

The Role of Religion/Spirituality in Fostering Resilience Among At-Risk Youth in the Halifax

Metropolitan Region

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Youth Study

Lucan K. Johnson

Department of Child and Youth Study

Mount Saint Vincent University

Halifax

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Abstract

The current research

Role of Religion/Spirituality in Fostering

Resilience Among At-R

youth (4 African-Nova Scotian and 1 Filipino-Nova Scotian) between the ages of 19 and 25 participated in this study. They were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling methods. Participants were from two low-income areas in the HRM, and attended, or were attending university and/or gainfully employed. A phenomenological approach was used as a framework for conducting this research. Social Ecological model was utilized as a theoretical framework for analyzing the results. Thematic analysis and in vivo coding were used for analyzing the data. The results have indicated that religion/spirituality plays a significant role in helping at-risk youth to rise above their difficulties. The findings also showed that resilience in these youth was not simply a product of individual qualities or traits, but also the result of supportive relationships from others such as peers, friends, parents, close family members, religious leaders, and other church members.

DEDICATION

To my beloved parents, Benjamin and Auna, for their continuous support and encouragement during this journey. You are both my cheerleaders and my champions. To my brothers and sisters, especially, Ryan, for believing in, and reinforcing my dreams. To my advisor and friend, Timothy Bailey, for frequently sharing his insights and experiences.

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Preamble

I have always been interested in understanding the factors that influence or drive human behaviours. From as early as the beginning of high school, I began asking myself general questions that became more complex. Over the past fifteen years, I have worked with youth with a variety of challenges in my capacity as Guidance Counsellor and Clinical Psychologist. Through the experiences of working with youth and having thoughts about the effects of religion on behaviour, I have developed a strong desire to understand the impact of religion in helping youth to overcome their adversities. For me, there is something about the influence of religiosity on young people that is yet to be understood. I was born and raised in Jamaica, the country with the most churches per square mile in the world (Chang & Chen, 1998). This reality presumes the idea that religion should be one of the most influential forces on the island. In my mind, religion should encourage peace, order, and respect for life. Surprisingly, Jamaica also has one of the highest crime rates in the world (Johnson & Gentles-Peart, 2019). These facts have provoked my interests and thoughts for many years. It turns out that youth appear to be both the victims and perpetrators of these crimes. While many adolescents turn to a life of crime and violence, some find religion to be a key factor in overcoming their adversities. As a teenager, I noticed that

his so,

my journey into Child and Youth Study has reenergized and reawakened my thoughts about these questions. The knowledge and theories about youth, their challenges, and difficulties, have driven me to investigate the role of religion in fostering resilience among at-risk youth.

Introduction

Several variations to this question might have been asked by many people throughout their lives. While this might be true, this reality does not diminish the importance of such questions. While religion has often been attacked as the origin of strife and violence amongst humans, the existence of moral codes which are inherent to many religious orientations has also served as a moderating influence and bulwark against violence, in many human societies. Yet, the impact of a religious orientation amongst young people who are living amongst violent societies is still relatively unknown. The hope of this research is to attempt to provide sound answers to this question.

The importance of conducting such a study lies partly in the fact that limited research has been done in this area in Canada. Also, while quite a lot of research has now been conducted on resilience amongst children and youth, limited research has been done on the role of spirituality/religion as a factor in building resilience in the specific population of at-risk youth. The impetus for this enquiry also rests on the fact that a limited amount of qualitative research has been done on this topic. At the same time, there is a yearning for a richer and deeper understanding of religion and resilience among at-risk youth.

Attempts were made early in this thesis to define resilience, religion, and spirituality, as well as at-risk youth. Several research questions were developed from the main research question. To answer these questions, semi-structured interviews were used to gather data from youth between the ages of 19 and 30 who were actively engaged in the practice of their faith.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the collected data.

Social Ecological

perspective was then outlined, as it was the theoretical approach that was used to interpret the

research findings (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Significance of the Study

McWhirter et al. (2017) have described how at-risk youth can pose a risk to both themselves and other members of society. For instance, they may be more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours, drug and alcohol use, and youth violence and delinquency. Youth in low-income areas may be more likely to enter into criminal activity (McWhirter et al., 2017) and government may end up spending millions of dollars on crime reduction that could have been otherwise spent on areas of national development. It is primarily out of a concern that at-risk youth may potentially harm themselves and society why this research is being conducted.

However, it is important to note that while many children and youth experience difficult life situations and circumstances, not everyone appears to succumb to the pressures to venture into criminal activities. Some youth, it appears, tend to overcome these challenges. These adolescents are said to demonstrate *resilience*, a quality which allows them to avoid entering into anti-social activities. Resilience is seen as a positive adaptation to adversity (Khanlou & Wray, 2014). It is not merely an event, but a process. Resilience is not merely a trait or an attribute within the person (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000; Masten et al., 1999), instead, it is more commonly seen as a process in which the person successfully adapts positively when faced with adversity (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Luthar et al., 2000).

One aspect which has been associated with resiliency is having a religious or spiritual outlook on life (Oxhandler et al., 2018; Cole-Lewis et al., 2016; Salas-Wright et al., 2013; Kim, 2008; Windham et al., 2005). However, while many studies have been conducted on the relationship between spirituality/religion and resilience in general, there are limitations to the available literature. Firstly, only a small portion of these studies have investigated the role of

religion and/or spirituality in fostering resilience specifically among at-risk youth. Secondly, of the limited number of studies that have been conducted in this area, many are quantitative in nature. By using a quantitative approach, previous studies have failed to gain any in-depth insights into the opinions, thoughts, feelings, and the personal experiences of the participants. Few have attempted to gain a qualitative and more nuanced understanding of this relationship. Thus, a qualitative study is necessary to gain rich insight into the subjective experiences of at-risk youth regarding the role of religion in fostering their resilience.

or qualities as the main factors in his/her resilience. However, the current understanding amongst resilience researchers is that resilience is associated not just with individual capacities, but with supportive relationships, and the availability of community resources and opportunities (Luthar, 2003; Masten, 2001; Ungar & Liebenburg, 2011; Moore et al., 2019). In the case of religiosity-trusting and supportive relationships, connectedness to community institutions, and the fellowship which the individual receives from being a member of their religious organization. Apart from giving youth hope in a testing situation, religious communities have shown to provide significant social support to members facing adversities (Foy et al., 2011). Religious communities also promote, encourage, practice, and teach important virtues such as honesty, forgiveness, patience, and dependability. Additionally, there is the issue of social accountability. Religious communities keep people accountable to each other. In order to maintain his/her or the , one has to avoid entering into inappropriate behaviours. Thus, the practice of, and the dedication to these virtues by believers may help to promote good relationships with others in society and reduce interpersonal conflicts. However, we still do not

know very much about the forces that are at work that allows religion to encourage resilience within individual youth. For instance, does a religious community mainly inculcate religious morals into young people, or does it mainly function by holding youth accountable to this community, with respect to their actions? It is therefore pertinent to gain a more comprehensive and first-hand insight into how the connections to a religious community might help at-risk youth to rise above their difficulties.

