

## **Distribution Agreement**

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Vanessa Rios

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Resilience and Adolescent Health: An assessment of risks and assets  
in the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay**

By

Vanessa Rios  
Master of Public Health

Global Health

---

Karen Andes, PhD  
Committee Chair

**Resilience and Adolescent Health: An assessment of risks and assets  
in the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay**

By

Vanessa Rios  
B.S. in Human Development  
Cornell University  
2009

Thesis Committee Chair: Karen Andes, PhD

An abstract of  
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the  
Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Public Health  
in Global Health  
2013

## Abstract

# Resilience and Adolescent Health: An assessment of risks and assets in the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay

By Vanessa Rios

**Background:** Resilience describes both the attainment of positive outcomes despite adversity and the process by which these outcomes are achieved. In a global health context where youth development often occurs in environments with accumulated risk factors, resilience-based interventions could serve to improve outcomes across multiple dimensions of health and wellbeing. However, while the utility of these interventions is limited by their contextual appropriateness, resilience research in developing countries and with marginalized populations remains scarce.

**Methods:** This qualitative study was conducted in the Bañado Sur neighborhood on the outskirts of Asunción, Paraguay, characterized by poverty and marginalization. In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 adolescents from this community who were identified as particularly resilient. Data were analyzed to understand how adolescents were able to effectively navigate their adverse environments and to characteristics of these *positive deviants* that could be applied to promote resilience across multiple outcomes among other youth in the community.

**Results:** Factors at the community, organizational, interpersonal, and individual level influenced adolescents' resilience by motivating them to persevere despite adversity, shaping their decision making, and helping them navigate towards other resources. Resilience emerges from interactions among factors within these different social ecological strata. More so than any one factor in isolation, several factors were identified as *pathways* that connected youth to multiple assets and resources. Sports, school, religion, and *Mil Solidarios*, the community-based organization hosting the present study, were discussed as pathways by the participants.

**Discussion:** While many of the general findings of the present study were consistent with the broader resilience literature, some factors appear to have stronger implications for resilience among youth in the Bañado Sur, highlighting the importance of understanding youth resilience in a context-specific way. Particularly relevant to youth in the Bañado Sur were the perception of education as the means for social mobility, the importance of collective struggle, resilient role models, and social distancing skills. Additionally, the concept of resilience pathways has important implications: connecting youth to one of the identified pathways could have far-reaching effects on their resilience because of their effects across multiple levels of individuals' ecologies and dimensions of their lives.

**Resilience and Adolescent Health: An assessment of risks and assets  
in the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay**

By

Vanessa Rios  
B.S. in Human Development  
Cornell University  
2009

Thesis Committee Chair: Karen Andes, PhD

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the  
Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Public Health in  
Global Health  
2013

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Chapter 1: Introduction .....   | 1  |
| 1.1 Introduction and rationale .....  | 1  |
| 1.2 Purpose statement and research question .....                                     | 2  |
| 1.3 Significance statement .....  | 3  |
| Chapter 2: Review of the Literature .....   | 4  |
| 2.1 Positive development and the emergence of resilience research.....                | 4  |
| 2.2 Defining resilience .....   | 5  |
| 2.3 Multidimensional risk and protective factors for adolescent health behaviors..... | 7  |
| Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) .....  | 7  |
| Alcohol and Substance use.....  | 9  |
| Violent behavior.....   | 11 |
| 2.4 Resilience-based interventions .....  | 12 |
| 2.5 International resilience literature.....  | 13 |
| 2.6 Positive deviance and public health .....   | 15 |
| 2.7 Summary .....   | 16 |
| Chapter 3: Methods .....  | 18 |
| 3.1 Research design.....  | 18 |
| 3.2 Study site.....   | 18 |
| 3.3 Study Population.....   | 19 |
| 3.4 Data collection methods.....  | 21 |
| 3.5 Participant recruitment.....  | 21 |
| 3.6 Data collection process.....  | 22 |
| 3.7 Data preparation and analysis.....  | 23 |
| 3.8 Data quality and limitations.....   | 24 |
| 3.9 Ethical considerations.....   | 25 |
| Chapter 4: Results.....   | 27 |
| 4.1 Community-level influences .....  | 27 |
| Community solidarity .....  | 27 |
| Giving back to the Bañado Sur.....  | 30 |

|   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| 4.2   | Organization-level influences .....   | 33 |
|   | Mil Solidarios and schools.....   | 33 |
|   | Soccer .....  | 35 |
|   | Religion.....   | 39 |
| 4.3   | Interpersonal-level influences.....   | 41 |
|   | Family support .....  | 41 |
|   | Responsibility to family .....  | 44 |
|   | Peer relationships .....  | 46 |
|   | Role models .....   | 50 |
| 4.4   | Individual-level influences .....   | 51 |
|   | Avoiding risky environments .....   | 52 |
|   | Distancing skills and navigating the social environment.....                      | 53 |
|   | Refusal skills.....   | 55 |
|   | Personal hopes and goals for the future.....                                      | 56 |
|   | Self-efficacy .....   | 58 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations ..... |   | 63 |
| 5.1.  | Summary of findings.....  | 63 |
| 5.2   | Pathway Case Study 1: Francisco and Soccer .....                                  | 64 |
| 5.3   | Contextually-specific findings.....   | 66 |
| 5.4   | Pathway Case Study 2: Alejandra and School.....                                   | 67 |
| 5.5   | Recommendations for Mil Solidarios' programs .....                                | 70 |
|   | Improving communication around important issues in the lives of adolescents ..... | 71 |
|   | Providing different types of role models.....                                     | 72 |
|   | Promoting mentoring relationships.....  | 73 |
|   | Create opportunities for others' investment in youth .....                        | 73 |
| 5.6   | Limitations.....  | 75 |
| Bibliography.....                               |   | 76 |
| Appendix 1.....                                 |   | 80 |
| Appendix 2.....                                 |   | 82 |
| Appendix 3.....                                 |   | 83 |
| Appendix 4.....                                 |   | 89 |

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction and rationale

Literature on adolescent health and development is shifting its focus from reducing pathology and negative outcomes to promoting positive development (Ungar, 2011). Of particular importance to a global health context where youth development often occurs in environments with accumulated risk factors is the concept of resilience. Resilience describes both the attainment of positive outcomes despite adverse circumstances and the process by which these unanticipated outcomes are achieved. The study of resilience can provide a useful framework for constructing interventions to promote health and wellbeing in youth by identifying crosscutting factors that promote youth resilience and understanding the processes by which youth are resilient. In fact, *positive deviants*, or especially resilient individuals, have been used to identify context-specific behaviors and practices subsequently used to improve nutrition, education, and sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Marsh, Schroeder, Dearden, Sternin, & Sternin, 2004).

While resilience-based interventions could serve to improve youth development outcomes across multiple dimensions of health and wellbeing, their utility is determined by their contextual appropriateness. The resilience literature has largely focused on western populations, using mainstream, western concepts of positive development with little cross-cultural validation of findings (Ungar, 2008). Additionally, cultural and contextual differences in the expression and operationalization of resilience have been mostly ignored (Cameron, Ungar, & Liebenberg, 2007). Despite the importance of understanding culturally



and contextually-specific meanings of resilience, resilience research in developing countries or with other marginalized populations is scarce.

This qualitative study was conducted in the Bañado Sur, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Asunción, Paraguay characterized by poverty and marginalization. *Mil Solidarios* (“A Thousand Partners”) is a faith-based, community organization that provides financial support for youth to stay in school, houses a program for adolescent mothers, provides evening classes for parents and promotes community development through various other activities. Working with *Mil Solidarios* in the Bañado Sur provides a rich context for exploring youth resilience and identifying positive deviants. In this adverse environment, identifying individuals who demonstrate surprisingly positive outcomes can uncover pathways to resilience that are specific to youth in the Bañado Sur. These apparently outlying cases can then be studied to identify ways of fostering resilience among *Mil Solidarios* members and other local youth by using a positive deviance approach.

## **1.2 Purpose statement and research question**

The purpose of the present study is to understand how some adolescents are able to effectively navigate through adverse environments like the Bañado Sur and how risk and protective factors influence adolescent health behaviors across multiple dimensions of health.

*Specific research questions:*

1. How are adolescents resilient in the context of the Bañado Sur?

2. What are factors that influence resilience among adolescents?
3. How do resilient adolescents navigate through adverse environments and achieve positive outcomes?
4. How do resilient adolescents make decisions regarding their behavioral and sexual health?

### **1.3 Significance statement**

Organizations like *Mil Solidarios* that are working in marginalized communities such as the Bañado Sur need innovative approaches to foster resilience and promote positive youth development despite adverse circumstances. Understanding how resilience operates in the Bañado Sur and identifying characteristics and behaviors of positive deviants can help uncover unexpected, culturally and contextually relevant strategies that promote resilience and improve health outcomes.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

### 2.1 Positive development and the emergence of resilience research

Historically, research on adolescent health and development has used a deficit model, focusing on negative outcomes in order to reduce pathology. However, more recently, the field is instead shifting its focus towards positive development (Ungar, 2011).

The study of resilience stems from longitudinal cohort studies in developmental psychology that found unexpectedly positive developmental outcomes among children from the most marginalized families in their cohorts (Werner & Smith, 1982). For 40 years, Werner and Smith followed 698 babies from Kauai, a third of which were considered to be high risk because of multiple risk factors at birth. As teenagers, more than a quarter of the “high risk” children grew up in healthy ways and was deemed “invulnerable” by the researchers. When this “high risk” group was followed into adulthood, the study found that the majority (80%) was doing well. These unanticipated findings had two important implications: firstly, since individuals followed different trajectories throughout their lifespan, the idea of “invulnerability” or resilience as an individual trait proved to be inadequate. Secondly, these studies led to the rejection of the idea that success in the face adversity was an uncommon process and gave rise to the conceptualization of resilience as “ordinary magic” (Masten, 2001). In other words, in most cases, resilience does not require extraordinary circumstances; it is instead a result of humans’ capacity to adapt and protect normal human development (Masten, 2001).

As the shift towards the study of positive development gained momentum, researchers began investigating the role of protective mechanisms in addition to the traditional focus on risk factors. Many of these studies focused on populations of children having experienced different types of significant acute or chronic adversity such as institutionalization, exposure to war, and poverty (Ungar, 2011). These studies investigated protective factors that could mitigate the effects of the risks that these children faced and began to uncover the processes by which these interactions of risk and protection happened over time (Rutter, 1987; Ungar, 2010).

As they continued to follow the Kauai cohort, Werner and Smith (1992, 2001) concluded that, using a life-span perspective, protective factors “make a more profound impact on the life course of children who grow up under adverse conditions than do specific risk factors or stressful life events.” These studies demonstrating positive developmental outcomes among high-risk children inspired inquiry into protective factors, their interactions with risk factors and the multidisciplinary study of resilience emerged.

## **2.2 Defining resilience**

As an emerging, multidisciplinary field of research, an appropriate definition for the concept of resilience has been challenging to develop. Early studies focused on resilience as a dichotomous, primarily individual trait; individuals were thought of as either resilient or not. However, if resilience were a fixed trait, the usefulness of resilience-based prevention efforts would be limited. Fortunately this conceptualization of resilience has proven to be inappropriate for several reasons (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Firstly, youth that are

resilient to one type of risk in a particular context may be less successful when confronted with another type of risk. For example, an individual who is resilient despite having a lack of parental support or supervision may not be resilient if they encounter interpersonal violence. Along similar lines, factors that might be protective in one context may be risky in another context and vice-versa. For example, Sameroff, Gutman, and Peck (2003) found that, in contrast to findings from the general population, having fewer opportunities for democratic decision-making (associated with a more authoritarian parenting style) was associated with better school performance among African American youth growing up in risky environments.

For these reasons, the social ecological model is generally used to conceptualize resilience as a process framed within the context of and “in interaction with an individual’s social and physical ecology (Ungar, 2011). Ungar (2008) provides the following social ecologic interpretation of resilience:

“In the context of exposure to significant adversity, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to *navigate* their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well-being, and their capacity individually and collectively to *negotiate* for these resources to be provided and experienced in culturally meaningful ways.” (Emphasis in original.) Resilience thus becomes more a descriptor for trajectories or the process(es) by which an individual achieves positive development when experiencing adversity.

### **2.3 Multidimensional risk and protective factors for adolescent health behaviors**

Much of the resilience literature is limited by its focus on one or two outcomes of interest paired with a narrow set of protective mechanisms while in reality, most youths are “exposed to multiple risks, may possess multiple assets, and may have access to multiple resources,” necessitating a multi-dimensional, social ecological approach (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). A brief overview of the risk and protective factors among youth that have been associated with sexual behavior, alcohol and other substance use and violent behaviors are discussed below.

#### *Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH)*

The US literature on adolescent sexual and reproductive health is extensive; more than 500 individual, interpersonal and community factors are “known to increase or decrease the changes that teens will engage in risky sexual behavior” (Kirby, 2007). In *Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, Kirby et al. (2007) reviewed 450 studies on adolescent SRH and developed an extensive list of risk and protective factors that could possibly be addressed in interventions.

Kirby et al. (2007) identified risk and protective factors at multiple ecological levels influencing adolescent SRH. At the community level, the researchers found community social disorganization to be a significant risk factor, while a high proportion of foreign-born residents was found to be a protective factor. With respect to the family level, living with two parents, parental educational attainment, greater connectedness, communication, and

parental monitoring and supervision were all associated with better SRH outcomes while physical abuse or maltreatment, and mother's and older siblings' early sexual initiation and age at first birth were risk factors. Peer-related risk factors included peers' substance use and deviant behavior, pro-childbearing attitudes, permissive values about sex and sexual activity. Meanwhile, positive peer norms, and support for condom and contraceptive use were found to be protective factors.

Individual level factors, particularly teens' own sexual beliefs, values and attitudes were found to be the most strongly related to sexual behavior. Attachment to and success in school, attachment to community, religiosity, and (for girls) involvement in sports were also protective factors with respect to adolescent SRH, while depression, working more than 20 hours a week, alcohol and drug use, and violent behavior and delinquency are risk factors. Results were mixed with respect to personality traits such as high self-esteem; however, teens with a greater internal locus of control "have sex less frequently, use condoms more frequently, and are less likely to become pregnant" (Kirby, 2007).

