CPW remarked: *"It's such a contradiction...to sit in court with a parent and give evidence against them about not being able to look after their child, but we're also the ones that take them home in our cars!"* (I).

Access to Resilience-enhancing Resources

The point was repeatedly made throughout the interviews that in order to be resilient, it's essential for families to be able to access key resources within their own community. CPWs described importance of the link between resilience and resources and work on behalf of their clients, particularly children in care, for academic, health, social, and recreational resources. All of the social workers interviewed spoke of the importance of access to family supports, child and adult mental health, and addiction services: *"We worked together as a team. The strategy included all the family members. The child was placed safely with the extended family instead of an institution which worked with others in the community and developed a mental health support network so the child was reinstated with his parents"* (A). Likewise another CPW spoke of the importance of sound planning and networking to secure resources on behalf of clients. In general CPWs demonstrated persistence and tenacity in accessing resilience enhancing resources tailored to a child's particular interests and circumstances, so, for example, a child could identify himself as *"part of a winning soccer team instead of a child living in foster care"* (I). CPWs spoke about the importance of making resources available to children for the purposes of nurturing resilience by *"investing in whatever talents and skills a child has so that they can be developed further"* (C). CPWs described using ingenuity and imagination in linking children with resources, as is captured in the following anecdote: *"I worked with him to help him understand his attitude, I asked him, 'can we find somewhere else to live and be productive?'... I arranged for the boy to live in a student hostel, then he began studying and doing theatre. I supported him so he went to school and learned new things...He made relationships and restored his life"* (A). Generally, greater emphasis was placed on children's abilities to utilize resources rather than linking resilience to the availability of resources, particularly for economically disadvantaged children living in high-risk communities. In relation to this, one CPW saw herself in the following way: *"My conceptual framework is, I am only a tool for the violated rights of the child which must be respected. Social rights are not given as economic or political rights, so my role is to fight so that children can exercise their rights"* (A).

Shared / Vicarious Resilience

A striking similarity across the three groups is the understanding that resilience is a shared relationship between people working together to minimize the effects of adversity. The following comments capture some of that feeling between CPW and client: *"Practice teaches me*

something new every day and make me unlearn many things as well" (A). *"I've learned so much from my clients not just about what to avoid in life but how to be strong, how to make the best of a terrible situation and still come out on top"* (C). Resilience shared between the CPW and child or family is a dynamic process based on the idea that the worker receives in return something from the child or family that is not always recognized in child protection practice. A key finding in this study that emerged in the form of stories regarding how clients overcame adversity and made positive changes in their lives, is the extent to which social workers themselves were affected by their perception of a client's resilience. In this sense, resilience can be viewed as a reflexive process with benefits for both parties involved. CPWs acknowledged that they learn a lot about their own lives by observing their clients and seeing how they manage their lives. There are also recognized benefits for the CPW from sharing success stories which is captured in the following statement: *"For example I found in a reunion some teachers which I worked with when they were very young, they were children without any support and now they have made it all the way through!... This is very satisfactory for me"* (A). The benefits for the worker are acknowledged in phrases such as, *"They help us become better at our job"* (C), or statements about the importance of working directly with children: *"I find that the longer I'm working the less I can actually deal with children and that's really upsetting for me because part of what I liked about the job was the direct work with children. It was so rewarding!"* (I).

Sharing narratives of client resilience with team members was also seen by the participants as a buffer against compassion fatigue and burnout and all the CPWs interviewed had stories to share about a particular child or family that made a difference in their own lives: *"Good outcomes like this give sense to our work, it's important to congratulate each other, good outcomes must be celebrated"* (A). CPWs clearly enjoyed telling stories of positive outcomes in which resilience was a key component of their work and it was evident that the workers benefited from the process of sharing stories about resilient clients. For example, one Canadian social worker in the study captured the sentiment expressed by many others in the following account of an encounter with a client a long time after the termination of a case: *"A few years ago I was out with my wife to a food court and there was a young man in his late 20s holding a baby in a really gentle way and my wife remarked that it was lovely to see a guy looking after a baby like that... Anyway I didn't know who this guy was until he came over and told me that he remembered me, and he actually said, 'I just want to thank you, I was hell on wheels in the group home, but there was a lot of things that I heard you say that really struck home later in life'"* (C). Another very similar story was told by an Irish CPW which captured the sense of vicarious pleasure in participating in the success of former clients: *"I went into a shop at lunch time and the guy behind the counter said to me, 'You don't remember me do you?' and I said yeah, I do where did you work before? And he said it wasn't work, 'I gave you a few headaches in my time'*

and then I realized he was a child in care. He's about 22 now and he's just finished his first year at NUI (National University of Ireland)*"* (I).