In accordance with this perspective, this study went beyond attempting to understand religious resilience among at-risk youth as a trait or quality that resides solely within the individual. Contrary to previous studies, this current research not only approached the topic of religiosity/spiritually enabled resilience as being merely the result of individual traits, or even an attempt to explore resilience amongst at-risk youth with other members, and/or institutions in society.

Ecological systems theory was utilized as a theoretical framework for analyzing the results. This model posits that the interrelations and interdependence between the individual and the different systems play an integral role in human development. The systems are organized into five levels: micro-, meso-, exo-, macro and chrono-ecological systems. From this perspective, human development occurs within interconnected and embedded ecological systems (McWhirter et al., 2017). The microsystem relates to the individual's engagement in roles, activities, and relationships with institutions such as the school, family and neighbourhood or church. Mesosystem refers to the interaction between the different elements of the microsystem. Exosystem relates to the more distal social structures that may affect the developing person. Macrosystems relate to those systems that form a cultural backdrop for the developing child.

(Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The chronosystem refers to (McWhirter, 2017). The socioecological model posits that human development results from a combination of all factors impacting the person, including his personal qualities (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). This model is useful in this research because the researcher is of the view that resilience among youth occurs because of individual qualities but because they are supported by other individuals, groups, and institutions.

Furthermore, of the limited number of studies that have been conducted on religion/spirituality and resilience among youth and adolescents, most were conducted in the United States (e.g., Breland-Noble et al., 2015; Cole-Lewis et al., 2016; Davis & Kiang, 2015; Rose et al., 2016) and the developing world (e.g., Bali & Sharma, 2018; Chulakarn & Chaimonkol, 2021; Cortina et al., 2020; Sahin & Unlu, 2020; Salas-Wright et al., 2013; Vinueza, 2017). Relatively few have been conducted on this topic in the Canadian context. As such, a research on religion and resilience among at-risk youth in Canada could yield new and important findings which may be influenced by the differences in culture and social context from previously studied countries. This possibility is very likely because we know that children and adolescents, simply, are not always and everywhere the same things: they are socially

literature sources on religion and resilience in at-risk youth emphasised the relationship between these variables. This study goes beyond simply trying to establish a relationship between resilience and religion among at-risk youth. Its aim is to dive more deeply, to explore, and understand this relationship. Also, of significant importance is to understand the salience of religious social networks in supporting the resilience of these youth.

While many studies have demonstrated the role of religion/spirituality in reducing adversities, the way in which this operates is not clear (Dipierro et al., 2018). This qualitative research is an attempt to explore and investigate how religion helps to foster resilience among at-risk youth, and thus aid the process of explaining the salience of religious social networks in fostering resilience amongst these youth. It attempted to provide such insights from the perspective of adolescents themselves who have been engaged in a religious organization.

Additionally, this study aimed at adding to the body of knowledge regarding religion and resilience among at-risk youth. It was hoped that the information gained from this study could contribute to the fields of psychology, psychiatry, social work, child and youth studies, and religious studies. It was also argued that a finding of how religion fosters resilience could also help to enhance the strategies offered by treatment programmes in their quest to improve the lives of children and youth. In essence, the findings might provide some insight into the types of religious or spiritual activity that could help youth rise above their challenges. Additionally, it was also hoped that the findings of this research would also shed light on the aspects of a religious or spiritual orientation that help youth to rise above their challenges. Since this research was centred on investigating how religion/spirituality helps at-risk youth to deal with their challenges, it may also help to provide valuable information in the fight against youth crime and violence in our society. In considering the above realities, this study sought to understand and explore the role of religion/spirituality in fostering resilience among at-risk youth in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM).

Research Questions

As mentioned in previous sections, this study attempted to gain a deeper understanding of the beliefs, thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences of at-risk youth who participate in religious

activities and have religious orientations. In attempting to fulfill this aim, this research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the role of religion/spirituality in fostering resilience among at-risk youth?
 - a. How is resilience affected by challenges in at-risk communities, such as economic hardship, and violence?
 - b. How is resilience affected by whether their religious/spiritual beliefs are extrinsically or intrinsically motivated?
 - c. What are some of the faith-inspired strategies that youth frequently access when faced with challenges?
 - d. What emotions and feelings (if any) does religion/spirituality engender in at-risk youth?
2. What role, if any, does participation in organized religious activities and communities play in fostering resilience amongst at-risk youth?
 - a. In the opinion of youth, how important is participation in institutionalized forms of religiosity (ex. participation in rituals such as Mass, in religious youth groups, etc.) in contributing to resilience, versus non-institutionalized forms of religiosity (ex. individual spirituality)?
 - b. How does participation in organized religious activities and communities affect resilience amongst these youth? If so, how does this occur?
 - c. Apart from strengthening their relationship with God, in what ways does their religious community help them to rise above their adversities?

- d. Does engaging in religious/spiritual activities discourage antisocial behaviours and promote prosociality? For example, does practicing their faith influence their beliefs about harming self or others? If so, how?
- e. What programmes and opportunities for self-improvement (if any) do religious organizations provide to at-risk youth, to help them prepare for the world of work and for social inclusion?

Literature Review

Introduction

This review began with articles attempting to conceptualize resilience. Studies pointing to cognitive style and neurobiological makeup were presented first. The review then moved to focusing on studies that provide a more dynamic understanding of resilience, arguing that it is not a trait that lies within the individual but is instead the result of an interaction or a relationship with other systems in society. Studies highlighting the importance of institutions and groups in society in helping to create within individuals, the capacity to overcome adversities formed the foundation of this review. The importance of good parental and family support, friends and peer groups, and the influences of institutions in the community in helping to foster resilience were also presented. This was followed by an examination of studies from different cultures and societies focusing on the role of religion and spirituality in fostering resilience among at-risk youth. Studies focusing on religion and spirituality together were discussed first. The review then presented articles on religion and spirituality separately.

Resilience as a Result of Individual Qualities

Some researchers have presented data suggesting that resilience comes from within the individual. Burt et al. (2016) in a study of MRI images of 1,870 adolescents found evidence indicating that resilience has a neurobiological basis. Participants underwent MRI scanning and completed behavioural and psychological measures of stressful life events, academic competence, social competence, rule-abiding conduct, personality, and alcohol use. These findings indicate that participants with a larger right middle and superior frontal gyri appeared to fare better on these measures and are believed to be more resilient in the face of adversity. The results have also indicated that increased grey matter volume was observed in the right prefrontal regions of adolescents who were performing well across various areas regardless of elevated life stress.

According to Luther (2006, as cited in Shaw, 2016), numerous literature reviews of studies conducted have stressed the impact of social relationships and psychological factors in the neurobiology of resilience (Shaw, 2016). Shaw (2016) referenced a study conducted in Europe which explored the anatomy of 1,810 teenagers who were considered resilient. The results indicated that teenagers who were resilient had a significantly larger right and middle superior prefrontal cortex compared to other groups. These results indicate that a larger right lateral prefrontal cortex in resilient children imply that good executive functioning is a key factor to resilience. However, Shaw (2016) also noted that emotional intelligence is likely to play a

The question of whether these differences in brain structures result from, or lead to, resilience may need to be further investigated.