Other studies have examined the interactions between specific risk and protective factors. For example, substance abuse is a risk factor for risky sexual behavior that can be compensated for by school achievement, religiosity and self-efficacy at the individual level and family socioeconomic status, peer norms for sexual behavior, and teacher support at different ecological levels (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Also, while peer sexual behavior is a risk factor for risky adolescent sexual behavior, parental monitoring and open parental communication moderate this relationship. One study also found that extracurricular

activities might counteract the effects of neighborhood poverty (Ramirez-Valles, Zimmerman, & Newcomb, 1998).

Literature on risk and protective factors for adolescents in developing countries is more limited, particularly because surveys and studies on SRH tend not to differentiate between adolescents and adults or between married and unmarried adolescents (Mmari & Blum, 2009). In a structured review of 61 adolescent SRH studies conducted in developing countries, risk factors with respect to pregnancy and early childbearing included drug use, early initiation of sexual behavior and living away from home, while living with both parents and having a father present in the household was protective. Similar to the US data, drug and alcohol use, family instability, school dropout and the perception that friends were sexually active were determined to be risk factors for having premarital sex while having educational aspirations, and school attendance and achievement were protective. In addition to the relative lack of research focused on adolescents in developing countries, the authors also noted the focus on individual factors while research in the US and other industrialized countries has more recently moved towards a more ecological perspective on risk and protective factors.

### *Alcohol and Substance use*

A review of the research on risk factors for serious alcohol and drug use yielded several individual, family environment and interpersonal factors (Nation & Heflinger, 2006).

Firstly, alcohol and drug abuse is strongly associated with a variety of measures of psychological functioning ranging from reports of loneliness and low self-esteem to



psychiatric diagnoses (ADHD, conduct disorder). Individual assets such as self-esteem, internal loci of control, and religiosity have been found to protect youth from substance use (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

With respect to family-related factors, family monitoring, parental involvement in school and quality of parental communication and relationships have also been found to be strong predictors associated with lower levels of substance abuse (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Nation & Heflinger, 2006). Peer alcohol and drug use as well as an adolescent's beliefs about the frequency of their friends' usage were also associated with initiation and maintenance of drug use among adolescents. While the research is more limited with respect to stressful life events, negative events, particularly witnessing violence, and personal and familial victimization (both physical and sexual) have been associated with adolescent substance use and increases in use over time.

The interactions among risk and protective factors for alcohol and substance abuse among adolescents are less well studied than those relating to SRH. While peer substance use is a known risk factor for adolescent substance use and abuse, participation in extracurricular activities, positive orientation towards school, family connectedness and parental monitoring and open communication may protect against these negative effects (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Additionally, while parental substance abuse is a significant risk factor for adolescent substance abuse, social competence, religiosity, family connectedness, parental authority, and youths' decision-making skills have been demonstrated to protect against this risk factor's negative effects (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).

The literature regarding risk and protective factors for adolescent alcohol and substance use in developing countries is even sparser. This is a significant gap in knowledge given that some US studies suggest that certain risk factors are differentially important depending on the demographics of the group being studied (Nation & Heflinger, 2006). One study of students from three Central American countries found dysregulation (defined as “a deficit in the ability to modulate affect, behavior and cognition in response to environmental context”), school disengagement, peer deviance and exposure to violence as the most significant risk factors for adolescent substance use while belief in God and parent religiosity were the most significant protective factors (Kliewer & Murrelle, 2007). The researchers found a reactive interaction among risk and protective factors meaning “the protective factor [belief in God] has a beneficial effect, but less so at higher levels of risk” (as measured by a risk factor index). Additionally, when considering interactions among risk and protective factors, different protective factors were significant for substance *use* but all were important in attenuating the relationships between risk factors and substance *use problems*.

### *Violent behavior*

At the individual level, attention and learning problems, antisocial behavior, witnessing violence, violence victimization, and alcohol and drug use have all been associated with adolescents’ violent behavior (Stoddard, Zimmerman, & Bauermeister, 2012). Conversely, social skills, self-efficacy for non-violence, a sense of hope and purpose, and school achievement have been found to be individual-level protective factors. Family factors

influencing violent behaviors include family aggression, attitudes towards violence, parental warmth and support. Parental monitoring and presence have also been shown to be protective. With respect to peer influences, association with delinquent or violent peers is associated with increased risk for violence and criminal activity while positive peer influences such as support and role modeling may be protective. Community violence, poverty, community disorganization have also been associated with increased youth involvement in violent activities while the availability of pro-social role models has been associated with decreased levels of youth violence.

Interactions between risk and protective factors with respect to violent behaviors have also been established. For example, academic performance, parental presence, parent-family connectedness and school connectedness were found to compensate for the cumulative effects of previous violent behavior, violent victimization, substance use, and school problems (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Additionally, with respect to peer-related risk factors, parental monitoring and support, anger control skills and perceived social status were found to be protective as well.

#### **2.4 Resilience-based interventions**

Resilience provides a useful framework for constructing interventions to promote health and wellbeing in youth. A resilience-based intervention requires a focus on developing assets, using available resources and promoting positive trajectories rather than the traditional focus on mitigating risks (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). The focus of resilience interventions is on both developing youths' internal assets and providing the external

resources for them to navigate the adverse circumstance in which they live. In addition, because it is a fundamentally multidimensional concept, a resilience-based intervention implies a focus on crosscutting risk and protective factors that could influence wellbeing across multiple dimensions of health and wellbeing (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). As described above, individual factors such as self-efficacy and family factors such as parental monitoring and supervision have a demonstrated influence on adolescent's health behaviors and outcomes across various aspects of health. These findings reinforce the need for a life-course, socio ecological approach to promoting resilience and thus promoting health among youth.

## **2.5 International resilience literature**

While the resilience literature has focused on identifying crosscutting factors that promote youth resilience and processes by which youth are resilient, this endeavor has been limited by the focus on western populations using mainstream, western concepts of healthy functioning (Ungar, 2008). While few studies have examined commonalities in patterns of resilience across cultures, cultural and contextual differences in the expression of resilience have been largely ignored (Cameron et al., 2007). In fact, there has been little cross-cultural validation of findings or study of “culturally determined outcomes that might be associated with resilience in non-western cultures and contexts” (Ungar, 2008).

A review of international studies of children's economic activity found that while child labor may be a threat to children's wellbeing, in some contexts, children's work may provide resources associated with resilience and thus promote positive psychosocial

development (Libório & Ungar, 2010). In this review, the researchers found examples of child soldiers developing resilience-promoting relationships and a perception of personal security that challenged their identity as victims through this seemingly adverse experience (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007; Libório & Ungar, 2010). Other research with street children in Brazil found that children who expressed themselves creatively in their informal work in the street found a psychological escape from the community and familial risks they otherwise faced (Botelho, Silva, Kassab, & Leite, 2008; Libório & Ungar, 2010). Importantly, even within the US as it has been found that processes that promote resilience in one context may promote risk in another. For example, the above-mentioned study of African-American youth growing up in a risky environment that found fewer opportunities for democratic decision making to be a protective factor with respect to school performance (Sameroff, Gutman, & Peck, 2003).

The growing field of cross-cultural resilience research is beginning to address this lack of “sensitivity to community and cultural factors that contextualize how resilience is defined by different populations and manifested in everyday practices” (Ungar, 2008). The International Resilience Project (IRP) based out of Dalhousie University in the Netherlands has implemented a mixed methods study with youth in 11 different countries in an effort to design a quantitative measure of resilience, the Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM) and to better understand the variability in resilience among a global population of children (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). Their goal is to use a social ecological interpretation of resilience in order to understand both common (etic or homogeneous) and culturally- or contextually-specific (emic or heterogeneous) conceptualizations of resilience and thus to

develop a framework for respectfully studying resilience across cultures (Ungar & Liebenberg, 2011). The IRP has found no single adaptive pattern defining resilience across the 11 countries, however seven themes emerged from their research: access to material resources, access to supportive relationships, development of a desirable personal identity, experiences of power and control, adherence to cultural traditions, experiences of social justice and experiences of a sense of cohesion with others (Ungar, 2010).

Given the paucity of resilience research in developing countries or other marginalized populations, some researchers have begun constructing definitions of resilience specific to these sociocultural contexts. For example, Theron, Theron and Malindi (2013) sought to work toward an “African definition of resilience” through qualitative interviews with South African adults regarding resilient Basotho youth. Understanding culturally- and contextually-specific meanings and expressions of resilience is particularly important as some researchers in the field of development studies are even suggesting using resilience measures as a tool for evaluating programs targeting vulnerable young people in international settings (Henley, 2010).

## **2.6 Positive deviance and public health**

In public health practice, we sometimes look to the experience of individuals manifesting resilience to identify uncommon, context-specific behaviors and practices that can then be promoted and used to improve public health outcomes. The positive deviance approach involves first identifying people in a community who are positive deviants, that is, have achieved unexpectedly positive outcomes despite adverse circumstances. These individuals

are interviewed and observed in order to discern uncommon practices that promote their resilience. Because the resilient individual is found within the community of interest, the behaviors or assets that contribute to their improved health outcomes are often also available to others who could benefit from adopting them. If this is the case, the resilience-fostering behavior can be transmitted to the general population through programs or interventions that would be culturally and contextually applicable (Marsh et al., 2004).

In global health practice, the positive deviance approach to finding solutions to public health problems originated with child nutritional interventions and has since extended to address a variety of public health problems after successful implementations and evaluations (Marsh et al., 2004; Walker, Sterling, Hoke, & Dearden, 2007). In particular, the international NGO, Save the Children has rigorously evaluated its positive-deviance-based child malnutrition interventions first through programmatic evaluations with community-based controls identified post-hoc and then through a randomized, prospective trial in 12 communities in Vietnam (Marsh et al., 2004). This positive deviance approach has since been expanded to improve pregnancy outcomes in Egypt, improve educational outcomes in the US and to identify factors influencing sexual practices in West Africa (Marsh et al., 2004).

## **2.7 Summary**

The multidisciplinary study of resilience arose from the observation that positive development among high-risk youth populations is more common than previously thought. The studies yielding these surprising findings inspired a paradigm shift from a deficit-

based model towards an asset-based framework. Resilience and its foundation in enhancing existing assets and resources can be used to create youth development programs that improve outcomes across multiple dimensions of health and wellbeing. One significant limitation of the existing resilience literature is its general dependence on a mainstream, western definition of healthy functioning. The utility of studying socio-contextually specific concepts and manifestations of resilience is demonstrated by the application of the concept of positive deviance to public health interventions.



## Chapter 3: Methods

### 3.1 Research design

This project was conducted in Asunción, Paraguay in affiliation with the Instituto Nacional de Salud (INS) and Asociación Mil Solidarios. In-depth interviews were used to understand resilience among adolescents in the context of the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción.

Youth who were considered to be *positive deviants* were recruited to participate in in-depth interviews in order to gain a detailed understanding of adolescents' individual experiences and decisions that contributed to their resilience. In-depth interviews were considered the most appropriate data collection tool because of the focus on individual experiences and the discussion of personal and potentially sensitive topics such as major life events, family factors, and health behaviors.

### 3.2 Study site

The Bañado Sur is an informally settled neighborhood in the flood plain of the Paraguay River adjacent to the capital city of Asunción. Characterized by poverty and marginalization, the Bañados are often featured in the country's news because of the purportedly high levels of violence, drug use, and delinquency. Additionally, throughout Asunción, the Bañado is often referred to as *el bajo* and its inhabitants as *los del bajo*, meaning *below* and *those from below*. These terms refer to the physical position of the Bañados as lower in elevation relative to the rest of the city but also serve as derogatory terms used to discriminate the Bañados' residents. Many of the Bañado's residents live with the stress of precarious employment and housing and 90% live in poverty (Zibeche,

2008). *Cateura*, the municipal dump, is a central feature of the Bañado Sur and many of the Bañado's residents, including many children and adolescents, make their living by picking through the garbage and collecting recyclables to sell. Most other Bañado residents who work are domestic workers or are employed in other service jobs in Asunción. Education levels are also low in the Bañado Sur; 99% of heads of households in the area have not completed secondary school (Solidarios, 2009). This challenging environment provides a rich context for exploring youth resilience and identifying positive deviant behavior.

*Mil Solidarios* is a faith-based community organization based in the Bañado Sur. It provides financial support through conditional cash transfers for youth to stay in school, houses a program for adolescent mothers, provides evening classes for parents, and promotes community development through various other activities. *Mil Solidarios* and its director are well known throughout the Bañado Sur for their dedication to serving the youth of the community and advocating on behalf of the poor in Paraguay. Most of the staff of *Mil Solidarios* is comprised of alumni of the program who are from the Bañado themselves and are either in college or have completed their university studies. They are all personally connected to the Bañado and know students and their families. The staff members' close ties to the community, the students, and their families were integral to the success of the project because of its emphasis on understanding contextually specific factors.

### **3.3 Study Population**

The study population was comprised of adolescents (ages 11-19) growing up in the Bañado Sur. The study chose to focus on this life phase because it is during adolescence that the

foundation for adult health is established. It is estimated that “70% of premature deaths in adults are largely caused by behaviors started in adolescence that share common risk factors” (Sawyer et al., 2012). Additionally, in adolescence, cognitive development is progressing so that individuals become more capable of abstract thought, future planning, and delayed gratification. These interrelated capacities allow adolescents to think about the long-term consequences of their behaviors and to weigh present and future benefits in their decision-making.

Participants were recruited from *Mil Solidarios* with a comparison group from a middle school, *Escuela Pia Santini*, and high school, *Colegio San Cayetano*, in the same community. A comparison group was used in this study because *Mil Solidarios* preferentially admits students from the poorest families and requires all students to meet certain achievement standards. Thus, this group may generally demonstrate higher levels of resilience. In addition, the resilience of students involved in *Mil Solidarios* may be related to support and programming provided by the organization. The comparison group therefore served to compare a group that overtly demonstrates resilience with a general population of students attending school. Additionally, the comparison group could serve to identify ways in which *Mil Solidarios* is providing unique support to their members.