Our research showed what appears to be a bi-directional "transmission of resilience" in which both people in the relationship are affected by the resilience of the other. One CPW described it as a *"contagious process"* meaning that resilience can be triggered by witnessing or participating in the performance of another person's resilience. CPWs also take vicarious pleasure in their clients' successes and emotional growth, and they talked about being greatly heartened by stories of successful outcomes in which they themselves have participated: *"I just got a letter from a girl who's 25 and she was in care. She's still attached to her foster carers but she wrote me this lovely letter thanking me for supporting her through her course and she just got her PhD"* (I). Many CPWs spoke about how their own lives had been enriched by working with resilient clients and one worker in particular made the following comment: *"I know I am a much more resilient person today because of what I've learning from working with resilient clients"* (C). This study supports the idea that CPWs can be strengthened in their work with clients, and perhaps develop greater personal and professional resilience through participating in the resilience of clients.

Promoting Resilience in Practice

Identifying and promoting resilience in clients is critical to resilience-based practice. Table 5 outlines the main themes related to promoting resilience and reveals extensive overlap between the three groups in how CPWs promote resilient functioning in children and families. For example, *"I like to think that I always go into my work believing that children are resilient, and that can I interject a positive person in that child's life, or do something to try to tap into that child's resilience to get them through"* (C). CPWs provided numerous examples of how they see themselves working to enhance resilience in the context of a dynamic enabling relationship with families they work with. *"People perceive human warmth and they show it to us, so it's reciprocal, if you do not extract from yourself the best you have inside you, the positive and if you do not work with what the other has, there is nothing you can do!"* (A). Clients are viewed as bringing resilient capacities into the relationship through self-reflection and insight. Many CPWs showed an understanding of the cumulative nature of resilience. *"I don't have the grandiose idea that a 30 minute interview with me is going to build a lifetime of resilience …although you can help to build resilience over the long term by your input at key point"* (C). Persistence is also highly valued in the service of building resilience: *"it's very important to stick with it, especially when everything is falling apart"* (C).

Table 5.

PROMOTING RESILIENCE	
THEMES	SUB THEMES
IDENTIFYING RESILIENCE	Noticing strengths
	Seeds of resilience
	Bringing to awareness
CAPACITIES & TALENTS	Unique characteristics
	Areas of interest; sports, social & recreation
	Managing adversity
SECURING RESOURCES	Persistent advocacy
	Inter-professional cooperation
	Informal social networks
BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS	Respect and commitment
	Dynamic relationship
	Seeing possibilities
QUALITY OF INTERACTION TO ENHANCE RESILIENCE	Friendliness & openness
	Sharing personal stories
	Commitment & caring
BALANCING RISK & RESILIENCE	Cooperative engagement with child & family
	Buffering adversity & increasing protective factors
	Determining risk & resilience