Additionally, in a study of 1,025 school children between the ages of 10 and 12 years, in rural South Africa, Cortina et al. (2020) found that the way children interpreted the world around them was a key factor in determining their level of resilience. They found that children with better cognitive interpretations of the world had lower levels of depression, anxiety, and issues arising from traumatic experiences. They suggest that their finding is especially important since individual factors within the child, such as their coping mechanisms, self-esteem and hope are contributing factors to resilience.

Furthermore, Gupta and Kumar (2015) conducted a study in which they tested the hypothesis that the personal attributes of forgiveness, acceptance and gratitude would have been significant predictors of resilience in undergraduate students. A hundred and fifty participants from Hapur, India, participated in this study. Their research findings support the hypothesis that the personal attributes of acceptance, forgiveness and gratitude were important factors predicting resilience among undergraduate students. Their finding indicates that of these three attributes, gratitude had the greatest predictive value.

Resilience as a Product of Social Systems

Despite this view that an in other researchers have sought to conceptualized resilience in a more dynamic way. Khanlou and Wray (2014), in reviewing research conducted since 2000, attempted to outline and define different aspects of resilience, and further discussed the association between resilience, mental wellness, and social outcomes. They have indicated that, despite frequent use of the term, there is

no consensus on any single definition of resilience. The authors took a hybrid approach in attempting to define this term. From their standpoint, resilience is a process, not a single or isolated event. It is also on a continuum, rather than two opposing poles, and has various dimensions. A combination of individual, family, and social environmental factors influence resilience rather than any single factor. For instance, in a home situation, a supportive and

Khanlou and Wray (2014) also emphasized a social determinant perspective. They review in the individual, rather, it relates to positive adaptation to adversity. In their view, resilience Masten (2007, as cited in Khanlou & Wray, 2014) in suggesting that resilience is shaped by a myriad of factors including the gene-environment interaction, social interaction, and other systems in the meso-, exo- theory of development.

Khanlou and Wray (2014) further indicated that there are three major perspectives on resilience in the current literature. The first relates to individual factors and has its roots in developmental psychology and psychiatry. The second, the constructionist view, sees resilience as the result of a negotiation between the person and his/her environment, who, despite being in an adverse environment, define his/her situation as healthy. The third, the socioecological model, suggests that resilience results from an interdependency between the individual and the different systems in society.

Many researchers have employed a socioecological framework in their understanding and

cial

ecological model, as well as his own interpretation of over four decades of studying resilience.

According to Ungar et al. (2013) the ecological model offers a good conceptualization of the idea

significant impact on outcomes, when

he/she is faced with adversity. Like Khanlou and Wray (2014), Ungar et al. (2013) suggested that

capacities. Neither does it r

resilience represents an interaction. Resilience is not, and cannot be determined by a single

- and time-dependent.

Ungar et al. (2013), further noted that, from their review of several articles, three main principles have emerged: equifinality, differential impact and, contextual and cultural

moderation. Equifinality suggests that all systems can be equally important in th

development, however, in some situations one system can become more influential than the

the odds stacked against the individual contributes more to changes in outcomes than the

the structure that enable them to benefit fully from these resources. This suggests that how

individuals deal with and negotiate for resources is highly dependent on their culture. From this

review, it was demonstrated that a socioecological model of development provides an in-depth

understanding and appreciation of how multiple processes at different levels can lead to

resilience.

Ungar (2008) also noted that there is often a confusion surrounding the differences

between resilience and strengths. He argued that, when one refers to strengths, it indicates a list

of internal and external assets that are available to the individual. Resilience, however, is the process of mustering these strengths in the face of adversity. Studies have shown that, in general, through the life course, when more resources are available to the person, the greater the chances that he/she will succeed in culturally approved ways (Ungar, 2008). According to Ungar (2008), while resilience is usually referred to as the capacity to cope based on standards defined by the dominant culture (e. g. police, mental health professional etc.), recent research findings have appeared indicating that children can employ negative and/or attention-seeking behaviours to conjure from others, the essential resources required to cope. Additionally, whether one is resilient depends on the interaction between his/her capacity to cope, the levels of risks

growing evidence that resilience is just as much about

In their review of literature concerning resilience in adolescence, Bali and Sharma (2018), suggested that resilience occurs when the path from risk to pathology is interrupted by an interaction of individual, social, and environmental factors. This argument reiterates the view that resilience is not a characteristic within the individual. Situations which help children and youth to have a sense of security, belonging, worth, mastery and control are contributing factors to their resilience. Studies have also demonstrated that a key difference between those who adapt compared to those who do not, is the presence of protective factors (Bali & Sharma, 2018).

Despite extensive research on resilience, there is not much agreement on a single definition for this concept (Carlie & Chassin, 2004, as cited in Ola & Singh, 2016). However, they pointed to the work of Bernard (1995, as cited in Ola & Singh, 2016), which suggests that

regardless of its various conceptualization, resilience encompasses social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose.

In their review of articles on resilience since 1970, Zolkoski and Bullock (2012) concluded that the resources that help children and youth rise above their challenges differ with regards to the population studied, the context in which the child exist, and how the outcome is evaluated. They have indicated that the concept of resilience is, to a significant degree, relative. However, they add that despite this reality, a common thread runs through all these situations: Parenting factors that relate to social support, monitoring, and communication are crucial resources for youth.

Relationships and Institutions (Systems) that Support Resilience

Despite the findings from these recently mentioned studies pointing to the primary role of an interaction between the individual and the different systems in society. Attempts will first be made to highlight studies indicating the importance of relationships with significant others and the connections to institutions in society that play an integral role in resilience. This will segue into a presentation of articles indicating the role of religion/spirituality in fostering resilience.

Clemens (2020), in his review of the literature on resilience in hospitalized children, asserted that resilience goes beyond promoting coping in a social sense. It also helps to protect the brain and biological systems that might be adversely affected by continuous exposure to stress. From his review, he suggested that four factors contribute to resilience and mental and physical healing in the hospitalized child. According to Clemens (2020), supportive relationships, a sense of self-efficacy and control, the development of adaptive and self-

regulatory behaviours, and successfully marshaling sources of faith, hope and cultural traditions are important factors that can lead to resilience in hospitalized children.

In conducting a study on 27 youth care providers of maltreated children from two agencies in the United States, Yoon et al. (2020) found that resilience is influenced by different

generally see it as a complex and ongoing process, while parents see it simply as a coping mechanism. Parents and children saw resilience as emotional courage, while practitioners saw it in a more dynamic way. Regardless of how resilience was defined, the idea of the importance of having a supportive relationship was common across all three groups. Despite this contribution to our understanding of the topic, the authors noted that because this study was undertaken in the metropolitan areas of Australia, it may not be representative of the views of participants in rural areas.