The schools *Pia Santini* and *San Cayetano* were chosen as appropriate venues to recruit a comparison group because they are also situated in the Bañado and serve a similar demographic to *Mil Solidarios*. In fact, many students who receive financial assistance for school through *Mil Solidarios* also study at these schools.

### **3.4 Data collection methods**

Initially, the researcher intended to identify potential in-depth interview participants using a survey that included the Child Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM), questions on health behaviors and risk and protective factors to detect positive deviants. However, after discussion with the project advisor and *Mil Solidarios* staff, it was decided to recruit the interview participants using information provided by key informants. Because resilience is defined as achieving unexpectedly positive results given adverse circumstances, identifying resilient youth requires acknowledging not only their present status or participation in risk behaviors but also the challenges that they have encountered in their lives. In order to identify youths who fit this profile, informal interviews were conducted with staff at *Mil Solidarios* (Social Worker, Educational Counselor, Psychologist, and Directors) and with school administrators who worked directly with the students and understood their neighborhood and family contexts.

### **3.5 Participant recruitment**

Eligibility for in depth interviews was restricted to high school (ninth through twelfth grade) students attending *Mil Solidarios* or *San Cayetano* identified by the organization or school staff as particularly resilient. The restriction to high school students was based on developmental factors, which suggest that youth over age 14 are better able to understand how different factors can influence their lives and discuss their decision-making processes.

For *Mil Solidarios*, potential in-depth interview participants were identified after explaining the concept of resilience to the above-mentioned key informants, ensuring their understanding of the concept, and asking them to review the roster of all high school students participating in *Mil Solidarios*' programs to identify youths they thought demonstrated resilience. Lists from each of the key informants were compared and youth who were identified as resilient by at least two informants were considered eligible and invited to participate in an interview. During their winter break, *Mil Solidarios* students were contacted either while attending activities at *Mil Solidarios* or by calling their cell-phones to invite them to come to the center to participate in an interview. All interviews at *Mil Solidarios* took place in a private office on the organization's property.

Due to time constraints, the school principal was the only one key informant who aided in the selection of resilient adolescents from the comparison group from *San Cayetano*. In the comparison group, participants were invited to participate in the interview at school. Interviews took place at a table in the library of the school.

### **3.6 Data collection process**

All interviews followed a semi-structured guide developed for this research, incorporating questions previously used cross culturally in the development of the CYRM and questions using the conceptual outline in Appendix 2. Interviews were intended to understand perceptions of resilience, uncover resilient processes, identify contextual and individual factors influencing resilience and understand resilience as experienced by the youth themselves.

Interviews were conducted with 20 adolescents. The sample was gender-balanced (11 girls and 9 boys) with 12 participants recruited from *Mil Solidarios* and 8 from *San Cayetano*.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish by the researcher. The researcher is a native Spanish speaker, from the United States, with training in qualitative research methods. Both Spanish and Guaraní are considered official languages in Paraguay, however, all school and *Mil Solidarios* classes (except for Guaraní language class) are instructed in Spanish. Thus, all students are fluent in spoken and written Spanish and it was felt appropriate by the researcher, *INS* and *Mil Solidarios* staff to conduct the interviews in Spanish. All interviews were recorded and lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Interview guides in English and Spanish can be found in Appendix 3.

### **3.7 Data preparation and analysis**

All interviews were transcribed verbatim in Spanish. Verbatim transcripts were then analyzed in Spanish in order to preserve the language and meaning. The data presented in this document were translated into English following analysis in order to disseminate the results.

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using MaxQDA10 software (Berlin; Verbi GMBH). The transcripts were annotated with memos during an initial reading to develop a preliminary set of codes based on recurring concepts and the research questions. The codebook was revised after an initial coding of four dissimilar transcripts that varied with

respect to gender and participation in *Mil Solidarios*' programs. This codebook was subsequently applied to all 20 transcripts. The codebook with definitions can be found in Appendix 4.

Prior to analyzing any theme across groups, a case-based analysis was conducted for each individual interview participant. This case-based analysis served to fully understand the individuals' experiences and the context in which they live. Major themes were then defined within the context of each individual's experience. Following this case-based analysis, pile-sorting was used to systematically analyze and understand different spheres of influence on the young people's lives and how they may affect their risk and resilience. Textual data were reviewed using individual codes and intersections of codes both at an individual level and also across participants.

### **3.8 Data quality and limitations**

In the qualitative interviews, language differences or privacy concerns might have affected the quality of the data collected. While the researcher is fluent in Spanish, she is not a native Paraguayan and may be limited in interpreting the nuances of Paraguayan Spanish. While the participants were all fluent in Spanish, they may have felt more comfortable speaking in Jopará (a mix of Guaraní and Spanish commonly spoken in the Bañado Sur). Additionally, while every effort was made to conduct interviews in a private setting, this was not possible with the interviews at *San Cayetano* since they took place at the school's library which had varying levels of privacy. Similarly, two of the interviews at *Mil Solidarios* were interrupted by staff members who walked into the office where the interview was

taking place. These interruptions could distract both the researcher and the participants, affecting the data quality. Nevertheless, participants seemed to feel comfortable and safe in these environments as indicated by their willingness to speak extensively about sensitive topics throughout the interviews.

One possible limitation is that the students might have feared that information regarding risky behaviors might be disclosed to their parents and/or teachers. As per ethical standards, all students were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and that they had the right to skip any questions they did not want to answer.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

This study was determined by the Emory Institutional Review Board not to meet the federal definition of “research” [45 CFR 46.102] because the findings of this project are specific to this population and neighborhood and are not generalizable outside of the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay (Appendix 1). Because the results are intended to inform Mil Solidarios’ youth development programs, this project is considered public health practice.

The administration of the Instituto Nacional de Salud, Mil Solidarios, and the participating schools reviewed the survey and interview guide prior to the start of the project and approved the content for use with the students. After speaking with staff at *Mil Solidarios*, *San Cayetano*, and *Pia Santini*, it was not considered necessary to receive consent from each youth’s parent. All participants were given a brief description of the study and



subsequently informed that participation was completely voluntary and confidential, and would have no bearing on their standing with Mil Solidarios or their school before agreeing to participate. All data were kept private and confidential. Interview transcripts were de-identified and participants chose or were assigned pseudonyms to preserve participant anonymity.

Before conducting any research, the researcher completed the Emory CITI certification training. The local research assistant who helped with administrative and logistical tasks was trained using the FHI research ethics training curriculum (Rivera & Borasky, 2009).

## Chapter 4: Results

Resilient adolescents were asked to describe their experiences growing up in the Bañado Sur including their perceptions and beliefs about their community, their families, the people and places important to them, themselves and their futures. The interviews focused on understanding what factors influenced each person's resilience by motivating them to persevere despite adversity, shaping their decision-making, and helping them navigate towards other resources. This chapter will describe each of these resilience factors and their influence on adolescents in the Bañado Sur. Using the social ecological model as a guide, the results below are divided into four levels of influence: community-, organization-, interpersonal-, and individual-level influences.

### 4.1 Community-level influences

In the interviews, adolescents were asked to describe the Bañado Sur and their communities. Although many of them acknowledged the negative stereotypes held against the Bañado, the participants overwhelmingly focused on positive aspects of their community. In particular, these young people articulated a sense of community solidarity among community members and desire to contribute to the Bañado's improvement.

#### *Community solidarity*

Half of the interview participants (ten out of twenty) allude to a sense of community solidarity. The idea of community solidarity includes both their perception of the community's problems as their own problems and discussion about how community

members support each other. This sense of community appears to be a particularly salient theme for boys who participate in *Mil Solidarios*. Five out of the six boys and one girl from *Mil Solidarios* and two boys and two girls from *San Cayetano* expressed this sense of community solidarity.

When asked to describe the Bañado, several participants mention how certain organizations work to improve the Bañado. Mateo, an 18-year-old *Mil Solidarios* student responds:

*My neighborhood? On the positive [side] there are people who work for the community. Near my house I have a woman who organizes donations of food and clothing for [senior citizens].*

When asked the same question, Alejandra, a 17-year-old student at San Cayetano, responds:

*In all the bad things that are said about it, some things are good... Here at school we organize a cleaning once a year. That is we, we go out to clean every little thing around here, throwing out garbage, all of that. Those are the most productive things that are done here: doing things for the community.*

Other participants described how neighbors supported each other and came to achieve common goals independent of organizations. Juanita, a 16-year-old *Mil Solidarios* student, noted

*My neighborhood... they are very much in solidarity, friendly, compassionate too, they help you... when you need something, when you're sick they'll hold a raffle, or, I don't know, organize anything to help you.*

She also sees this as the way for individuals in the Bañado to overcome the discrimination that is held towards them, explaining that:

*The truth is that one person or one organization alone won't be able to do it. Each person has to show what they are, that is, what the truth is. Each has to show it and each one has to put in a grain of himself and that way we will be able to demonstrate what we are.*

Other participants described experiences similar to Juanita's, talked about neighbors pooling resources to fix soccer fields, roads, and plazas, and protecting each other from violence.

Several participants also demonstrated their attachment to their community and expressed their hopes for its continued improvement. Participants expressed their wish to "see this neighborhood that I love so much changed into a better place," to see "a change in the

Bañado... for it to have roads... for garbage collectors to pass, for it to have [bus] lines.” One participant in particular was adamant about how he would share with others his pride in being from the Bañado after his success:

*I say, if I get out, if I am someone in life, I will not forget this barrio, I will never forget it. Even though those from the other side will tell you ‘oh, you’re from below’ like that you know, I am from below, I’m not going to deny it... how I was born, how it serves you, how it takes struggle. (Miguel)*

#### *Giving back to the Bañado Sur*

Six participants (three girls and three boys), all of whom were *Mil Solidarios* participants (meaning half of the participants from *Mil Solidarios*), also expressed a strong desire to serve others from the Bañado in the future. These participants have specific ideas of what they would do to help their communities. For example, Octavio describes how he is considering becoming a social worker:

*The truth is that there is a lot of need for social workers. For now, I’m really interested in that too... Since there aren’t very many social workers, I like it.... Because there are a lot of problems, many young people have problems... drugs, engagements (noviasgo), and many ugly things of the neighborhood.*

The influence that Mil Solidarios has on participants' plans to serve their community is apparent throughout the interviews. For example, Octavio describes how he looks up to Paí, the founder of *Mil Solidarios* because of his work for the poor:

Interviewer: *What are your hopes for the future?*

Octavio: *To be a great contributor to my community.*

I: *In what way?*

O: *And to help the people, to help the poorest.*

I: *And how will you do that?*

O: *And I don't know, I'm going to, I have to work hard at that too, because everyone says that they want to help the poorest, that they want to help them succeed. Paí told us, and that comes to mind too, to think that way, because everyone has said they want to be like Paí... because he helps the poor, and that's what I want to do in life.*

Mateo describes how he is hoping to work for *Mil Solidarios* in the future in order to give back and help others who are living in the Bañado:

Interviewer: *Ok, and what are your hopes for the future?*

Mateo: *Me, as of now, it's to finish my high school, then to enroll in college, then to graduate, to have, what I had planned is to work. If I get the opportunity, to work at, the association, at the Asociación Mil Solidarios if I get the opportunity, and to be able to work in helping, in contributing something, to help the people in the Bañado. That's what I have planned.*

*I: And why is that important to you?*

*M: Because I like helping people who are trying to succeed despite the things that they are sometimes not given. Because there are people, you know, in worse circumstances than we are. Some don't have, there are times that they don't even have anything to eat, like that. I also passed through those circumstances a few times, I didn't eat, I preferred a thousand times over that my little brother ate and that's how I became like this.*

In addition to Octavio and Mateo, other interview participants also discussed wanting to help solve problems that they have witnessed in their neighborhood, such as helping girls face the challenges of teenage pregnancy, families suffering from food insecurity, children and elderly who are homeless, and young people with drug addictions. As Mateo explains in the above quotation, some participants also discussed their own experiences of either being directly affected by these hardships or by witnessing them in their communities as their motivations for wanting to do this type of work.

Not only did these participants describe how they would help address these problems, but they also talked about how they themselves would have to succeed, continue their education, and do well economically in order to achieve these goals. For example, Sandra, whose goal is to help children who are drug users or living on the street, responded with the following when asked what has kept her in school and on the right track:

*I don't know. I want to keep going. A lot of things, and like I say, today you don't get anything without studying. And I would like to finish, to move on in life, to be able to help those, what I want most is to finish my studies and to be able to help those that need it. That was my dream. I would like to achieve it. I hope I can.*

In this way, the participants' strong motivation to serve others in their community also seems to influence their decisions to persevere and continue their education.

#### **4.2 Organization-level influences**

The young people interviewed were also asked about the places in their community that are most important to them and where they find support. School and *Mil Solidarios* were significant influences on the lives of the participants and, as described below, provided them with much more than an education. Although less pervasive, soccer and religion were tremendously significant influences on several youth and thus were also included in the results.

##### *Mil Solidarios and schools*

A significant source of support, particularly for the boys interviewed, was the relationships that were made through *Mil Solidarios* or at school. Half of the boys and one of the girls interviewed from *Mil Solidarios* mentioned the organization as a source of support. In addition to the friendships that were formed through these institutions, the social network established by *Mil Solidarios* was an important resource for participants in the program.

When asked where he finds support in his community, Pedro responded:



*I find support in members of Mil Solidarios who are everywhere, they're dispersed everywhere practically, and every time I have some sort of difficulty, I try to look to them because they're always helpful and they never have their doors closed to us.*

Paí, the founder and leader of *Mil Solidarios* also served as role model and mentor for several of the participants. Because of his commitment to work with the people of the Bañado and help those in need, many participants, particularly those motivated by wanting to give back in their communities, saw him as an example to emulate. In addition, Paí also gave advice and hope to the participants at *Mil Solidarios*, encouraging them that they could accomplish their goals with hard work and that they were worthy of achieving success. In addition to Paí, other participants talked about looking up to teachers *Mil Solidarios* who also grew up in the Bañado and about seeing the psychologist at another *Mil Solidarios* center for support.