An important aspect of supporting resilience for children in care is the crucial role of long-term workers who are guardians of the children's life stories that provide essential continuity and meaning and would otherwise be lost in the frequent disruptions and relocations that are ubiquitous in child protection practice. One CPW described herself as *"part of the living history of that child, kids are asking the worker stories about themselves when they were young, it's like holding on to the memories for the child which might easily be lost with moves from foster home to foster home, we kept the child's memories safe"* (C). There was an appreciation of the unique relationship that can develop between a child in care and a long-term CPW who can act as a container of narrative memories helping to preserve and retrieve vital narratives of the self, thus providing a sense of continuity and connection. *"We'd be making cookies and she'd ask me, what was I like as a baby, did I cry a lot?"* (C). This research supports the idea that resilience is more likely to flourish when the worker has been successful in preserving the social ecology of the child, as is evident in the following example: *"a group of brothers without a father or mother came before the court, as soon as the eldest brother came of age he took care of the younger ones with help from the neighbors in his community, they were all able to take care of one another so there was no need for internment"* (A). One worker in particular wondered if the child protection system overall does more harm than good, which was expressed in the following quote: *"I often ask myself are we doing a better job these days of promoting resilience or are we finding better ways to kill it?"* (C), a reference to the many placements and CPW turnover that are common in child protection practice. There is an irony that resilience-enhancing resources are more often available to children who have been removed from their family, as children in care generally have greater access to resources than children who remain under supervision with abusing parents. CPWs in all three locations were extremely concerned about their mandate to protect children by removing them from their home rather than providing families with the resources needed to promote better parenting and more resilient functioning. The phrase used by one CPW, *"we work between the zone of risk and the zone of resilience"* (A) captures the feeling of many people working in the field of child protection.

Child protection work as a *"vocation dedicated to helping clients discover their own resilience"* (C) was poignantly described in the following words: *"My focus is on making the quality of that child's life as best as possible, looking at the education, health and family context, I focus on that, not so much on the parents, because you know that's where I have to look, keeping the focus on building up a relationship with that young person and trying to look at what they want"* (I). CPWs offered numerous examples of what they say and do in their work to promote and sustain resilience in their clients. For example sharing their personal stories: *"Sometimes I tell them about my own life as a teenager, I suppose I was resilient enough to cope with circumstances in my life, I look at young people the same way…you know what can I give them which will help get them through this period"* (C). CPWs understand the importance of

cultivating a resilient perspective and being open to finding resilience in their clients as an antidote to a deficit-based discourse that is endemic in the field of child protection. One CPW spoke of the need for resilient systems and acknowledged that, *"I suppose child care reviews are quite a good way of building resilience because everyone is brought to the table and are accountable"* (I). In summary, the CPWs who participated in this study see themselves as nurturing resilience in children by being aware of its importance and understanding resilience as a developmental process and by exposing children to resilience-enhancing activities within the social ecology of the child. Table 6 summarizes the main themes that capture various aspects of how CPWs see themselves promoting resilience in clients. Nurturing resilience can be summarized in four overarching themes that include: (a) accessing resources and enriched environments, (b) promoting talents and skills, (c) overcoming structural barriers, and (d) respectful collaboration with clients.

Table 6.

PROMOTING RESILIENCE		
ARGENTINA	CANADA	IRELAND
Locating basic resources a family needs within their local community& respect for what child values most about their social-ecology	Accessing resources within the CP agency and professional services in the community tailored to a child's interests & needs	Accessing educational and social services on behalf of child and family to strengthen parent capacity and meet the needs of the child.
Finding creative ways to support the development of children's talents and skills such as Arts Project	Finding the 'seeds of resilience' and nurturing them; keeping children's memories safe	Creating inter-professional networks on behalf of children based on workers skill and networking abilities

Overcoming structural barriers to accessing resources on behalf of poor and marginalized families	A CPW provides a step in a resilient chain, not an end point but an on-going project to sustain resilience	Helping child see resilience in themselves and focusing on success in education and employment
Recognizing and sharing resilience by entering into the life of the child and family within the local community	Awareness of needs of low income families & scarcity of assessment and therapeutic resources	Exposing child to enriched environments that trigger a resilient response

Resilience and Child Protection Institutions

This is an area that requires more in-depth investigation as it is critical to the emotional well-being and effective functioning of the CPW. In general, child protection agencies are not seen to support resilience in their workers and, in fact, contribute to compassion fatigue and emotional exhaustion that is ubiquitous in the field (Reagh, 1994; Ellet et al., 2007), which is captured in the following dramatic statement: *"In Argentina they don't support resilience in the worker, they try to kill it*!*"* (A). The statement from an Irish CPW that, *"No one ever thinks about the resilience of the worker!"* (I) echoed this sentiment. Many CPWs in the study also expressed their concerns about the nature of the job and the organizations they work for: *"It's definitely not a healthy profession, a lot of people could be more resilient if we were more financed, I'd say generally most social workers are not working at a great level resilience-wise…a lot of people are affected in one way or another"* (I). Or, as another highly stressed CPW remarked, *"If someone told me five years ago, you're going to be working in a system where nobody's going to support you, where's there's no resources, where there's loads of alcohol and drugs, you're going to be banging your head off a brick wall, I would have laughed at them and said – no way!!"* (I). On the other hand, the role of the team in buffering stress and secondary trauma is strongly reinforced across the three locations of the study. *"I felt relieved to have my team this year, I had a big slump with a kid who died on the street at Retiro station. I continued to work but I gave myself permission to say to my team, 'I feel bad'"* (A). Phrases such as *"I could never do this work without my team"* underscore the importance of resilient team