Fogarty et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study on children who have been exposed to inter-partner violence (IPV) to explore how mothers promoted resilience and wellbeing in the and the strategies they employ to make their children more resilient while experiencing these challenges. Fogarty et al. (2019) found several factors that were important in safeguarding their in

activities they enjoyed, and maintaining their own mental health. While this study had important findings, only mothers were interviewed. As a result, the purported resilience reported may

This idea provokes some doubts about whether the resilience factors mentioned by mothers really contributed to childr

Arshad et al. (2020) conducted a community-based cohort study in Calgary with 467 mothers of children who experienced the 2013 flood. Mothers were asked to use questionnaires socio-demographic, mental health history, intimate relationships, and social support. This study

was interested in factors that are related to the emotional resilience of children who experienced the flood. The results showed that the greater the impact of the flood on these families, the higher the level of resilience reported. Their findings also indicated that there was a positive association between social support and child resilience. The better the maternal mental health history the better resilience the child demonstrated. These findings raise questions as to whether the inherited genes, and/or the experience of the developmental health. This research has highlighted some of the risk and protective factors that may predict resilience when adversity is experienced.

The findings of other studies have also indicated that parental care can influence resilience. Sriskandarajah et al. (2015) studied 359 schoolchildren between the ages of 7 and 11 in Sri Lanka who experienced trauma. Their findings suggest that a strong family support appeared to be associated with good mental health and reduced behavioural problems even when children were living in areas affected by mass trauma such as wars and natural disasters. This study is not without limitations. Due to political and logistical issues, the researcher did not get the chance to collect a representative sample of the population under study. This has affected the generalizability of these findings.

Sharp et al. (2018) conducted a study investigating school connectedness as a factor contributing to resilience in children affected by HIV. Five hundred and seventy (570) (224 HIV/AIDS orphans, 276 HIV/AIDS non-orphans and 250 non-orphans) children between the ages of 7 and 11 participated in this study. The findings showed that regardless of the orphan group, a close connection with the school community helped to increase the overall wellbeing of orphans and bolster their resilience. One limitation of this study is that because the researchers were

unable to control for other confounding variables that might contribute to resilience, it is difficult to say that school connectedness was the sole factor contributing to their resilience.

Other studies have indicated that good social relationships and a supportive family are salient in fostering resilience. Kim and Yoo (2010) studied 74 children (10 -15 years old) visiting a medical clinic for follow-up after a cancer diagnosis. Their findings have indicated that school age children with a well-functioning family, good relationship with friends, and supportive teachers were more likely to be resilient than their counterparts without such support. Kim and Yoo (2010) noted that while other studies have highlighted that demographic factors such as race, gender, religion, and academic performance were important protective factors, they found that environment were greater contributors to resilience for children experiencing cancer.

Mirza and Arif (2018) conducted a study which demonstrated that protective factors could lead to higher levels of academic resilience among at-risk youth. This study involved 64 9th and 10th graders from a public secondary school. In this study, the researcher played the role of a supportive teacher. The results have indicated that the researcher being a mentor/guide/facilitator proved to be beneficial to at-risk youth. Through his positive, motivational, and inspiring role, the teacher helped to foster their resilience. It is also important to note that factors such as providing explanations, encouragement success played an important role in helping them to rise above their adversities. It is important to note though that this research only lasted for three months. It would be interesting to see if these outcomes would have been so promising after that period.

Chulakarn and Chaimonkol (2021) conducted a study aimed at testing a model of factors that may influence resilience among 10 to 14-year-

the metropolitan areas of Bangkok, Thailand. They collected their data using self-reported questionnaires. Their findings indicated that problem-focused coping, a positive self-concept, and school engagement had a direct positive impact on resilience. However, school connectedness was found to be indirectly related to resilience. While this research contributed to the body of knowledge related to resilience among children and youth, one limitation is that there might be difficulty generalizing its findings even to Thailand because the research only used

McMahon (2007) conducted a qualitative study with nine (9) students who struggled academically in high school but are now performing well at university. In this study the participants were interviewed about interpersonal and intrapersonal factors responsible for their accomplishments. The respondents reported that personal attributes such as being future-directed, devoted, perseverant, persistent, resolute, enthusiastic, and socially capable were contributing factors to their resilience. However, they also suggested that external support such as a good relationship with family, friends, their learning institutions, and instructors also contributed to their success.

Howell and Miller-Graff (2014) investigated the factors associated with resilient functioning among young adults who experienced various forms of violence and victimization in childhood. Three hundred and twenty-one college students between 18 and 21 years old participated in this study. The findings indicated that there is a positive relationship between the derived from friends (as opposed to family). The findings of this study suggest that the magnitude of these protective factors appears to outweigh adversity and mental health issues. However, while this research has some merits, it is not without its limitations. Because

participants were asked to recall info 2. To recall

and reduced psychopathology. The strongest association was between high religiosity and reduced teenage substance use. This finding is important because the researcher is aware that substance abuse is often associated with criminality (McWhirter et al., 2017).

In addition to this research, the results of several primary studies have indicated that both religion and spirituality together can encourage resilience among at-risk youth. Jocson et al. (2020), in their study, investigated how Latino adolescents exposed to violence in their communities were able to benefit from religion and spirituality. This sample consisted of 223 Latino adolescents living in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in the United States.

perceptions of religious importance at home, and religious

their personal and private relationship with God. Religious importance at home relates to any activity at home by parent that promotes righteousness and service attendance. Finally, religious involvement relates to participation in, and attendance at religious services events which may indicate a connection between the adolescent and the religious /faith-based organization in the

effects, but moderation results varied across types of violence exposure and psychological wellbeing outcomes. Spirituality had the greatest moderating effect in relation to violence exposure and psychological wellbeing. This effect was greater than religious involvement and religious importance at home. Religious importance at home and religious involvement buffered the effect of witnessing violence and depressive symptoms, respectively.

Jocson et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative research which compared levels of mental wellbeing and violence exposure to the different measures of spirituality: spirituality, religious

importance at home and religious involvement. While they demonstrated that spirituality had the greatest moderating effect, this research, by design, did not allow the researchers to find out from participants, why this was so. In attempting to provide such answers, this current research will ask youth which of these dimensions they considered most important in their resilience, and why.

Windham et al. (2005), in their review of several articles on the role of religion, spirituality and family factors in fostering resilience highlighted studies indicating many adolescent boys who committed a criminal offense experienced a sense of meaninglessness and a feeling of spiritual emptiness and despair. They emphasized that religion/spirituality has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on the lives of young people. Windham et al. (2005) pointed out that studies have shown that even when youth have been abused, their level of religiosity was inversely related to the frequency of committing acts of violence. They noted also that studies have indicated that a relationship with a supernatural being not only allows young people to have a sense of purpose, but it also serves as a buffer against negative mental states. These youth were more hopeful, proactive, and engaged less in self-destructive behaviours. Of important interest to this research is their assertion that the belief in a higher power and being a part of a religious organization appears to be protective factors for youth who live in high-risk environments. From reviewing this article, the current researcher is prompted to ask the current participants several questions. What are elements of their religion/spirituality that help to prevent or diminish self-destructive behaviours and keep youth in high-risk environments and situations hopeful and proactive? From the experience of youth themselves, what are the benefits of being part of a religious organization?