Two interview participants from *San Cayetano* also mentioned school teachers or administrators as sources of support. Alfredo, who says he receives support from his school and his family, explained:

*The teachers are very sympathetic and teach you values that are often hard to find in a community like this one... They teach me to value myself, to value others, to respect [others], to be responsible, and to work hard to have a good future because of the*

*things that we experience.... The teachers come from humble families. They know how that feels.*

Miguel also spoke about having supportive teachers at *San Cayetano* who expressed concern when he would come to school exhausted because of waking up at three in the morning to work at a bakery and practicing soccer in the evenings. He also had a challenging home life that included witnessing domestic violence and also spoke about being approached by a school administrator to talk about this issue.

### *Soccer*

A majority (fourteen) of the participants mentioned playing sports in their interviews. However, for three of the participants, Miguel, Francisco and Sandra, playing and “practicing” soccer was an important facet of their lives. Throughout their interviews, it became apparent that soccer was not only an extracurricular activity for them, but also an integral part of their identities. The participants who were most involved in soccer were also three of the five young who talked about domestic violence as part of their everyday lives.

“Sports are something that was made so that you don’t fall into bad things.” Sports in general and soccer in particular were described by participants as a kind of “healthy fun,” an alternative to involvement in riskier pastimes. Among the participants who were most involved, soccer shaped the decisions they made regarding cigarettes, alcohol, drugs, and

even relationships. For example, as described below, Francisco's aspirations to be a national-level soccer player influenced his decision to abstain from cigarette use:

*Because cigarettes degrade your lungs and I want to be a soccer player, and I won't be able to be a soccer player smoking and I won't be able to run. Because of that I don't, I leave it behind.*

Miguel also talked about sports as an alternative to drugs or violence when young people are working through problems in their lives. In talking about a time when he was offered drugs by a friend he says "and I chose not to and I'm glad that I can say that because, why would you fall into something like that instead of doing sports?" In addition to taking precedent over drugs, soccer also superseded Miguel's romantic relationships. When asked if he had a girlfriend, he responded "I broke up with her a month ago, because I practice and... it's better for me to practice than to be with her... Football pushes me, I like it."

More than directly influencing these young athletes' decisions, their involvement in soccer also helped them avoid risk indirectly by occupying their free time. For example, when asked why he has been able to stay out of problems despite having friends who have gotten involved with drugs and other problems, Francisco explains:

*School, the scholarship [from Mil Solidarios] and now that I practice, it takes up my time, I don't think about cigarettes at all, in any of that... those others got worse also because they don't have any activities to do.*

Miguel and Sandra also talk about how they spend all their time at school, the soccer field, and for Sandra, at *Mil Solidarios*.

In addition to *preventing* adolescents from participating in risky behaviors as described above, Miguel and Francisco repeatedly discussed how soccer led their parents and other adults around them to invest. For example, Miguel's father would go to his practice to ask his coach how he was doing and Francisco attributed the improvement in his relationship with his stepfather to soccer. Although he and his stepfather previously did not get along, they now play soccer together on Tuesdays and Fridays and talk about soccer and girls together. Both participants also said that they felt support from their neighbors and others around them who admired them for being soccer players. This support in turn made them feel more confident in themselves and hopeful for their potential as athletes who might represent the Bañado Sur in the future. When asked where finds support, Francisco responded:

*Support? In my neighbors and that, because now that I practice, they support me because they want me to be a worth-while player and show that the Bañado Sur is not like they say it is **up there**.*

In addition to the interest generated from others because of these participants' athletic talents, soccer also provided them with an opportunity to expand their social connections and make friends. Francisco shared that he never really spoke with others in the

neighborhood that he moved to six or seven years ago until they started practicing soccer together. He also talks about going “up there” to soccer games and having friends who are from outside of the Bañado (but also sometimes experiencing discrimination). For Miguel, his soccer coach is the reason why he did not drop out of school. Below, Miguel shares his story as why he stayed behind a year in school:

*I wasn't going to start this year in school because I was going to work to help my mom and practice because I like football.... My soccer coach told me, someone had told him, he talked to me, he took me aside and told me to study... and after, I went to tell my mom, I told her that I wanted to study and be someone in life if nothing comes of soccer, but I'm trying [in that] too.*

Miguel and Francisco both admired their soccer coaches, but also talked about the challenges in balancing school and soccer practice and how it could affect their school attendance.

For these participants, soccer provided a means to expand their social support networks; more importantly, it allowed them to think about the future and to see themselves as potentially important figures in the Bañado. Both Miguel and Francisco hoped to be professional soccer players, but were also planning on continuing their education in case they were not able to achieve this dream. Throughout his interview, Miguel talked about how he would act in the future if he did become a professional soccer player and emphasized that he would never deny his origins in order to help break down the

discrimination that exists against residents of the Bañado Sur. Francisco also talked about representing the Bañado Sur in the future if he becomes a successful soccer player. They also both alluded to how the positive feedback that they received from people in their community made them feel confident. Miguel talked about his mom becoming increasingly interested in his soccer playing and said, “[My mom likes that I play soccer] because she likes how people talk about me, because everyone who knows me says ‘that kid, your son is so good’ everyone outside says that and it makes me happy.”

### *Religion*

About half (nine) of the participants mentioned their religion or going to church in their interview. Three girls spoke extensively about how their religion influenced and sustained them; three boys also mentioned going to church as something important to them. The other three participants mentioned religion, but as a more minor part of their lives. All three girls who spoke extensively about religion as an influence on their lives were also part of *Mil Solidarios*. While two boys from *San Cayetano* discussed their faith, no girls from *San Cayetano* mentioned religion at all. Religion influenced participants in several ways: it provided a sense of support, gave them strength to continue moving forward in the face of challenges, guided certain decisions they made, and served as a way to connect to others.

For participants who had a strong sense of faith, religion provided them with a sense of love and support. When asked to talk about her faith, Roberta responded,

*Religion, to me, is something spectacular... because you find someone to lean on... and it gives you faith, strength, and all of that, and love too.*

She also described how her faith helping her cope when her older brother was sent to jail for stealing, saying,

*I sustain myself in God. I call him my rock, my strength even, because he gives me power... I believe in him, I trust in him, and I know that the things in my home are going to change.*

Even among participants who did not express such profound faith, several talked about going to church or praying when they were having problems. Prayer calmed them and gave them hope that everything would happen in the way that God intended. In Patti's words, "[prayer] helps me be strong... it encourages me... I'm happier." They typically reported praying for their families and for their studies.

Some of the more religious participants also talked about their religion as an influence on their decision-making regarding sex and substance use. For example, when Juanita was asked how she would make the decision to start having sex, she responded "when I'm married, because [I think about] my studies, I would betray my mom, myself and God, because only after marriage should you have [sex]." Roberta who has drunk alcohol in the past, no longer does because "religion, the church" influenced her to avoid alcohol as a vice. Several participants also talked about spirituality as a component of health and well being.

In addition to its direct influence on some participants' behaviors, religion was also associated with activities that occupied their time in a *healthy* way and helped them build their social networks and support in their communities. Juanita, for example, when describing how she spends her time responded, "my house, at school, at the church... and then Sundays, my house, church, and my house again." A few of the participants are taking confirmation classes or are part of religious groups either through *Mil Solidarios* or through their own churches. These classes allow them to form relationships with both adults and peers around religion. For example, Miguel talked about receiving support from the instructor of his confirmation class at church and a few other participants mentioned that most of the friends they make are through either school or these religious organizations.

### **4.3 Interpersonal-level influences**

Social relationships with family, peers, and other influential individuals in the community significantly impact adolescents' experiences, decisions, and motivations. Families and peers comprise most participants' social ecologies and influence adolescents in different but complimentary ways. Other interpersonal relationships, particularly with adults who the participants perceived as role models are also influential.

#### *Family support*

*If [your mom] supports you, that's all there is. If your mom supports you and your father and your family, everything, [you]'ll have strength there, and you'll make it.*



All of the boys and most (seven) of the girls interviewed had at least one person in their family who they spoke about as providing them with encouragement and guidance. While some participants' parents were very strict, and described as overprotective, others were more laissez-faire; however, most participants did talk about having specific curfews or restrictions to spending time outside of the house. Overall, participants mostly spoke about their parents demonstrating their support for them by encouraging them to think about their futures and monitoring their progress in school. When asked about who they go to for advice, participants most often said their mom or their parents more so than their friends.

For eleven of the participants, their mother seemed to be the person they most trusted and approached for advice about their problems. Two additional participants had this type of relationship with their grandmother rather than their mothers. Only one participant seemed not to have a good relationship with either parent, but his aunt provided his main source of support and guidance. Even when participants had a strong sense of family support in general, several participants talked about having stronger relationships with their mothers than with their fathers who tended to be less communicative. For example, Octavio explained, "[my mom] gives me advice... my father doesn't say anything to us, but he looks out for us." All of the participants who witnessed domestic violence against their mothers talked about having a particularly strong relationship with their mothers.

While all but one girl explicitly talked about how her parents prohibited her from having a boyfriend, all the girls had a boyfriend at the time of the interview or had had one in the

past. Having rules against boyfriends meant that participants did not talk to their parents about their relationships, however some parents did talk to their daughters about how to *cuidarse* or *to take care of themselves*, which is often used as a euphemism for using contraception. When asked whether they talk to their parents about sex, most participants either responded that their parents told them to *cuidarse*, two girls reported receiving advice to wait until marriage and others said that their parents had never broached the subject.

One girl who talked about teen pregnancy as a significant problem in the Bañado attributed its prevalence to a lack support from parents and absence of communication about sex between parents and their children. She said,

*Because they don't tell them, they end up pregnant... sometimes they need to know that their parents are interested in them, and when they don't feel that, they either end up badly, or not studying, or pregnant... that's because their parents didn't pay enough attention or guide them much.*

Although she was waiting to have sex, she seemed to have the most openly communicative relationship with her mom with respect to sex out of all the female participants who were interviewed and talked to her mom about when she might have sex in the future.

Similar to the above explanation for the high rates of teenage pregnancies in the Bañado, a common theme throughout the interviews was the idea that a lack of love and support

from their families led many young people to get involved with drugs. While only a few participants reported speaking to their parents specifically about drugs, participants consistently attributed the others' drug use to family or lack of parental support. When several participants shared stories about a friend or family member who fell into drugs, they explained that the difference between the person who became involved in drugs and themselves was related to family involvement in their lives, in one participant's words:

*Many kids avoid those problems because they have a family that helps them, but many people here... the sons and daughters don't have much help, and they end up falling into drugs.*

Providing another example of how parental influence is perceived to affect youths' participation in these behaviors, Octavio's explanation for how he has avoided drugs was:

*Well, some young people do that because they have problems: they smoke, drink, steal, do drugs, and because of that, I always get advice from my mom about that, that if I have problems I should tell her.*

### *Responsibility to family*

A sense of responsibility to helping their families was also a strong motivating factor for five of the participants interviewed (including participants across each of the four groups). In particular, they expressed wanting to contribute financially and to live up to their families' expectations of them. In all but one case, participants expressed their belief that

the only way that they would be able to do this was by finishing school and graduating from college so that they would have jobs in the future. Miguel was the only exception; he was practicing to become a professional soccer player, but discussed college as an important part of his contingency plan. As the participants talked about striving to succeed not only for their sakes but also for the wellbeing of their families, this source of motivation was also sometimes a source of stress.

The conflict between working now to provide immediate support to family and investing in their education to potentially earn more in the future was a consistent theme throughout the interviews. When discussing reasons for why so many young people drop out of school, the most common explanation is that they have to start working instead of studying in order to help support their families or that their families cannot afford to continue sending them to school. While most of the adolescents interviewed discussed “giving [their] family the life they deserve,” “lifting up [their] parents,” or “helping with household costs” as motivations for staying in school, three youth with especially difficult home lives discussed their ongoing conflict between working and school. Below, Christina describes her conflict between helping her mother and staying in school:

Interviewer: *And what are your hopes for the future?*

Christina: *Um, one is to finish my high school and to get my degree in something, and to give my family the life they deserve and to get them out of poverty.*

I: *Ok, and when you say “what my family deserves” what do you mean?*

C: *Let’s say, well, she suffers a lot with my stepfather, because he abuses her a lot, and she*

*bears it all for us, and I, you don't know, I don't want to experience the same thing that she did, and that's why.*

....

*I: And what do you tell her?*

*C: That, well, why does she put up with it and why doesn't she leave him and that I'm going to help if she wants, that I'll work, but she doesn't want [me to], she wants me to study.... She tells me that she doesn't want me to experience the same things that she did and doesn't want any man to want to come kill me.*

Of the three participants who struggled with the conflicting priorities of work and education, two lived in homes with domestic violence and the third shared experiences of food insecurity. At the time of the study, they were all still attending school; however, as Christina demonstrated above, they also all had parents who were supportive of them continuing their educations.

### *Peer relationships*

While participants spoke most about the support they received from their parents, friendships were also an important influence and source of support for the participants. All of the boys from *Mil Solidarios* talked about the significance of their peer relationships while only one of the boys from *San Cayetano* discussed peer relationships. The female participants did not demonstrate as strong a pattern as the boys in their expressed importance of peer relationships. Two thirds of the girls from *Mil Solidarios* and two fifths of the girls from *San Cayetano* talked about peer relationships as important influences in

their lives. In general, participants' mostly met their friends at *Mil Solidarios*, through school, or practicing soccer.