functioning as well as the importance of humor as an antidote to resignation, demoralization, and despair.

Table 7.

RESILIENCE IMPACT ON CPW		
ARGENTINA	CANADA	IRELAND
Team as an essential buffer to emotional exhaustion and burnout	Team as an essential buffer to emotional exhaustion and burnout	Team as an essential buffer to emotional exhaustion and burnout
Reflecting on good outcomes helps CPWs remain committed and is an antidote to despair and demoralization	Reflecting on good outcomes helps CPWs remain committed and is an antidote to despair and demoralization	Reflecting on good outcomes helps CPWs remain committed and is an antidote to despair and demoralization
CP system as actively undermining the resilience of the worker and creating serious obstacles to resilient functioning in clients	Agency seen as providing some support for sustaining resilience but could/should do much more to prevent emotional fatigue	Management structure of CP service not seen as protective of resilience. Temporary posts undermine the value of the work and sap resilience

Responses in this section were highly consistent and raised concerns about the extent to which child protection agencies understand what Ferguson (2004) refers to as "the deep emotional impact of child protection work on workers and their capacities to protect children" (p. 190). Though some resources are in place to help CPWs cope with the day-to-day stress of child protection work such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and mental health days, they do not compensate for the reality of the experience of front line CPWs who are confronted by extreme conflict, emotional pain, and wrenching loss on a regular basis. The following quotes speak to a significant disconnect between the emotional needs of front line CPW's and the ability of child protection agencies to respond appropriately to those needs: *I often ask myself, are we doing a better job these days of promoting resilience or are we finding better ways to kill it? Social work resilience is ground down by the system"* (I). In a statement referring to supervision

as a parallel process to the worker-client relationship, one astute CPW remarked, *"I think the organization has to believe what they say, so if we're encouraging and supporting resilience in clients, I think we have to encourage and support resilience in our staff"* (C). This shared sentiment was also reported by an Irish CPW when she said, *"My support is definitely the team, we have great support, formal supervision hardly ever happens, the team leader is just so busy"* (I).

Institutional culture is also very significant in supporting resilience in the CPW as the following quote illustrates: *"There's definitely an informal culture of support, especially since the formal process is very lacking in acknowledging the successes, for want of a better word…it helps when someone turns and says, 'Thanks! You did that well, you made a difference in that child's life'; that's very important"* (I). Some CP supervisors understood the need to provide CPWs with emotional support and opportunities to reflect on their work by encouraging innovative supervisory practices as in the following example: *"We're lucky, we have an outside paid facilitator who uses a reflective practice model and that has proved hugely positive, I would say it has very much developed the resilience of team members…I think we've become a more resilient team because of it"* (I).

There was also strong agreement among the participating members of the child protection teams (country notwithstanding) that it is important to support resilience in each other, as shared resilience is as much a quality of team functioning as individual experience: *"I think about my co-workers and the things they do and how they're able to be so resilient in keeping their lives as whole as possible and they're able to transmit that respectfully to people they're working with"* (C). The small working team was described as the most significant force in promoting resilience in children and sustaining commitment to the work of child protection, such that, *"When we can talk and work as a team, which is something we can't always do because we have too many cases to carry…I believe a much better outcome is possible"* (A). An overwhelming number of CPWs interviewed stated that their team is the primary source of resilience sustenance to be found in the agency: *"I don't know how I would do this job without my team, being able to talk to other social workers and know they understand how awful it can be, but also see some of the humor as well, that's what support means to me"* (A). Accordingly, teams were seen as providing essential buffers against the demands of the work as well as a sense of solidarity that people working in high stress jobs feel with fellow workers: *"I'm not alone, I'm not the only one going through this so it kind of normalizes the fact that maybe I will be okay, that I'll be able to do this"* (C).