Additionally, Salas-Wright et al. (2013) conducted a study on the role of religious coping and spirituality in fostering resilience among at-risk youth. In their study they defined religious

coping as the act of engaging in religious activities as a means of dealing with life demands. In contrast, spirituality was defined as a relationship between the individual and God, and may or may not be linked to an institutionalized religious community or set of beliefs. Two hundred and ninety (290) El Salvadorian youth between 11 and 25 years old participated in this study. Higher levels of spirituality and religiosity were good predictors of reduced instances of antisocial bonding (developing a close relationship with others who commit antisocial acts). The results of their research indicated that both religion and spirituality are important factors in preventing youth from engaging in delinquent behaviours. However, the extent of this effect was greater for spirituality. Salas-Wright et al. (2020) found that when social developmental factors were accounted for, spirituality appeared to have indirect effects on both minor and severe delinquency. These include weapons carrying, property destruction and public disturbances. However, no association was found for spirituality and other delinquent behaviours. Religious coping, however, was associated with one of the more severe forms of delinquency: theft. The research used a cross-sectional design, and as a result, it is difficult to make causal connections between spiritual coping and violence. The researcher also mentioned that they used a nonrandomized method when selecting their sample. Using a nonprobability sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings.

Kim et al. (2018) conducted a study examining protective effects of religious beliefs on behavioural health. Six hundred and thirty-eight (638) African American adolescents from a low-income area in Chicago participated in this research. In their study, they defined religious involvement as the formal display of beliefs and practices, and church attendance. They assessed attendance, conversations about religion and spirituality. They then compared these scores on

measures of school engagement, school bonding, teacher student connectedness, sexual behaviour, and substance use. Their findings suggest that greater religious involvement by adolescents predicted lower levels of delinquency, drug use, risky sexual behaviours, and school dropout. While these findings are useful in providing a better understanding of the benefits of religious beliefs on behavioural health, there are some limitations. Like other cross-sectional research cited previously in this review, no causal relationships can be established. Additionally, the research being conducted on a small group of adolescents in a low-income section of Chicago limits its capacity to generalize about youth from different races or ethnic backgrounds. Even though this current research is not aimed at achieving generalizability, careful note is taken of this limitation. This is part of the reason why the sample for the current research will attempt to include youth from different races and ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, since this research was correlational, the researcher only compared the scores of each variable to each other. In an attempt to better understand religion/spirituality and resilience, this current researcher feels compelled to ask additional questions that were not addressed by this research based on its design. An important question that could be posed to youth is whether they think that the frequency of their church attendance, prayers, or conversations about religion impact their ability to overcome their difficulties?

Breland-Noble et al. (2015) investigated the role of spirituality and religious coping among African American youth with depression. This study involved youth between 11 and 17 years old from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The data were gathered from this group using individual and focus group interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings from this study suggest that religion/spirituality plays a significant role in how these adolescents experienced depression. A common theme that emerged is that religion helps to rid

them of negative thoughts and reduce self-harm. These findings also indicated that praying and finding support from church leaders and other members can help youth with their challenges. However, some adolescents thought that prayer could act as barriers to psychological or medical treatment.

Oxhandler et al. (2018) in exploring the role of religion and spirituality among young adults with severe mental illnesses, examined data from a qualitative study of 55 youth between 18 and 25 years old. For this research, the authors provide definitions for both religion and spirituality from the standpoint of creating a context for their research. However, no explicit distinctions were made regarding these concepts. This research attempted to uncover how youth experiencing psychiatric crises talked about religion/spirituality, and how spirituality and/or religion emerged in the stories they told about their experiences. Four main themes emerged from these interviews: positive religious and spiritual coping; negative religious coping; relationship with God; and implications for religion and spirituality and mental health. A significant portion of youth who spoke about religion and spirituality related to them in positive ways, especially as coping mechanisms. These included activities such as praying, reading the Bible, gaining support from their religious community, and identifying a meaning and purpose in their lives. About half of all the participants who mentioned the religion/spirituality theme described the importance of a relationship with God. Approximately a third of those who mentioned religion/spirituality themes suggested that God provided support, comfort, and protection. Youth with mental health illnesses considered spirituality and religiosity important factors in their mental wellbeing.

Although this study provides a better understanding of the role of religion in improving mental health, there are some limitations. Responses from participants with serious mental issues

may lack the required validity. Such data may also be ungeneralizable to the general youth population. Additionally, it is also important to note that this research did not establish whether one aspect of a religious/spiritual practice was more effective than the other. In other words, is their personal communication with God more effective than worshipping and having fellowship with others from their religious community? This research will attempt to answer this question.

In their study of 20 orphaned children between the ages of 7 and 17 years old in 4 orphanages in Ghana, Yendork and Somhlaba (2016) investigated the role of spirituality and religion on well-being. They found that religion facilitated well-being by encouraging positive emotions along with hope and optimism. While spirituality and religion were not the focus of this study, they emerged as important factors in the lived experience of orphans which allowed them to be more resilient. Resilience and spirituality from the o conduits to their wellbeing, encouraged positive emotions, hope and a positive outlook on the future. One limitation to this research was that religion and spirituality were not the focus, and as a result, the researchers pointed out that they might have missed important information regarding the role of religion in fostering resilience and preventing antisocial behaviours. This current study will seek to explore the link between religious participation and decreased antisocial behaviours.

Spirituality and Resilience

Other scholars have focused primarily on the role of spirituality in encouraging prosocial behaviours. Gower et al. (2020) in a study of the impact of caregiver support and divine support on adolescents following sexual abuse found that there was a positive association between resilience and both measures. They conceptualized divine support as turning to God or a higher power for love, strength, and guidance in times of difficulty. They clearly outlined that divine

support is distinct from participation in religious service attendance. The results showed that adolescents who looked to divine support after sexual abuse were more likely to be resilient. The finding also demonstrated that the greater the social support from the non-abusing caregiver, the greater the resilience and vice versa. These findings suggest that social support and the belief in a supernatural being can be a significant factor in fostering resilience. Even though these findings contribute to a better understanding of resilience, social support and spirituality, there are some limitations. Other unmeasured variables may have been responsible for the high levels of resilience measured. For instance, the authors noted that poly-victimization has predicted youth resilience after adversity over and above other risk and protective factors.

Other studies have found that spirituality is a major factor in fostering resilience. Vinueza (2017) conducted a study on the role of spirituality on building resilience among immigrant children in Central America. The results have indicated that spirituality was a key element in fostering resilience among immigrant children. Being in a new land, and faced with numerous uncertainties, reliance upon a supernatural being/God helped them to cope with their challenges.

Nauli and Mulyono (2019) conducted a study on spirituality level and emotional resilience among school-age children. One hundred school-age children from South Bekasi, Indonesia participated in this study. For this research they defined religion and spirituality as a general human identity that influences various cultural boundaries, moral concepts, human thinking, and behaviour. The results of a bivariate analysis indicated that there is a positive relationship between their level of spirituality and their emotional resilience. According to the authors, this finding is in support of other studies suggesting that spirituality can play a significant role in fostering resilience among at-risk children and youth. However, this sample was probably too small to make a generalization about children and spirituality. Additionally, the

instrument that was used to measure the spirituality level of these children was originally designed to measure this variable among the elderly, therefore, further revisions might be needed to accurately measure spirituality in children. Additionally, this study did not focus on at-risk youth. This current study intends to focus on how

Francis and Bance (2017) in their study explored the protective role of spirituality from the point of view of Indian college students experiencing suicidal ideation. Twenty (20) female college students between the ages of 19 and 22 participated in this study which collected data using a focus group. Each participant expressed how their life challenges evoked thoughts of committing suicide. However, despite being from different religious backgrounds, they all described their religion as a source of strength and a source of meaning in times of difficulty. They also expressed how participating in praying can lift their spirits and give them a sense of comfort. Additionally, they pointed out how their relationship with God helped to maintain a firm and hopeful mindset even when confronted with adversities. This study found that the belief in God could improve resiliency against suicide.