Several participants described situations in which friends provided support when they lacked support from their families. One participant shared that she is embarrassed to talk to her family about a lot of things and trusts in her friends more for help with her problems. For example, Claudia described how her friends helped her manage when her mom went to work abroad in Argentina. Alejandra describes receiving reassurance from her friend when she felt neglected by her parents:

*When I was sad... I always messaged my friend. I would tell her and she would tell me if she had problems too, through text, but we listened to each other, it would hearten me. She would tell me that everything would pass; that everything happened for a reason... that my parents not being there with me sometimes isn't because they don't love me but because they need to work to give me something more.*

Three of the boys interviewed, Pedro, Ronaldo, and Mateo, were very close friends who met at *Mil Solidarios*. Their friendship was a central component of their interviews and each talked about how they consider each other like brothers, taking care of one another and helping each other when needed. Ronaldo often helps Pedro, who stayed behind in school last year, with his school work and they all talk about their hopes for the future together, supporting each other in staying on the right track in order to achieve success. Pedro explained, "we always support each other, we're like 'I like your decision, so we'll help or

advise you with anything,' we're always looking after one another." They each talked about how the first time they drank a lot was at Pedro's fifteenth birthday, and that they joked with each other about sex, alcohol, and drug use but also about their consequences:

*Joking, we often say, 'can't you imagine if you had AIDS?' Or something joking like that, but at the same time we know that it's true, that it's a serious topic that deserves attention and that it's something that no one wants to deal with in their lives.*

Outside of this group of three boys, other participants also reported having supportive relationships with their peers, with friends helping them vent and work through problems and supporting their personal and academic goals. In contrast to the parental relationships, however, both girls and boys generally reported that they were more likely to talk to friends about alcohol, drugs, and sex. When boys described the way they talked about issues like sex and drugs, they mostly talked about joking around; however, several male participants also spoke about a *supportive* subtext to these jokes. One boy from *Mil Solidarios* who has hopes of becoming an actor would talk to his best friend about sex, relationships, and other topics of concerns to de-stress and then they write plays together about their experiences.

While several participants did talk about knowing someone who had become involved in drugs or who had teenage pregnancies, they were not close friends at the time of the interviews. Some participants talked about friends they had who smoked or drank more than they agreed with or who were sexually active (when the participant was not). In these

circumstances, several participants discussed their own ability to think independently of their peers, to moderate their alcohol intake, or talked about how their friends knew that they did not wish to participate in those activities. Participants also talked a lot about how getting involved with the wrong crowd and having friends who do drugs led to initiation of drug use. The following quote from Julieta is representative of many of the descriptions of participants' peers or estranged friends who have fallen into drugs:

*Well, there are some who were friends, and those young people, their parents worked and weren't with him, with her, a lot of the time, and so he didn't have anyone to take care of him... and he hung out with whoever. Most of the people he was with were bad influences and took him down the wrong path.*

While some participants talked about having good relationships with some of their neighbors, others talked about not really knowing the people who lived near them because they avoided spending time outside of their homes because their neighbors did not get along or they felt that it was dangerous. Two participants in particular talked about having strong relationships with a neighbor who provided them with substantial support. Miguel has an older neighbor who took interest in him and gives him advice about distancing himself from friends who are involved with drugs and about not rushing to have sex. Christina also has a slightly older (23-year old) neighbor who has shared with her that he was previously suicidal and addicted to drugs but has been able to turn his life around and is now working.



### *Role models*

When asked whether they knew someone from the Bañado who had achieved success or whether they knew of someone who they admired and emulated, the participants were split evenly. About half said they did not know anyone who fit this description, and half were able to name someone specific who they looked up to as a role model.

Of the boys involved in *Mil Solidarios*, the two participants who talked about someone who they wanted to emulate mentioned adults involved with *Mil Solidarios*: Paí and a male teacher. An additional boy from *Mil Solidarios* first said that he had no one to look up to, but then proceeded to talk about his aunt who is one of his most significant sources of social support. All of boys from *San Cayetano* looked up to male family members (a cousin, a father and uncles) while the girls from *Mil Solidarios* who talked about a specific role model all looked up to females (a mother, an aunt, a neighbor, and a teacher). Only one of the girls from *San Cayetano* talked about having someone to look up to as a role model: her female neighbor.

Among the participants' role models, most of them had overcome significant adversity in their own lives. For example, Sandra most admires her aunt who "got stuck along the way and, now that she has her little children, started college" and is studying nursing. Sandra describes how her aunt previously dropped out of school due to lack of funds but eventually was able to save up enough money to return to school after having children. She associates her aunt's story with taking her studies more seriously after she started receiving the scholarship from *Mil Solidarios*. Alfredo admires his uncles because even

“seeing how the neighborhood was [before], they reached things that few achieve or dream.”

The participants admired people who were “working well” or studying, who “think differently,” and who were “perseverant.” Overall, the role models were generally people who had completed their educations or were working in a profession that allowed them to provide well for their families. As Juanita said:

*[Seeing these people who] work, have finished their studies, are seen at the universities, are making their careers, and are improving their quality of life, they are the example that I can follow, and seeing how they completed their studies, that [my neighbor] is continuing on, gives me more energy, more strength so that I want to keep studying to be like her.*

#### **4.4 Individual-level influences**

Throughout the interviews, participants were asked about how they made decisions regarding smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, using any other drugs, and having sex. In 11 out of the 20 interviews, the participants also brought up how they avoided participating in these potentially risky behaviors. Participants’ ways of avoiding risk included avoiding potentially risky environments in general, distancing themselves from peers who were participating in behaviors they did not want to participate in, and using refusal skills when directly invited to participate in the risky behavior. Future goals and a sense of self-efficacy also factored into individuals’ decision-making processes.

### *Avoiding risky environments*

Some adolescents mention completely avoiding risky or dangerous contexts. Three distinct reasons for the avoidance of risky situations are apparent throughout the interviews: parental restrictions, their own avoidance of risky situations, or lack of time.

Several participants describe how parental orders or family norms protected them from risks in the environment. When asked about what kind of rules or responsibilities they had at home, about a third of the young people specifically talk about parental restrictions on time they spent outside of the house. For example, participants mention not being allowed to go outside at night or during *siesta* and having to inform their parents where they are at all times. While these restrictions are challenging to some of the participants, the youth also seem to understand their purpose. For example, after describing how he has witnessed other young people in his community get involved in drugs, Pedro explains that he has been able to abstain and say no to drugs because “the culture of my home is that I don’t go out much, that is, I don’t talk with a lot of people, and even less over that way [where there are drug addicts].”

In contrast to those who were restricted by parents, a few participants, both boys and girls, discuss their own decision to not spend time outside in their neighborhoods. Because of problems and fighting going on around her home, Sandra says “I don’t go out there anymore, now I go somewhere else to enjoy myself, that is, I don’t go outside on my street.”

In general, participants avoid certain areas of the Bañado that they consider to be dangerous, or where robbers or *chespiritos* (crack users) live.

Another way adolescents seem to avoid risky contexts is by limiting their free time.

Participants report having little free time because they are members of *Mil Solidarios*, are doing double shifts at school, play sports, have jobs, are responsible for family members at home, or are involved in other extracurricular activities. In Paraguay, most students attend school either in the morning or in the afternoon. Students in certain programs do double shifts at school, meaning that they attend school both in the morning and in the afternoon. The activities that occupy these particularly busy participants' time leave limited opportunities for getting involved in potentially bad situations.

#### *Distancing skills and navigating the social environment*

The ability to distance themselves from risky social environments was another factor that influences some participants' ability to avoid risky health behaviors.

For Francisco and Miguel, two soccer-playing boys, these distancing skills are a particularly salient theme. They both describe how they navigate risky situations in socially acceptable, non-offensive ways. They create a friendly distance between themselves and peers participating in activities that they do not want to be a part of, like using drugs, smoking or starting fights in the street. Miguel discusses having cordial relationships with people he knows are drug addicts or habitually start fights in the street, but there is a mutual respect as to how far their relationships go. Both Miguel and Francisco seem capable of maintaining

relationships with childhood friends who now engage in risky behaviors while maintaining their distance and ability to abstain. Below, Francisco describes a time when he avoided both confrontation and smoking:

*Because, I remember, when I went there to a festival, alone, I found my friends and we were all in a circle, but that whole day they were drinking and then they started to buy cigarettes and to go smoke, and I told myself, I'm coming, I told them, and I didn't go any more because the smell of cigarettes makes me sick and I left them.*

He also recommends a similar approach to avoiding risk for other children growing up in the Bañado:

*He should leave the bad things, better yet, that there are people who want to take him down the wrong path, he should separate himself from them. He should leave- that is, he shouldn't separate himself completely from them, he should talk to them, but, if they want to take him down a bad path, he should leave them like I do. That's it all I will say to him so that he moves forward.*

In addition to physically distancing themselves from possible negative influences as described above, participants also explained how they created psychological distance. These participants mentally differentiated themselves from their friends who are participating in risky behaviors. Miguel describes this mental distancing from peer influences with respect to drug use:

*The trouble, really, is the topic of drugs. It's the bad – like my mom says – bad company (mala junta) but I say I can't interfere in others' things, I can't interfere, but I distance myself, like that, I, in my mind, right, I say that.*

Juanita provides another example: Although many of her friends have started having sex, Juanita differentiates herself from her friends and is abstaining from sex. She says,

*I don't know, I, my friends aren't like me. They say that, well, if I have a friend like that, you will also be like that, but I'm different. They don't put their little thoughts in my head, and I give them advice instead.*

Another girl, Roberta, describes this as not being “a person of the circumstances,” and explains that just because others in the neighborhood are doing bad things (stealing, perpetrating violence) does not mean that those are the examples that should be followed.

### *Refusal skills*

In addition to risk avoidance and distancing skills, a few participants also talked about their capacity to refuse to say no, even when facing social pressures. Participants shared their experiences of being offered drugs or cigarettes by friends or feeling pressured to drink, particularly at parties. Four participants in particular (three boys and one girl) discussed specific circumstances in which they said no when their peers were asking them to smoke, drink, or use drugs. For example, Mateo, who says he does not drink because his father

used to drink a lot when he was younger, has clearly shared his decision not to drink with his friends and maintains his stance regardless of their actions. When asked how abstains from drinking when his friends are he responded: "They invite me [to drink] just to tease me, but they know well that I don't, I don't drink." Miguel also shared that he had some friends who were addicted to crack and asked him to try it. However, he said, "no, I chose not to and I am glad that I didn't... because I'm a kid who likes to enjoy himself, go to parties, and that's it."

#### *Personal hopes and goals for the future*

All of the participants were able to articulate specific goals that they had for their future. Many of the participants used the phrase *ser alguien* meaning *to be somebody* as their way of expressing future success. To the interview participants, *to be somebody* mostly meant finishing school and having professional employment.

All of the participants expressed their perception that education was the primary - if not only - means through which they would *be somebody*. Many explained that they came to believe in the importance of education for reaching their goals through the advice and experiences of their parents and other family members. Participants believed that "without education there is no work," that "the future depends on education," and that "nothing is gained without education." Witnessing how education (or the lack of education) has affected the work and economic opportunities of those around them influences them to continue studying because they see education as the only means through which their circumstances may improve.

In fact, for many participants completing their education was a goal in itself. Many shared their short-term goals of graduating, then finding a way to pay for their college degree, and subsequently developing their careers. Even the two soccer-players talked about how they were continuing their studies in case they do not succeed as professional athletes. All participants spoke similarly about this educational trajectory; while having a family of their own was a stated goal of two thirds of the boys but only one girl mentioned a having a family as one of her goals.

Participants' goals for the future also influenced the decisions they made regarding sex, alcohol and substance use. While an virtually all of the girls were advised against (or prohibited from) having a boyfriend by their parents, all of them disclosed that they did actually have a boyfriend. None of the boys reported being cautioned against having a girlfriend and six of them reported ever having a girlfriend. However, only one girl reported sexual activity in comparison to three of the boys. Throughout the interviews, girls were more likely to talk about teenage pregnancy as a problem in the Bañado. They also named avoiding pregnancy as a reason for delaying their sexual initiation more often than boys. Boys did, however, talk about using condoms to avoid unplanned pregnancies. For example, when asked reasons why he might not use condoms consistently, Octavio responded,

*Well, I always use condoms... I hope to have children at 25, at 24. The truth is that it would be great because now at this age it's difficult to be a father.*



In contrast, girls were more likely to talk about how an unplanned pregnancy would impact their education and their ability to have a career. For example, Christina, who has a boyfriend but wants to wait a few years before she has sex explains that her decision to delay initiating sex is:

*In order to not end up pregnant, because of the way my family has been.. I will have a different career, that's why I want to wait still.*

While alcohol use was not generally seen as a significant problem or something that might affect their future plans, participants felt very strongly about avoiding other drugs. Many participants talked about peers who had started using *chespi* (crack) or seeing young people who were *chespiritos* (crack users) on the streets. Several participants shared their experiences witnessing peers and community members who became involved in selling and consuming crack. They attributed the crime in the Bañado mostly to drug users who would steal from or assault others in order to purchase their drugs. Among other negative consequences, they strongly associated crack use with becoming disinterested in education and subsequently dropping out of school. Thus they were certain that even trying the drug would set them on the wrong path and “destroy [their] lives.”

### *Self-efficacy*

A strong sense of self-efficacy was a prominent theme throughout a majority (13 out of 20) of the interviews among all groups of participants. Across both genders and among both

*Mil Solidarios* participants and non-participants, a significant motivation for the young people interviewed was the belief in the power of an individual to change his or her own circumstances. Many participants used the words *luchar* (to fight or struggle) or *esforzarse* (to exert oneself or strive) as the means to achieving success. When asked what advice they would give to another boy or girl who was growing up in the Bañado, several participants mentioned that the most important thing was to understand that “nada no es difícil” or “nothing is not difficult,” but that continued struggle and perseverance results in achieving your goals. When asked what kinds of recommendations he has for other children from the Bañado, Pedro, 17, MS responds:

*“And, just like me, that they also have to attend to their priorities and that they should never surrender. That they will always encounter difficulties. That, what is- what he should know is how to encounter these difficulties, and I think that that, with just that, that will serve them well. And I don’t really know how to say it, but I think that’s the most important thing for each person: to know how to encounter difficulties and to always keep in mind that hard work, dedication, and all that will always be rewarded.”*

When asked about people who they admired, participants often mentioned admiring *luchadores* (“fighters”), and their fight to move themselves and their families forward. Among qualities that those people they looked up to often had, persistence, hard work, and the ability to move themselves forward on their own were often mentioned. As mentioned above, most of the participants with role models chose individuals who had overcome significant adversity in their own lives.