In the discussions about work contexts, CPWs also acknowledged the importance of paperwork but did underline their dislike for the volume of recording and repetitive entries in data systems they are obliged to use. The role of the supervisor is important in how social

workers see themselves engaged in the business of supporting and enhancing resilience in clients, and the study identified the need for resilience-informed supervision to be made available to front line social workers as an adjunct to case planning and more formal supervision. *"Even in one-to-one supervision it's about case management, it's not about 'oh you've done that well' or 'I'm amazed that you've been able to hang in with this client for so long'…sometimes I just want to be able to say, 'I had a really bad home visit, it just didn't go well'"*. A supervisory relationship that recognizes the importance of emotional responsiveness in promoting resilience (Morrison, 2007) is seen as an essential step in developing a parallel process for supporting resilience in clients that will be elaborated upon in the following section of the paper.

Discussion

Resilience in this study is described as a human quality that can flourish in the face of adversity when facilitated within a social ecology that enables the development of resilient capacities. The concept is relationally-based and embodies ideas such as preserving important attachments, strengthening resilient relationships, accessing key resources, and promoting outcomes that give value to clients' lives. According to the perspectives of the CPWs who participated in this study, resilience develops in real life situations, where resources, skills, abilities, strengths, and possibilities are seen as essential ingredients of practice. These findings are consistent with earlier resilience research and practice that offers evidence-informed strategies for enhancing resilience (Brooks & Goldstein, 2002; Hart & Blincow, 2007). Promoting resilience for CPWs in the present study means building on the resourcefulness that individuals utilize in adverse conditions and facilitating the development of these capacities in a variety of ways. The Child Protection Workers from all three countries appeared to share the belief that children at risk can develop resilience despite situations of neglect, abuse, and deprivation, although they also reported that their ability to deliver resilience-promoting resources varies from location to location. In general, CPWs did not situate their work within a critical social work discourse, except among CPWs in Argentina where there is a strong awareness of structural inequality and systemic oppression linked to the issue of basic human rights.

Important themes emerged from the study adding to those that had been identified in the literature, toward understanding resilience as a shared, mutually beneficial, dynamic process between worker and client. The evolving paradigm toward "human flourishing and compassion satisfaction" for social workers exposed to client trauma and adversity is a timely development (Bride & Figley, 2007). Bride and Figley's study identified characteristics in children that CPWs associate with resilience, and examined how resilience may be fostered in a dynamic enabling relationship between a child and a CPW. Social workers are seen as having the potential to be part of a resilience-enhancing environment for child clients. CPWs look for *"a glimmer"* of

resilience in their clients, and see themselves *"nurturing the seeds"* of resilience through a dynamic enabling relationship and by accessing a variety of supports within the social ecology of each child. The unique features of this relationship vary from place to place and worker to worker and there is room for a deeper exploration of the emotional dynamics that operate in resilient relationships. Resilience is related to the ability of CPWs to access resources to support the development of children's talents and skills. Ironically, it is the experience of many CPWs that these resources are made available after children have been removed from their families and are in the care of the child protection agency, which clearly has significant implications for child welfare policy and practice. In the words of one exasperated CPW, *"Childhood is seriously undervalued in this country, especially for vulnerable families, there is no forward planning to speak of. Available beds have been reduced and private providers charge huge amounts of money to look after children in care. The galling thing is that we can't use any of that money to fund alternative family support services to keep children in their homes"* (I).