Dill (2017) conducted a study on the role of spirituality in helping African American youth to cope with life challenges. Twenty (20) youth between the ages of 12 and 20 participated in this research. The findings have indicated that African American youth reported the importance of the role of prayer, a strong and unwavering faith in a higher power, and importance of giving back to their community as factor that help them to rise above their difficulties. These youth reported that by praying, they were able to communicate with God and ask him to intercede despite not being at a physical church. Prayer also allowed them to turn their emotional worries over to a higher power. Frequent prayer occurred even when there was no church attendance. They also emphasized how they turn their emotional worries over to God.

While this study highlighted the importance of prayer, giving back to the community, and having a strong faith in a higher power as key elements in helping youth to overcome life challenges, no mention was made of the important role of the church community in helping youth to overcome their difficulties. This research will seek to explore the role of the church community in helping youth gain resilience.

Shek and Zhu (2018) conducted a study on the self-reported risks and delinquent/problem behaviours among adolescents in Hong Kong, and how these behaviours are influenced by spirituality and moral competence. The data was collected from students from grade 7 to 12 based on six waves and involved 3,328 participants. In this research moral competence related to having high expectations of oneself, and the ability to self-evaluate and reflect. Spirituality relates to an individual and personal relationship with a supernatural entity which gives a person meaning to life. The results showed that after controlling for sociodemographic factors, spirituality and moral competence were negatively related to at-risk behaviours and the intention to engage in such behaviours. This research adds value to our understanding of the relationship between spirituality and moral competence and at-risk behaviours. Yet, we only know that there is an inverse relationship. This current research seeks to find out how a relationship with a supernatural being or entity reduces the chances of carrying out at-risk behaviours or even the intention to do so. During the period in which the research was conducted, several participants dropped out of the study. This could have caused a bias in the research findings. Additionally, self-reported measures were used to collect the data. Because of this method, participants might be more likely to report positive traits or answers.

Raftopoulos and Bates (2011) conducted a qualitative study in which they investigated relationships between the

ages of 15 and 16 participated in this study, which involved the use of one-on-

that they had a personal relationship with God, which gave them a sense of closeness to, and a sense of support from a higher power. The role of prayer was also significant, in that, it served as a way of communicating their requests and desires to God. They also emphasized the importance of participating in both traditional and non-traditional religious practices. While many participants did not attend regular religious services that they would attend during earlier years of their lives, they still found other ways of maintaining a relationship with the higher power without going to church. This is important, as it points to the fact that the phenomenon being studied is different than the ones in the studies where youth were asked about religious attendance and/or the effects of religious institutions in their lives. The participants mentioned that religion and spirituality help them to rise above their difficulties when faced with challenges

personal relationship with God in helping them to rise above their difficulties.

Despite its contribution, this research has its limitations. One limitation of this research is

well one is able

to deal with the hardships of life. To measure resilience, they used the Connor-Davidson and adversity (Kumar & Singh, 2014). Psychological Well-being Scale measures psychological wellbeing and has eighteen items rated on a five-point Likert scale (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, as cited beliefs or behaviours, in order to transcend the boundaries of religion. They also used the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES), which was constructed by Underwood and Teresi (2002) to assess the frequency of positive spiritual experiences (Kumar & Singh, 2014). The results have indicated that students who scored high on the resilient and spiritual scales also reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing. This finding is similar to previous research results which indicated that adolescents who display high levels of religiosity were more likely to have good mental wellbeing. One drawback to this study is that this sample was taken from just one university. This reality will affect its ability to generalize about other populations.

Shahina and Parveen (2020) conducted a study investigating the role of spirituality in increasing resilience and mental health levels among youth between 16 and 19 years old. Sixty (60) adolescents participated in this study. The authors define spirituality as

A universal phenomenon search for transcendence For some, it is primarily about participation in organized religion and for others, it is all about yoga, meditation, private prayer, or time in nature. However, the cornerstone of spirituality is connectedness (Shahina & Parveen, 2020, p. 292).

They used the Spirituality Scale, the Resilience Scale, and the Mental Health Inventory. To

ality Scale

(SS), developed by Delaney (2003), is a 23-item scale which evaluates human spirituality

holistically, including their beliefs, intuitions, lifestyle, practices, and rituals. The Resilience

through five components: equanimity, perseverance, self-reliance, meaningfulness, and

developed by Jagdish and Srivastava (1983) and was constructed to evaluate the mental health of persons without significant mental health issues (Shahina & Parveen, 2020). The results have indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between spirituality, and resilience and mental health among adolescents. In other words, adolescents who had high levels of spirituality also had higher levels of resilience and better mental health.

Religion and Resilience

focusing on spirituality. Rose et al. (2016) conducted a study investigating the relationship between organized religious involvement and mental health among Caribbean black adolescents. By religious involvement, the authors mean participation in various church activities such as youth group functions and religious services. This study used data from the 2001 - 2003 National Survey of American Life (Rose et al., 2016). Three hundred and sixty (360) adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 participated in this research. The results have indicated that Caribbean Black adolescents received emotional support from other members of their church group. A positive relationship was found between active coping, and participation in both active religious services and other religious activities. A negative relationship between depressive symptoms and attendance at religious services was also found. One limitation of this study is that it used a cross-sectional design, and as a result, no causal relationships can be established. It is also

difficult to generalize the findings of this research to groups outside the specific group that was investigated in this study.

Kim (2008) attempted to investigate the role of childhood religiosity in the development of maladaptation among maltreated children. One hundred and eighty-eight (188) maltreated and 196 non-maltreated children between ages 6 and 12 participated in this study. They were assessed on measures of child religiosity, and depression, and note was taken of both their internalizing and externalizing symptoms. Child religiosity measures attempts to assess the frequency of church attendance, how important children saw faith, and their frequency of prayer. The results showed the protective effects of religion in both groups. Reports of the importance of faith were associated with lower levels of internalizing symptomology among girls that were maltreated. Reports of attendance at religious services were related to lower levels of externalizing symptomology among non-maltreated boys. These results have indicated that child religiosity is a contributing factor to the coping process among both maltreated and non-maltreated children in low-income families. This research was cross-sectional in design and as a result causality between religiosity and adjustment outcomes cannot be established.