Another manner in which the participants spoke about self-efficacy was by describing themselves as independent in solving their problems and reaching their goals. While they may have mentioned having social support from family and peers in other parts of the interviews, many participants' response when asked who they ask for help or how they solve their problems was simply "just me," "I alone solve my problems," or "when it's problems that I can solve, I solve them." In addition, several participants explained that regardless of circumstances or support, they were the only ones who were capable and responsible for shaping their own futures. Octavio, 18, MS, explains: "Let's see, I don't have issues with doing what I want because, like I told you, I fight for what I want and when I want something, I fight for it and there is no one who can hold me back, no one blocks me, no" and Pedro explains "with my *esfuerzo* is the only way that I will reach what I want."

Not only did the individuals interviewed demonstrate their own agency, but they also recognized it as something that differentiated those who are able to succeed from those who are not. Several respondents expressed the feeling that "you only have to think that you are capable" in order to be able to persevere through difficulties. When asked what the few people from the Bañado who were able to surpass their circumstances had in common Octavio, 18, MS responded:

*"Their courage, they look higher, they think higher. They don't think like other people who say that they can't, because they can, right. Paí also teaches about that because*

*we can achieve what we want, we just have to fight for it, a lack of fight is what it is, and to succeed.”*

While this idea of self-efficacy was mentioned often by participants when asked what advice they would give to other young people growing up in the Bañado, two participants in particular explicitly discussed eliciting this belief in others through his own actions. For example, when Pedro was asked about what other important people in his life think about his goal to attend university, he responded:

*“... And in the case of younger people they say ‘oh, I want to do that’ that type of thing, and that is really, it makes you feel really good, to see that your efforts, like that, with your will you are also teaching another person that that is the only way that you can achieve what you want.”*

When asked what advice she would give to others growing up in the Bañado, Alejandra, 17, SC responded:

“That she get in the mindset. If she wants something, she should commit and achieve it. She shouldn’t give up just because of she’s been through or because s/he’s here. You see, there are many people who say that things will never improve here, that you will never have anything here. Try to block all of that out. She should get up, say that she can, she should say that she can and get there, and she will get to be someone, all of that will get better. That the people who criticized so much that she wouldn’t be anything, she should show

them that she can be something, that she did become something, that she can be that person that she can be.”

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

### 5.1. Summary of findings

As described and demonstrated by youth themselves, resilience emerges from interactions among factors within different social ecological strata. Individual resilience factors such as self-efficacy and future goals are interrelated with interpersonal factors such as family support or peer relationships. In turn, these individual and interpersonal factors are nested within organizations and the broader Bañado Sur community.

The key finding in this study is that no single factor serves in isolation. Rather, several different factors have served as *pathways* that have connected these youth to multiple assets and resources. Each resilient adolescent in this study had a pathway that was a key influence at the individual level while also helping him or her build supportive social relationships that transcended the individual or interpersonal levels. Because of the effects that these pathways could have across multiple levels of individuals' ecologies and on various dimensions of their lives, connecting youth to one of these pathways could have far-reaching effects on their resilience. Resilience is the complex, dynamic process by which individuals navigate an adverse environment and negotiate for resources (Ungar, 2008). These pathway factors may serve to facilitate the navigation process by guiding an individual towards protective aspects of the environment or shielding them from some of the negative influences in their environments. To better illustrate how these pathways can influence participants' lives, two case studies are provided here. The first depicts how soccer had operated as a pathway for Francisco.

## 5.2 Pathway Case Study 1: Francisco and Soccer

Francisco is a 17-year-old student in second year of *la media* (equivalent to 11<sup>th</sup> grade) and a *Mil Solidarios* student. For Francisco, soccer is his identity. Soccer's influence on his life is pervasive; it facilitates his social relationships, provides an orientation towards his future, and influences his decisions around smoking, drugs, and romantic relationships.

Francisco's relationship with his stepfather has always been rocky. He explains, "I didn't think that a stepfather was going to be so good like that... because I train and he helps me in everything." When his mother started dating his stepfather, Francisco could not stand him, particularly because his stepfather was still married. Until three years ago, his stepfather also used to drink and physically abuse his mother. Francisco talked about losing his fear of his stepfather after breaking up one of their fights. More recently, their relationship has improved, with soccer providing a way for them to connect. Francisco shares, "now that he's been with my mother for six years, I get along well with him. Sometimes on Tuesdays and Fridays we go play together, with my friends and him."

Soccer is also intertwined with Francisco's sense of connectedness to the Bañado Sur and to his neighbors. When asked to describe the Bañado Sur, Francisco focuses on the ways that his neighborhood has improved, and provides an example of neighbors gathering their resources to fix a soccer field. He also articulates feeling support from his neighbors due to his status as a soccer player, saying, "I practice now and [my neighbors] support me because they want me to be a worthwhile player who demonstrates that the Bañado Sur is not like they say it is *up there*." When asked who he admires in his neighborhood, Francisco mentions one neighbor who is particularly supportive of him, always wishes him luck, and reminds him that the most important thing is to rise above his circumstances.

Additionally, soccer has also helped him make friends both within and outside the Bañado Sur. Francisco had few friends in his neighborhood after moving 7 years ago, however, he says "then we went to practice, and *there* I met my friends who lived near my house." This group of soccer players often watches soccer games *up* in the main area of Asunción where they meet and make friends with other young people who are not from the Bañado. Francisco explains, "we always go up there to watch the soccer game and we have some friends... we get along with some of them, and with others we don't because they say that we're *from below*, that we're drug addicts and all that." While these interactions may directly expose Francisco to discrimination, given the extreme social marginalization of people from the Bañado, making friendships with young people outside of this community may also be beneficial.

Francisco's aspiration to become a professional soccer player influences his engagement in risky health behaviors and orients him towards future goals. For example, he cites soccer as a reason for not smoking, not doing drugs, and not having time for a girlfriend. He explains that while those who practice soccer cast aside drugs and cigarettes, it is usually young people who do not have activities to participate in that go down a worse path. He also prioritized his soccer practice over having a girlfriend, noting that he thought it would be better for him. By encouraging him to consider how his decisions may impact his future career, practicing soccer helps Francisco make better decisions.

Many of the general findings of this study are consistent with the broader resilience literature and what is known about risk and protective factors. Supportive family and peer relationships, positive role models, bonds to effective schools and pro-social organizations, self-efficacy, positive self-perceptions, and goals for the future have all been identified as factors fundamental to “adaptation and resilience” (Masten, 2001; Theron, Theron, & Malindi, 2013; Werner & Smith, 1992). Risk avoidance and refusal skills also help youth navigate risky social environments and promote resilience. Life Skill Training interventions targeted at teaching these skills and enhancing social competence are widely-used, effective strategies for lowering alcohol and substance use and violent behaviors (Botvin & Griffin, 2004).

The *pathways* that youth discussed included sports, school, religion, and for some, *Mil Solidarios*. These pathways connected youth to various resilience-related factors across multiple social ecological strata. They provided opportunities for youth to develop skills and personal qualities that would promote their resilience while also facilitating the formation of supportive social relationships, and thus connecting them to resources in their community. As revealed through Francisco’s story above, playing soccer on a competitive team motivates athletes to abstain from substance use, helps them think about their future goals, and inspires interest and investment from peers and adults in their families and communities. Religion also functioned as a pathway for several participants, guiding their decisions, providing them with a sense of support, and connecting them with others in the community. For other youth, school and *Mil Solidarios* provide not only places for learning and actively working towards future goals, but they also served as platforms for youth to



create supportive relationships with like-minded peers, find role models within their own communities, and receive encouragement and guidance from teachers and administrators who were willing to act as mentors in their lives. Because of their connections to multiple factors that promoted youths' resilience, these pathways can serve to help youth more effectively and safely navigate their environments. Thus, linking a young person to one of these pathways would have a greater influence than working to provide any single resilience-related factor. It should be noted that employment, or an apprenticeship/internship-type position was a pathway for only one individual in this study; while they are rare in this community, similar opportunities that allow youth to stay in school while also learning a trade/skill and generating some income may well serve to be an important pathway for youth in this community.

### **5.3 Contextually-specific findings**

While the above factors appear to also be important in the Bañado Sur, other factors seem to have stronger implications for resilience among youth in the Bañado Sur. For example, one of the major forces compelling these youth to continue schooling despite the many challenges they face is their perception of education as *the* means for social mobility. Resilient youth from the Bañado Sur perceived continuing their education and *being someone* in the future as a feat they would accomplish not only for themselves, but also for their families and community. This finding resonates with studies by Theron et al (2013) among Black youth in segregated South Africa who see educational progress as "a pathway to self-, family, and community improvement." The researchers draw a parallel between this view of educational progress and prior studies among African Americans in the United

States finding “a positive correlation between cultural pride and academic aspirations and achievement” (Theron et al., 2013). Theron et al. (2013) distinguish this emphasis on upward mobility from the Western focus on cognitive competence as representing a Black or Afrocentric form of resilience. Perhaps instead this perception that education is the key factor for upward mobility is typical of youth from highly marginalized and impoverished communities, like the Bañado Sur.

The second case study featured below exemplifies the importance placed on education by resilient adolescents from the Bañado Sur. Through her story, Alejandra demonstrates that school is much more to her than an education. Her school serves as a pathway through which she develops her sense of agency, works towards her goals, and connects to peers, her family and her community.

#### **5.4 Pathway Case Study 2: Alejandra and School**

Alejandra is a 17 year old girl in her second year of *la media* (equivalent to 11<sup>th</sup> grade) at *San Cayetano*. She lives in the Bañado Sur with her parents and four siblings: an older brother, 20, a younger brother, 14, and two younger sisters, 12 and 9. Both of her parents work, her mom in recycling and her father as a construction worker and she describes her family as having “scarce resources.” For Alejandra, school provides much more than an education; it is a source of supportive peer and adult influences, develops her sense of agency, serves as the basis for experiencing parental support, and allows her to imagine and work towards a better future.

“At this school, you can make friends... here, everyone likes each other,” says Alejandra, differentiating her school from more expensive schools and demonstrating her sense of affiliation with San Cayetano. In addition to providing an opportunity for Alejandra to connect with similarly oriented peers from her community, her school also cultivates a sense of community solidarity and culture of giving back. When asked to describe the Bañado Sur, Alejandra responds:

*In all the bad things that are said about it, some things are good... Here at school we organize a cleaning once a year. That is, we, we go out to clean every little thing around here, throwing*

*out garbage, all of that. Those are the most productive things that are done here: doing things for the community.*

As explained by Alejandra, her school facilitates her participation in one of *the most productive things* to be done in the Bañado. This school activity allows her to give back to her community while also instilling a sense of self-efficacy and agency for change.

While Alejandra is not personally aware of anyone she considers successful, she hopefully relays the school director's stories of alumni who "are going to finish, [who] are going to have a career." Thus, through the relationships that she makes at school, she is able to imagine her own success. Although she lacks a role model to follow, she hopes to set an example for her younger siblings so that "they copy what I do, finish their... studies, a career, university."

Education is a central theme in Alejandra's relationship with her parents; it seems to be the basis for her feeling their support. The major messages in communications with her parents, according to Alejandra are: "that I have to study a lot. That they don't want me to go through what they went through. That they want me to be something more than they are." When asked how she feels about these interactions, Alejandra describes comfort in feeling her parents' support, saying "It's a beautiful experience to know that you have parents who do that, who are there, who worry about you."

With the goal of working to improve her and her family's quality of life, to Alejandra, education is most importantly about a means to *superarse*, literally meaning *to overcome one's self*. Alejandra provides her definition of *superarse* below:

*To progress. Like, if I'm bad at something, and studying, studying, and learning, and memorizing, and knowing, I improve... To progress is to advance at life, to climb as if you were climbing a mountain or a staircase to reach that goal that you have made for yourself.*

Similarly, a study of educationally resilient African-American youth also found a strong sense of fighting against stereotypes and succeeding for the sake of the broader African American community among those with greater understanding of racial discrimination (Gayles, 2006). Another qualitative study found the concept of struggle, particularly collective struggle to be a distinguishing factor among high-achieving, inner-city, African-American high school students (O'Connor, 1997). While the recognition of structural

barriers to future success has been associated with powerlessness and disengagement from school, the researcher posits that the prominence of struggle in the lives of the resilient youth contributed to their sense of agency. Similarly, the resilient youth interviewed in the Bañado Sur demonstrated an awareness of their marginalized status, and a sense of community solidarity and struggle. By contextualizing their personal hardships within the greater collective struggle, these resilient youth appear to develop a motivation to fight against these oppressive factors, particularly through their persistence in education rather than disengagement. Beyond persistence in education, public health researchers have called for increased focus on personal and collective meaning-making as a strategy for eliminating health disparities disproportionately affecting other marginalized (indigenous and sexual minority) youth populations in the United States (Wexler, DiFluvio, & Burke, 2009).

In communities like the Bañado Sur, role models tend to be everyday people more so than exceptionally successful individuals. Some of the resilient youth in this study chose role models who might be considered conventionally successful: they graduated from college, owned cars, and were helping their families. Several others, however, admired role models who had overcome significant adversity in their own lives. For example, one girl admired a neighbor who had previously been addicted to crack, but managed to get off drugs, get his life back together, and was now working at an office. While this might not seem like an ideal role model, in a context where youth are constantly exposed to the consequences of crack use, a gainfully employed former crack addict might symbolize the epitome of

resilience. Identifying and respecting resilience in other people could strengthen youths' own belief in their ability to overcome significant adversity in their own lives.

Social distancing skills also seem particularly important for youth in the Bañado Sur.

Resilient youth are able to create distance between themselves and their peers who begin using drugs or participating in other behaviors in which they do not want to partake.

Notably, they navigated away from these potentially negative peer influences in a socially appropriate way that did not completely sever the relationship. The Bañado Sur is a community where many families have coexisted for generations. Neighbors tend to all know each other, and have lots of time for socialization because rates of unemployment are high and walking is the primary mode of transportation. In this context, the ability to create a comfortable distance with youth who engage in high-risk behaviors is particularly important.