Resilience in child protection in the present study is viewed as a two-way relationship in which both participants benefit from the strength and resourcefulness of the other. CPWs see themselves as supporting resilience by identifying and promoting resilience in their work with clients. The relationship is recognized as being mutually beneficial, as supporting resilience in clients creates the potential for shared resilience to flourish. Though not labeled in this way by the CPWs, there is an understanding that vicarious resilience is a natural consequence of participating in the resilience of others. Obviously this is not the case in every situation but there was a remarkable sense of vicarious resilience in the success narratives that CPWs shared in relation to particular clients in whom they clearly had an emotional investment. It is a concept that requires a deeper understanding of resilience within the context of shared emotional experience. CPWs spoke about how they had been inspired and strengthened by their clients' ways of coping with adversity, and throughout the study it became obvious that this effect could be reinforced by consciously attending to it (Hernandez, Engstrom, & Gangsei, 2010). The point was made in the study by a number of CPWs that nurturing resilience in children required CPWs to be resilient themselves so that a parallel process could be enacted, thereby enabling the CPW to be more protective of the resilience of their clients. Perhaps emotional resilience should be embedded in social work curricula and be an integrated part of social work student professional development (Rajan-Rankin, 2013).

In this study the CP organization is not viewed as protective of resilience in CPWs; on the contrary, they may actually contribute to the erosion of resilience in workers. Participants in the study expressed that their level of stress was not recognized and the volume of paperwork for risk management and legal proceedings (Canada, Ireland) was repeatedly mentioned as an obstacle to effective practice. The concern is that the agency is not *"tuned into resilience"*

despite the fact that resilience building is an important focus of the work with clients. There was a strongly expressed need among CPWs for supervisors to be more aware of resilience in front line workers so that a parallel process could occur, enabling the CPW to be more protective of the resilience of their clients. The study identified the need for resilience-informed supervision focusing on the strengths and emotional responses of the CPW based in part on social work and social care research looking at coping and resilience in practice (Gibbs, 2001; Green, Galambos, & Lee, 2003; Collins, 2008; Dill & Bogo, 2009; Kinman & Grant, 2011; McFadden et al., 2014). Notable in this study is the finding that small teams are critical to the working lives of CPWs by supplying some of the emotional ingredients necessary to sustain resilience in their workers. The importance of a resilient team culture in child protection practice was very strongly emphasized in the research and CPWs placed great value on team understanding and support as an effective buffer against emotional exhaustion and burnout. This is consistent with much of the literature that looks at the utility of resilience models in promoting recruitment and retention in child protection (Russ et al., 2009; Kinman & Grant, 2010).

Limitations

There are some important limitations to this study, the first being the potential for professional bias between the research team and fellow social work professionals, which may contribute to an uncritical acceptance of many of the opinions and statements made by the CPWs. There may also be a tendency to ascribe greater significance to the concept of resilience than may be warranted, given the reality of child protection work and its attendant risks. The narrative excerpts show that the themes are not discrete and frequently overlap. There is some danger of over-interpretation of data as well as interpreting selectively on the basis of particular cultural points of reference. Difference in responses in the three locations are less represented in favor of the strong similarities that are identified between groups. There is also the possibility that the process of translation may have inflated or diminished the degree of conceptual equivalence in translation.

It is important to acknowledge the potential problem of making inferences and drawing conclusion based on anecdotal stories told about resilient clients given as evidence of resilient functioning in the absence of more solid outcome data to support the observations made about resilient children. Further, although we faithfully reported our findings, we recognize that what people think and believe to be true about resilience, or for that matter any process or experience, can only ever be understood as a faithful description captured at a particular time and place. As well, we note that there is also a parallel discovery process between theory and findings occurring throughout the study in relation to the concept of vicarious resilience that was cited in the literature before the study began. In other words, our findings are no doubt shaped by our foreknowledge of the literature with which we had engaged.

We also acknowledge non-standardized translation processes as a limitation of the study and that one can argue that the methodological framework may have been underdeveloped in order to ensure rigor for cross-cultural qualitative analysis. A further limitation of the study is that resilience work at the community level was not adequately explored across the three sites and a model of community-based intervention to enhance resilience would add a further dimension to intervention with children and families (Landau, 2007). Lastly, this research did not sufficiently capture different cultural manifestations of resilience, which is an important area for further research. Aspects of resilience, social messaging, and culture have been explored elsewhere in a previous article based on research on CPWs in Argentina (Alvarez & Hurley, 2010). Despite these limitations, the study recognizes that resilience-based child protection practice, which entails commitment, sensitivity, ingenuity, and humor, is essential for promoting and sustaining resilience in children and CPWs. In the words of one CPW, *"we learn everyday that the human condition can restore…there are small victories!"* (A).

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