Cole-Lewis et al. (2016) conducted a study sampling 161 adolescents between the ages of 12 and 15 in which they investigated religious participation - private religious practices, organizational religiousness, and religious support - in relation to depressive symptoms and -family connectedness. Organizational religiousness related to how often individuals participated in faith-based events. Private religious practice relates to their involvement in their religion in private, such as praying and singing. Religious support relates to the encouragement that the individual got from other members of their religious organization when they experience

adversity. The results showed that private religious practice and religious support were associated with lower depression levels; private religious practice and organized religion were associated with less suicidal ideation. When they controlled for connectedness, private religious practice was still associated with less suicidal ideation only. The findings suggest that when youth with interpersonal problems engage in private religious practice, this appears to increase the value of the already positive influence of school and family connectedness, specifically regarding suicidal thoughts. When it comes to the experience of depression, school and family connectedness were more important predictor than private religious activities. Their findings

for dealing with more physical expressions of difficulties, whereas the more subtle, yet pervasive feelings of sadness are sufficiently addressed

-Lewis et

al., 2016, p.

different dimensions of worship. Some difficulties appear to be remedied by their personal faith while others are abated by having the benefit fellowship in a church community. The results suggest the importance of considering religious involvement as a target of youth depression and suicide prevention interventions. There are a few limitations to this study. The conclusiveness and generalizability have been affected by its small sample size. The current study also did not focus on youth in general, instead, it focused on youth with interpersonal challenges. The research also did not explore the variations in these measures in relation to being affiliated with different religious groups.

Cook (2000) conducted a study of thirty-two (32) African American, Haitian American, and Latino male and female teenagers from an inner-city community in the United States. Half of these teenagers attended church, and the other half did not. The findings from the interviews

demonstrated that teenagers who attended church experienced less psychological stress than those in the comparison group. It was also found that church-going teenagers were more likely to be living with their biological parents, less likely to have family members who are benefiting from welfare, and a greater chance of having a job compared to other teenagers. Church-going teenagers also emphasize how important church was to their lives, and how it contributed to their positive development. Many youth pointed out that they benefited from mentoring from church leaders. They also indicated that the church helped them to develop self-regulatory abilities, a feeling of community, and a relationship with God. The current research seeks to understand why church leaders play such an important role in their resilience. Of importance also is the self-regulation.

Malindi and Theron (2010) conducted a study which involved 20 street youth between the ages of 10 and 17 years old in Free State and Gauteng, South Africa. This study sought to explore the hidden resilience in street youth. This research was carried out using semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Youth were asked a series of general questions about how they

do other people do to cope with the bad things

personal resources, support from peer groups, and religion. They indicated that personal resources such as humour, assertiveness, personal agency, and their ability to regulate themselves socially were important. Regarding peer group support, they suggested that peer groups helped to improve their coping skills. Youth who discussed religion as a driving force behind their resilience indicated that it did so by making them feel strong and able to deal with

they experience trying times. They also indicated that their belief in a higher power provided them with a sense of direction regarding accessing community resources. Church attendance was instrumental in helping them to cope. Participants suggested that when they experience difficulty, attending church provided a source of moral support and compass, and guidance from the church leaders and other members regarding difficult matters. One limitation of this study is that it involved mainly male street youth. The researchers have suggested that a better understanding of this relationship could be gained from this study if the sample were more diverse, including more girls and youth who are not homeless in the study.

Gunnestad and Thawala (2011) conducted a two-phased retrospective study on religion and resilience in Zambia and Swaziland. In the first phase preschool teacher students from Zambia and Swaziland documented the difficulty they experienced in their childhood, and how they rose above these difficulties. The second involves results from interviews conducted with student orphans in Swaziland. The findings from these studies indicate that religion can have a significant positive impact on children experiencing crisis. While the findings indicate negative religious coping (interpreting difficult life situations as the work of God) can often occur, its main emphasis was on the positive role of religion in fostering resilience among youth. They reported that praying and intercession, fellowship (seeing church as a network), the facilitation of faith and hope, and the provision of good values play a significant role in fostering their resilience. While the authors highlighted important findings in relation to what aspects of religion were important in helping to foster resilience, no mention was made of which activity was more important in helping them to achieve this goal. From this information, one possible

Baena et al. (2019) conducted a study on religiosity and alcohol consumption among adolescents in Madrid, Spain. Two thousand, eight hundred and ninety (2,890) participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years old participated in this study. Religiosity was assessed using a Likert scale which asked that adolescents respond to questions about their religion regarding the strength of their belief, religious importance, influence of religious belief on their actions, commitment to the rules of the religion, and frequency of prayer. The findings demonstrated that adolescents who were nonbelievers consumed, and abuse alcohol more compared to believers (Catholics and Muslims). These findings are indicating that there is an inverse relationship between religiosity and alcohol consumption. Adolescents who did not consume alcohol appeared to score higher on measures of religiosity. This research, like others reviewed so far, is not without its limitations. The participants completed these self-reported questionnaires at school, and as a result, the researchers have suggested that the responses given could have been influenced by the need to give socially appropriate or desirable responses. This study found that there was an inverse relationship between levels of religiosity and alcohol consumption. By virtue of the fact that this research was quantitative in nature, youth were not afforded the opportunity to explain what aspects of their religious teachings, beliefs, or involvement discouraged them from alcohol or substance use/abuse. Recognising this gap in the research, this personal relationship with God help to prevent them from using/abusing alcohol or other drugs.

Is reduced alcohol

rules of the religious organization? Some people are of the view that alcohol and other substances can help to numb the pain we experience in difficult times. If this is true, it could mean that there is less reliance on substances because youth can find refuge in their

religion/spiritual connection. Exploring religiosity/spirituality and reduced substance use is important because youth who use substances are more likely to be engaged in at-risk behaviours (McWhirter et al., 2017).

Francis et al. (2019) conducted a study to investigate the relationship between religiosity and at-risk behaviour such as alcohol and other drug use, and risky sexual behaviours among 8 - 10 graders in South Africa. This research consisted of 20,227 learners from 240 public schools. The researchers defined religiosity as participation in religious activities or services. The findings showed that when compared to learners with low levels of religiosity, those with high levels of religiosity had a decreased likelihood of engaging in the use of alcohol and other drugs such as cannabis and tobacco. Students with higher levels of religiosity were also less likely to engage in risky sexual behaviours. There are limitations to this research. There is the risk that socially desirable responses might be given since the research used a self-reported survey.

Moulin-Stozek et al. (2018) in their quest to understand the relationship between religion and risk behaviours and prosociality, analyzed the self-reported data generated from a health project research on school students in Peru and El Salvador. The data for 6,085 students from public schools were analyzed using multiple logistic regressions to assess the association between religious identification (identifying with a religion), salience and practice; 5 adolescent risk behaviours and four indicators of prosocial attitudes and behaviours. Religious salience and practice relate to how important religion was to the participants and how often they engaged in a religious activity. The results demonstrated significant associations between religiosity and prosocial activities and attitudes. Adolescents who considered themselves to be religious were more likely to abstain from behaviours such as early sexual activities, drinking alcohol and taking illegal drugs. This research was a cross-sectional study and as a result, assumptions cannot

be made about causality. Additionally, because the data was collected using self-reported measures, the information gathered may simply be that which is congruent with the moral code.