### **5.5 Potential recommendations for Mil Solidarios' programs**

The findings from this study pertain to factors that promote resilience among youth in the Bañado Sur that emerged from the narratives and the perceptions of the youth themselves.

By analyzing these youths' experiences, contextually relevant resilience factors were identified. These factors were incorporated into recommendations for *Mil Solidarios* and other youth development organizations in the Bañado Sur as described below.

*Improving communication around important issues in the lives of adolescents*

Social support, especially from parents, was a significant factor influencing youths' resilience. This effect seemed to be particularly strong with respect to motivating adolescents to persevere in their studies. When describing their relationships with their parents, these resilient adolescents talked about how their parents explicitly talked to them about staying in school to have a better life. However, it seems that parent conversations surrounding other important issues, like those surrounding substance use, violence, sex, and relationships, were more limited.

Currently, *Mil Solidarios* holds weekly meetings for parents where they discuss various topics ranging from current political events to parenting skills. During these parent meetings, parents can learn skills and strategies for broaching the less-discussed topics above with their children. Improving communication about these topics may increase perceived parental support and affect youth motivation and behaviors across these dimensions in addition to their education. This strategy would be consistent with existing literature demonstrating that the quality of parent communication can affect sexual health and substance use (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Given the findings regarding social mobility with respect to education and the motivating power of goals, including these components into the communications may further enhance their ability to promote resilience in youth of the Bañado Sur. Importantly, while the mother was the primary source of support for many participants, some relied more on an aunt or other source of support, thus it might also be beneficial to include other potential sources of support (like teachers or coaches), if possible.

### *Providing different types of role models*

That even some resilient youth are unable to name anyone from their own community who has been successful demonstrates the scarcity of appropriate role models for youth in the Bañado Sur. Role models may help adolescents develop their goals for the future which in turn helped resilient youth make positive decisions for their health and futures.

Additionally, as described above, role models who have overcome the significant adversity faced by youth in the Bañado Sur may strengthen youths' perceived self-efficacy to overcome their own challenges.

*Mil Solidarios* does a good job of employing staff from the Bañado, and in several interviews, youth appreciated that their teachers could understand them because they shared similar backgrounds. However, providing additional opportunities for youth to find a role model that resonates with them might extend the benefits of having a role model to a greater number of young people. *Mil Solidarios* can provide these opportunities in several ways. Firstly, while many staff members are alumni and some of the participants aspired to also work at *Mil Solidarios*, encouraging alumni who have followed different career paths could expand youths' *assessment* of their future possibilities. Another possibility would be to invite community members who exemplify resilience but may be not be conventionally considered role models to discuss their experiences with students. Explicitly providing examples of resilience from their own communities may support youths' perseverance in their own lives.

### *Promoting mentoring relationships*

Among youth in the Bañado Sur, perception of themselves as a model or mentor for younger children in the community also seemed to influence their resilience. This resilience factor may be related to youths' motivation to persevere not only for themselves, but for those in their families and community.

*Mil Solidarios* could incorporate this finding into their programs in several ways. Firstly, they can cultivate the idea that each participant's success is not only a personal victory, but also one that is lifting up their families and their communities. Promoting this concept of success could in itself serve to promote resilience among additional youth in a contextually meaningful way. Secondly, they can provide students with the opportunity to interact with younger students in meaningful ways that encourage them to see themselves as role models. Although an initiative to build relationships between *Mil Solidarios* members from different age groups may ultimately benefit both participants, the intention would be to promote this idea of the self as a role model within mentor.

### *Create opportunities for others' investment in youth*

Among the resilient young people's narratives, a crosscutting theme was investment in the young person's success by at least one important adult. Participants' demonstrated their ability to valuably contribute to their communities by their demonstrated determination in school, athletic ability, or hard work in employment. For example, soccer works as an effective mechanism for creating interest in youth because they are able to showcase their talent for something that could ultimately lead to a professional career and future success.



Thus, participants who practice soccer inspire interest from parents, teachers, and neighbors. This increased investment consequently expands youths' social networks, increasing community connectedness and connecting them to additional assets and resources.

By creating opportunities for youth to demonstrate their talents and potential to contribute to their communities, *Mil Solidarios* may rouse further interest and investment in their participants. Like some youths' natural proclivity towards sports, other participants expressed interests in arts but did not have a venue for pursuing these interests. Although procuring special instruments or supplies may require unavailable resources, some extra-curricular activities such as dance, writing, or crafts may be more financially feasible. For example, one resilient participant shared her love of traditional Paraguayan dancing, the pride she felt when she performed, and her experience teaching younger children. Another participant who would write short plays with his friend shared his dream of becoming an actor. If there were a platform for them to share these interests and abilities with others outside of *Mil Solidarios*, it might inspire interest and investment in these youths. Another possibility for increasing the perceived contribution of children to their community is through incorporating potentially income-generating activities, such as making crafts from recycled materials into the *Mil Solidarios* activities. Lastly, *Mil Solidarios* sometimes serves as a host organization for university students fulfilling internship or practicum requirements from local and international universities. By establishing more consistent partnerships between the organization and universities (such as the neighboring Catholic university) and sustaining a stronger presence of university students at the organization,

*Mil Solidarios* could raise its profile and encourage greater outside investment in its participants.

## **5.6 Limitations**

This study had several important limitations. Firstly, this study focused on understanding youth resilience in the context of the Bañado Sur. Thus, findings from the present study are context-specific and may not be generalizable to youth outside of this population.

Additionally, this study focused specifically on youths' experiences, perceptions, and explanations of their own resilience, motivations, and influences. While this approach may capture the lived experience of this population, youths' retelling of their stories may not be factually accurate. Additionally, their perceptions may not necessarily coincide with how others in the community, such as parents or teachers, would describe concepts or event.

## Bibliography

- Botelho, Adriana Pedreira, Silva, SLF, Kassab, Marina Janzen, & Leite, Ligia Costa. (2008). Meninos de rua: Desafiliados em busca de saúde mental. *Psicologia em Estudo*, 13(2), 361-370.
- Botvin, Gilbert J, & Griffin, Kenneth W. (2004). Life skills training: Empirical findings and future directions. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 25(2), 211-232.
- Cameron, C. A., Ungar, M., & Liebenberg, L. (2007). Cultural understandings of resilience: roots for wings in the development of affective resources for resilience. *Child Adolesc Psychiatr Clin N Am*, 16(2), 285-301, vii-viii. doi: 10.1016/j.chc.2006.11.001
- Cortes, Liliana, & Buchanan, Marla Jean. (2007). The experience of Columbian child soldiers from a resilience perspective. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 29(1), 43-55.
- Fergus, Stevenson, & Zimmerman, Marc A. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annu. Rev. Public Health*, 26, 399-419.
- Gayles, Jonathan. (2006). "Carrying it for the whole race": Achievement, race and meaning among five high achieving African American men. *Journal of African American Studies*, 10(1), 19-32.
- Henley, Robert. (2010). Resilience enhancing psychosocial programmes for youth in different cultural contexts Evaluation and research. *Progress in Development Studies*, 10(4), 295-307.
- Kirby, Douglas. (2007). *Emerging Answers 2007: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. Washington, DC: The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.
- Kliewer, W., & Murrelle, L. (2007). Risk and protective factors for adolescent substance use: findings from a study in selected Central American countries. *J Adolesc Health*, 40(5), 448-455. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2006.11.148
- Libório, Renata Maria Coimbra, & Ungar, Michael. (2010). Children's perspectives on their economic activity as a pathway to resilience. *Children & Society*, 24(4), 326-338.
- Marsh, David R, Schroeder, Dirk G, Dearden, Kirk A, Sternin, Jerry, & Sternin, Monique. (2004). The power of positive deviance. *BMJ: British Medical Journal*, 329(7475), 1177.

- Masten, A. S. (2001). Ordinary magic. Resilience processes in development. *Am Psychol*, 56(3), 227-238.
- Mmari, K, & Blum, RW. (2009). Risk and protective factors that affect adolescent reproductive health in developing countries: a structured literature review. *Global public health*, 4(4), 350-366.
- Nation, Maury, & Heflinger, Craig Anne. (2006). Risk factors for serious alcohol and drug use: the role of psychosocial variables in predicting the frequency of substance use among adolescents. *The American journal of drug and alcohol abuse*, 32(3), 415-433.
- O'Connor, Carla. (1997). Dispositions toward (collective) struggle and educational resilience in the inner city: A case analysis of six African-American high school students. *American Educational Research Journal*, 34(4), 593-629.
- Ramirez-Valles, Jesus, Zimmerman, Marc A, & Newcomb, Michael D. (1998). Sexual risk behavior among youth: Modeling the influence of prosocial activities and socioeconomic factors. *Journal of health and social behavior*, 237-253.
- Rivera, R, & Borasky, D. (2009). Research Ethics Training Curriculum. In F. H. International (Ed.). North Carolina.
- Rutter, M. (1987). Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*, 57(3), 316-331.
- Sameroff, A, Gutman, L, & Peck, SC. (2003). Adaptation among youths facing multiple risks: Prospective research findings. *Resilience and vulnerability: Adaptation in the context of childhood adversities*, 364-391.
- Sawyer, Susan M, Afifi, Rima A, Bearinger, Linda H, Blakemore, Sarah-Jayne, Dick, Bruce, Ezeh, Alex C, & Patton, George C. (2012). Adolescence: a foundation for future health. *The Lancet*.
- Solidarios, Mil. (2009). Formación y Atención Integral para Pobladores del Bañado Sur. Mil Solidarios.
- Stoddard, Sarah A, Zimmerman, Marc A, & Bauermeister, José A. (2012). A longitudinal analysis of cumulative risks, cumulative promotive factors, and adolescent violent behavior. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 22(3), 542-555.
- Theron, Linda C, Theron, Adam MC, & Malindi, Macalane J. (2013). Toward an African Definition of Resilience A Rural South African Community's View of Resilient Basotho Youth. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 39(1), 63-87.
- Ungar, Michael. (2008). Resilience across cultures. *British journal of social work*, 38(2), 218-235.

- Ungar, Michael. (2010). What is resilience across cultures and contexts? Advances to the theory of positive development among individuals and families under stress. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy, 21*(1), 1-16.
- Ungar, Michael. (2011). The social ecology of resilience: Addressing contextual and cultural ambiguity of a nascent construct. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 81*(1), 1-17.
- Ungar, Michael, & Liebenberg, Linda. (2011). Assessing Resilience Across Cultures Using Mixed Methods: Construction of the Child and Youth Resilience Measure. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 5*(2), 126-149. doi: Doi 10.1177/1558689811400607
- Walker, Lorraine O, Sterling, Bobbie Sue, Hoke, Mary M, & Dearden, Kirk A. (2007). Applying the concept of positive deviance to public health data: A tool for reducing health disparities. *Public Health Nursing, 24*(6), 571-576.
- Werner, Emmy E, & Smith, Ruth S. (1982). Vulnerable, but invincible: A longitudinal study of resilient children and youth.
- Werner, Emmy E, & Smith, Ruth S. (1992). *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*: Cornell University Press.
- Wexler, Lisa Marin, DiFluvio, Gloria, & Burke, Tracey K. (2009). Resilience and marginalized youth: Making a case for personal and collective meaning-making as part of resilience research in public health. *Social science & medicine, 69*(4), 565-570.
- Zibechi, Raúl. (2008). Bañados de Asunción: La Potencia de la Comunidad. from [www.cetri.be/spip.php?article758](http://www.cetri.be/spip.php?article758)



## Appendix 1



EMORY  
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

---

DATE: May 24, 2012

**RE: Determination: No IRB Review Required**

**Title: Resilience and Adolescent Health: An assessment of risks and assets in the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay**

**PI: Vanessa Rios, MPH Candidate '13**

Dear Ms. Rios:

Thank you for requesting a determination from our office about the above-referenced project. Based on our review of the materials you provided, we have determined that it does not require IRB review because it does not meet the definition(s) of "research" involving "human subjects" or the definition of "clinical investigation" as set forth in Emory policies and procedures and federal rules, if applicable. Specifically, in this project, you will work with Mil Solidarios, a community-based organization working with youth in the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay. While there, you plan to examine how some adolescents are able to effectively navigate the potentially adverse environment of the Bañado Sur and how risk and protective factors influence resilient adolescents' health behaviors across multiple dimensions of health in this context. You will conduct qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys with adolescents between the ages of 11-19 years. The findings of your project will be used to inform their youth development programs. The findings of this project will be specific to this population and neighborhood and do not appear to be generalizable outside of the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay.

Please note that this determination does not mean that you cannot publish the results. If you have questions about this issue, please contact me.

This determination could be affected by substantive changes in the study design, subject populations, or identifiability of data. If the project changes in any substantive way, please contact our office for clarification.

Thank you for consulting the IRB.

Sincerely,

Carol Corkran, MPH, CIP  
Senior Research Protocol Analyst  
*This letter has been digitally signed*





## Appendix 2

| <b>Research Objective</b>  | <b>Research Questions</b>   | <b>Domains</b>   |
|--|---|--|
| Developing an understanding of youth resilience in the context of the Bañado Sur neighborhood of Asunción, Paraguay. | How are adolescents resilient the context of the Bañado Sur?                                      | Personal circumstances and life-history; dimensions of outcomes: education, health, employment   |
|  | What are factors that influence resilience among adolescents?                                     | Socio-cultural beliefs; community-level: violence, resources, sense of belonging; family cohesion, presence of violence, level of parental supervision; individual factors: major life events, coping and decision-making strategies, future goals, educational achievement, self-perception |
|  | How do resilient adolescents navigate through adverse environments and achieve positive outcomes? | Use of resources; relationships with family, mentors, school, peers; extracurricular/recreational activities; coping mechanisms, decision-making strategies; future goals and aspirations  |
|  | How do resilient adolescents make decisions regarding their behavioral- and sexual-health?        | Information sources, knowledge of services, locus of control/self-efficacy, perceptions of future/foresight; dimensions: violence, substance use, depression/mental health, STI and pregnancy prevention   |

## Appendix 3

### Introducción:

Gracias por participar en esta entrevista hoy día. Me llamo Vanessa Ríos y yo soy una estudiante de salud pública en la Universidad de Emory en Georgia, E.E.U.U. Yo estoy realizando esta entrevista como parte de un proyecto de investigación sobre la resiliencia. Cuando alguien logra resultados positivos a pesar de enfrentar muchos retos, esa persona demuestra resiliencia. Yo quiero entender como los jóvenes, como tú, manejan las dificultades que se encuentran en sus vidas y como toman decisiones que pueden afectar su salud.

Durante esta entrevista yo te voy a hacer unas preguntas sobre tu vida, tu familia y tu comunidad. Nosotros vamos a hacer dos actividades: la primera es un dibujo y la segunda es una línea de tiempo. Yo también te voy a preguntar sobre tu salud física, mental y sexual. Yo estoy interesada en oír lo que tu tienes que decir y aprender sobre tus experiencias como un joven viviendo en el Bañado Sur. Por favor también siéntete libre de hablar sobre cualquier otro tema que te parezca. Tu participación es completamente voluntaria y puedes escoger no responder a cualquiera pregunta o parar la entrevista en cualquier momento y por cualquiera razón. Todo lo que tú me digas va ser completamente confidencial y yo no lo compartiré con ninguna otra persona.

Está bien si yo grabo la entrevista? Después de la entrevista, yo voy a transcribir la entrevista, eliminar toda información que puede servir para identificarte y borrar la grabación.

Gracias de nuevo. Tienes alguna pregunta antes de empezar?

### Preguntas de introducción:

Primero te voy a preguntar sobre tu y tu familia.

1. Dónde vas a la escuela?
  - a. En qué año estas? Clase favorita? Cuanto tiempo llevas en esta escuela?
  - b. Hay alguna vez que tienes otras cosas que hacer y no vas a la escuela? Qué cosas?
2. Cuando no estás en las escuela, que te gusta hacer para divertirte?
  - a. Deportes? Arte? Música?
3. A dónde vives?
  - a. Como describirías tu: casa, barrio, el Bañado, Asunción?
4. Con quien vives?
  - a. Hace cuánto tiempo vive tu familia en el Bañado Sur?
  - b. Donde vivían antes?
5. Como describirías tu familia?
  - a. Tus padres? Tus hermanos?
6. Como te llevas con tu familia?

- a. Son estrictos tus padres? Cuáles son tus responsabilidades?

**Actividad de mapa:**

Ahora te voy a pedir que dibujes un mapa de tu comunidad.

7. Cuales lugares son importantes para ti?
  - a. A donde pasas la mayor parte del tiempo?
  - b. Escuela? Iglesia?
  - c. Con quienes pasas tiempo en estos lugares?
8. A donde pasas tu tiempo libre?
  - a. Con quienes pasas tiempo?
  - b. Que haces en esos lugares?
9. A donde encuentras apoyo en tu comunidad?
  - a. Encuentras apoyo de tu familia? Amigos? Profesores? Lideres? Organizaciones comunitarias?
10. Cuales lugares te parecen estresantes o peligrosos?
  - a. Porque son estresantes? Que ocurre en estos lugares?
  - b. Cuales lugares en tu comunidad se evitan?

**Ahora te voy a preguntar sobre dificultades en tu comunidad y en tu experiencia.**

11. Cuáles son las otras dificultades que los jóvenes enfrentan en el Bañado?
  - a. Discriminación (contra los jóvenes, contra los residentes del Bañado), violencia, otras dificultades
12. Conoces a alguien que tu admiras que tuvo éxito a pesar de estas dificultades?
  - a. Él/ella como lo pudo hacer?
13. Como crees que estas dificultades pueden afectar la salud de los jóvenes?
14. Me puedes contar sobre una dificultad que enfrentaste en el último año?
  - a. Esto porque paso? Como te sentiste? Como manejaste/estas manejando este problema?
15. Que haces cuando te sientes triste o desesperado/a?
  - a. A quien le pides ayuda?

**Ahora vamos a hacer una línea de tiempo con eventos importantes en tu vida. En esta línea de tiempo, yo ya he marcado tu nacimiento y el tiempo en que estamos ahora. Cada línea indica un año.**

16. Cuando empezaste en la escuela?
  - a. Has cambiado de escuela?
17. Cuando empezaste en el programa de Mil Solidarios?
18. Cuando han pasado otros eventos importantes relacionados a tu educación?
19. Desde cuando vive en la casa donde estás viviendo ahora?
  - a. Cuando te has mudado de casa?
  - b. Ha cambiado la gente con quien vives?
20. Y otros eventos o cambios importantes que han ocurrido en tu vida?
  - a. Teniendo que ver con tu familia? Amistades? Alguna otra cosa?

*El cuestionario que llenaste anteriormente incluye unas preguntas sobre tu salud. Yo vi que..*

21. Cuando fue la primera vez que fumaste un cigarrillo?
  - si no fumas cuando crees que empezarías?
    - a. Como empezaste/empezarías?
    - b. Porque?
22. Cuando fue la primera vez que te tomaste un trago de alcohol?
  - si no usas alcohol cuando crees que empezarías?
    - a. Como empezaste/empezarías?
    - b. Porque?
23. Cuando fue la primera vez que usaste alguna otra sustancia o droga?
  - a. Drogas...
24. Con quien hablas sobre el uso de tabaco/alcohol/drogas?
  - a. Pares, amigos, padres, profesores, otros
25. Cuales riesgos crees que son asociados con el uso de tabaco/alcohol/drogas?
  - a. Como permaneces sano alrededor de estas sustancias?
26. Cuando tuviste tu primer novio/a?
  - a. Cuanto tiempo llevaron juntos?
27. Cuando fue la primera vez que tuviste sexo?
  - cuando crees que vas a tener sexo por la primera vez?
    - a. Que paso en este tiempo?
    - b. Porque?
28. Con quien hablas sobre el sexo?
  - a. Pares, amigos, padres, profesores, otros
29. Cuales riesgos crees que están asociados con tener sexo?
  - a. Como te cuidas cuando estas sexualmente activo?
30. Cuáles son tus esperanzas para el futuro?
  - a. Puedes pensar en alguna otra cosa que quieres aumentar a tu línea de tiempo en el futuro?
  - b. Como vas a cumplir estas metas?

### **Conclusión**

31. Que piensan otras personas en tu vida sobre tus metas?
  - a. Ellos creen que si las puedes lograr?
  - b. Quienes? Tu familia? Amigos? En tu escuela? En tu barrio?
32. Conoces a alguien en tu barrio que admiras o que deseas ser como él/ella?
  - a. Porque?
33. Que recomendaciones le darías a un niño o niña más joven que está creciendo aquí en el Bañado?
34. Hay algo más sobre lo que tú quieras hablar o que tu quisieras que yo te hubiera preguntado?

**Introduction:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. My name is Vanessa Rios and I'm a Public Health student at Emory University in Georgia, US. I will be conducting this interview as part of a research project concerning resilience. Resilience is when someone performs better than expected when faced with challenges. This interview is being conducted in to understand how adolescents deal with challenges they encounter in their lives and how they make decisions that can affect their health.

During this interview, I will ask you questions about your life, your family and your community. We will do two activities: the first will be a drawing and a timeline. I will also ask you questions about different aspects of your health: physical health, mental health and sexual health. I'm interested in hearing your perspective and your experiences as a young person growing up in the Bañado Sur and how you navigate your community. Please feel free to bring up any other issues you think are relevant. Your participation is completely voluntary and you can decide not to answer any question or stop the interview at any time and for any reason. Everything you tell me will be held completely confidential and will not be shared with anyone else.

Do you mind if I record the interview? After the interview, I will transcribe the interview, remove any information that could identify you, and delete the recording.

Thank you again. Do you have any questions before we begin?

**Introduction Questions:**

First, I'm going to ask you some general questions about you and your family.

1. What school do you go to?
  - a. What grade are you in? Favorite subjects? How long have you been at this school?
2. When you're not at school, what do you do for fun?
  - a. Sports? Art? Music?
3. Where do you live?
  - a. How would you describe your: home, neighborhood, Asunción?
4. Who do you live with?
  - a. How long has your family lived in the Bañado Sur?
  - b. Where did they live before?
5. How would you describe your family?
  - a. Parents? Siblings?
6. How do you get along with your family?
  - a. Strictness? Responsibilities?
  - b.

**Mapping activity:**

Now, I'm going to ask you to draw a map of your community.

7. What places are important to you?
  - a. Where do you spend most of your time?
  - b. School? Church?

- c. Who do you spend time with at these places?
- 8. Where do you spend your free time?
  - a. Who do you spend time with at these places?
  - b. What do you do there?
- 9. Where are places where you find support in your community?
  - d. Do you find support from family? Friends? Mentors? Community organizations?
- 10. What places do you think of as stressful or dangerous?
  - a. Why are there stressful? What happens at these places?
  - b. What are places that you avoid in your community?

**Now I'm going to ask you some more questions about challenges in your community and in your own experience.**

- 11. What are other challenges that young people face in the Bañado?
  - a. Discrimination (against youth, against the Bañado residents), violence, crime, other stressors
- 12. Is there someone you admire that was successful despite these challenges?
  - a. How as s/he able to do that?
- 13. How do you think some of these challenges can affect young people's health?
- 14. Can you tell me about a challenge that you had in the past year?
  - a. Why did it happen? How did it feel? How did you deal/are you dealing with it?
- 15. When you feel sad or hopeless, how do you deal with it?
  - a. Who do you ask for help?

**Now we're going to make a timeline of different important events in your life. On the timeline, I have already marked where you were born and where we are now. Each line represents a different year.**

- 16. When did you first start school?
  - a. Have you ever switched schools?
- 17. When did you first start the *Mil Solidarios* program?
- 18. When did other important events related to your education happen?
- 19. What about other important events/major changes in your life?
  - a. Relating to family? Friendships? Anything else?
  - b. How did you deal with this event/change?

*In the survey that you filled out for me earlier, I asked some questions that relate to your health. I see that...*

- 20. If you use tobacco/alcohol/other drugs, when did you start?
  - OR** If you don't use tobacco/alcohol/other drugs, when do you think you might start?
    - a. How did you start using tobacco/alcohol/other drugs?
    - b. Why?
- 21. Who do you talk to about using tobacco/alcohol/other drugs?
  - a. Peers, parents, mentors, teachers
- 22. What kind of risks do you associate with tobacco/alcohol/other drug use?

- a. How do you stay healthy around tobacco/alcohol/other drug use?
23. If you are sexually active, when did you first start having sex?  
**OR** When do you think you will become sexually active?
- a. What happened at this time?
  - b. Why?
24. Who do you talk to about sex?
- a. Peers, parents, mentors, teachers
25. What kind of risks do you associate with having sex?
- a. How do you stay healthy when you're sexually active?
26. What are your hopes for the future?
- a. Can you think of anything you want to add to your timeline for the future?
  - b. How will you achieve those goals?

**Closing questions:**

27. What do other people in your life think about your goals?
- a. Do they think you can achieve them?
  - b. Who? Family? Friends? School? Neighborhood?
28. What advice would you give to a younger boy/girl who is growing up here?
29. Is there anything else you would like to talk about or wish I would have asked you?

### Appendix 4

| #  | Code                               | Code definition  |
|----|------------------------------------|--|
| 1  | Apoyo Social / Social support      | Support received from other people, it could be used in terms of <i>consejos</i> or advice, or more explicit help between two people. This includes support from family, peers, and neighbors. |
| 2  | Sex                                | Includes sexual relationships, contraceptive methods, and reasons for engaging or not engaging in sexual activity (pregnancy, etc.)  |
| 3  | Romantic relationships             | Mentions of girlfriends or boyfriends. Also includes discussion of other adult's romantic relationships.   |
| 4  | Familia                            | All mentions of family: fathers, mothers, brothers, stepparents, uncles, cousins, grandparents, etc.   |
| 5  | Drugs                              | Mentions of drug use, presense of <i>chespiritos</i> , or drug addicts and drug dealers.   |
| 6  | Studies / education                | Includes school, high school, university, finishing studies, graduating and mentions of education in general.  |
| 7  | Alcohol                            | Includes mentions of use and abuse of alcohol, getting drunk and <i>empedarse</i>  |
| 8  | Solidaridad / Community Solidarity | Includes a sense of inclusion and support among residents of the Bañado, also a feeling of wanting to contribute and give back, working towards the improvement of the community.              |
| 9  | Religión                           | Includes mentions of praying, miracles, going to church, finding support and help in God, Jesus, or having another personal faith.   |
| 10 | Crime                              | Includes mentions of stealing, assault, domestic violence, community violence. Includes perpetration, victimization, and witnessing of violence.   |
| 11 | Discriminación                     | Includes experiences of discrimination, how discrimination is felt and expressed, and the effect that it has on those discriminated against.   |
| 12 | Sports                             | Mentions of playing or practicing any sport, soccer, volleyball, etc.  |
| 13 | Avoiding risk/ refusal skills      | Encompasses the capacity to distance oneself and to reject things that are harmful. Could include drugs,   |



|    |                            |  |
|----|----------------------------|--|
|    |                            | alcohol, but also ditching school, etc.  |
| 14 | Peers                      | Mentions of their friends or classmates, people who are close to them in age   |
| 15 | Mentorship /caretaking     | Taking care of, modeling for or feeling responsible for another person, whether they be older or younger or related or unrelated           |
| 16 | Self-efficacy              | The idea that one is capable of causing change in one's own life, agency. Also includes mentions of solving problems independently.        |
| 17 | Employment                 | Labor for pay, also includes mentions of unemployment  |
| 18 | Giving back/serving others | Includes mentions of wanting to help others, to give back to the community.  |
| 19 | Social skills              | Discussions of how to navigate social situations, adapting self to be likeable by others   |
| 20 | Goals/aspirations          | Includes discussion of hopes and plans for the future, things they want to accomplish in life, future-oriented motivations for persevering |