Fletcher and Kumar (2014) in their study of the association between religion and health behaviours among adolescents and adults in the United States also found evidence supporting the idea that religion is positively associated with prosocial behaviours. Using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the researchers estimated the contemporaneous as well as the medium to long term effects of religiosity throughout adolescence, focusing on both licit and illicit behaviours. Their results have indicated that intrinsic religiosity-self reported importance of religion-during adolescence was most significant in reducing dependence on and use of addictive drugs. The sample was selected based on being in school during 1994-1995. This could potentially limit the external validity of the reported association for other cohorts and for individuals who dropped out of school.

Mitha and Adatia (2016) in their study investigated the extent to which the faith community was able to influence mental health resilience amongst Australian Muslim youth. The study involved youth between 18 and 25 years old who were either diasporic or post-diasporic Muslims in Australia. Of the 11 respondents, 5 were diasporic and 6 post-diasporic. For the purposes of triangulation, five community leaders were also interviewed. Respondents noted that their religious community not just offer support through worship, but also provided social support which help them to be resilient. Youth also noted that attachment to a religious community not just gave them a sense of belonging, they also mentioned their religious
onally, they also
reported on how they use their faith to create meanings about relating to the world and keeping their soul healthy. The finding suggests that religion facilitated the development of resilient

strategies in these youth. Despite its contribution to the body of knowledge relating to religion and resilience, this research has some limitations. The researchers noted that the interviews were conducted in mosques, and this reality might have consciously or unconsciously prompted respondents to respond in positive ways to the questions asked. This current researcher will seek to further understand through what practices or activities do youth receives support from their religious community?

In their study of how Muslim religiosity affects youth delinquency, Sahin and Unlu (2020) also found evidence indicating that religiosity may be negatively associated with delinquency. In their study they investigated three dimensions of religiosity- beliefs about religion, religious practices (participation in religious activities), and religious social environments (the level of religious engagement displayed by their friends, acquaintances, and peer groups). A total of 31,272 high school students between the ages of 14 and 18 years old participated in this study in Istanbul, Turkey. The study found that religious beliefs and religious social environments were negatively associated with delinquency. However, religious practice correlate positively with delinquency. This research only used participants from high schools in Istanbul, and as a result may have difficulty generalizing to other groups of high school students. Additionally, the authors noted that the three measures of religiosity might be too closely related to be measured as three separate dimensions. This study simply compared delinquency levels with the levels of the three dimensions of religiosity outlined (religious practice, religious beliefs, and religious social environments). All that is known from these results is that there is a relationship between at least two of these variables (religious social environments and religious beliefs). This current research seeks to find out, from the perspective of youth, why and how

their religious beliefs and religious social environment contribute to a reduction in at-risk behaviours?

In a qualitative study of resilience, Asante (2019), consulted 16 homeless adolescents in Accra, Ghana. The results of this research showed that a strong religious belief, a good sense of socially collaborative relationships, reciprocated friendships, abiding to cultural norms, and receiving support from community organizations played a significant role in helping homeless youth cope with living on the street. One drawback to this research is that the sample used involved only youth living on the street, and as a result, its findings might not be applicable to youth in other settings.

Davis and Kiang (2015) investigated the association between religiosity and wellbeing among Asian American high school students in southeastern US. One hundred and eighty (180) adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 participated in this research which took place over a four-year period. In their research, religiosity was defined by private regard, centrality, and participation in religious activities. The well-being indicators included self-esteem, depressive symptoms, positive and negative affect, and both the presence of, and a search for meaning in life. They found that there was a positive association between religious regard and centrality, religious participation and good self-esteem, positive affect, and meaning to life. However, there was a negative association between religious participation and depressive symptoms. The sample used was small and therefore there will be difficulty generalizing the findings to a wider population.

Several studies were reviewed in previous sections of this research paper in an attempt to establish the importance of religion/spirituality in fostering resilience among at-risk youth. A significant majority of these articles focused on Protestant Christianity. The studies that have

been highlighted in the literature review may indicate that youth who are involved in faith are resilient simply because their practice of Protestant Christianity may encourage, value, and entertain the norms of the dominant culture. As a result, youth following the rules of the dominant culture would be deemed more resilient because of adherence to the rules of this culture. This preoccupation with Protestant Christianity may represent a limited view of Christianity. For instance, Christians from the Liberation theology might not accept some of the teachings of Protestant Christians. Additionally, extreme care should be taken not to assume that Christianity and religion are the same things; they are not. Furthermore, it may be prudent not to have a fixed understanding of the concept of religion. In fact, how religion is defined may be time and context dependent. According to Hughes and McCutcheon (2021), the same things can be called religion in one context but not in another.

Conclusion

This literature review opened with an attempt to define and conceptualize resilience. This turned out to be a difficult task, as it was realized, there seemed to be no single definition for this term. Studies were highlighted suggesting that resilience is the result of a character or trait within the individual. This appears to be a limited view of resilience. Arguments were presented opposing this view and suggesting that resilience is not simply a trait within the individual but is the result of an interaction between the person and the various other systems or organizations in society. This current researcher agrees with the arguments and understandings of the latter. Even if a youth possessed individual qualities that make him/her resilient, his/her ability to rise above life challenges would possibly be more difficult had it not been for the support they receive from other individuals, groups, organization, or institutions. This idea is central to this current research. The common thread that runs through all the discussions of resilience is the ability to

adapt and function in the face of adversity. Special attention was paid to the role of religion and spirituality in fostering resilience among at-risk youth. The findings of numerous research on the role of religion and spirituality in helping youth to overcome adversities was reviewed. By reviewing these articles, this current researcher has carefully considered both the contributions and limitations of such studies in developing important questions that need to be answered.

Many of the studies presented findings suggesting that a relationship exists between resilience and religion/spirituality. Some only tell the reader that religion/spirituality and resilience are associated but does not provide answers from youth as to why this is so. Substance abuse/use, delinquency, early sexual encounter, theft, and mental health issues all appear to have an inverse

are obvious gaps in these findings. We are yet to find out from youth themselves why or how

religion/spirituality aid in reducing these behaviors. These findings suggest that religion/spirituality are associated with resilience, but do not provide answers as to why or how religion/spirituality aid in reducing these behaviors.

Methodology

This study attempted to investigate the role of religion/spirituality in fostering resilience among at-risk youth. Before this topic was explored, clear definitions of the key words that were used in this study were provided. Firstly, the researcher is cognizant of the fact that while religion has been around from the beginning of time, no single definition of this phenomenon seems possible (Idinopulos & Wilson, 1999). However, for the purposes of this research, the notion of religion was treated according to the following definition, from Baksh (2019): Religion
utionalized, codified set of beliefs and practices that include prayers, scriptures,

that living in a low-income area and being adolescent put one at significant risk of involvement in antisocial or high-risk behaviours.

feelings about their personal experiences with religion, a qualitative research method was undertaken. This approach was

Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 16). This method was also used because the researcher was the primary instrument in the collection and analysis of the data. A qualitative method also allowed the researcher to be richly descriptive, by using words rather than numbers to represent the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A phenomenological approach was used as a framework for conducting this research since the researcher is interested in the subjective lived experiences of how the participants

describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as it appears, that is as it manifests itself to the

. By adopting this approach, the current researcher has taken the position that and... the external world is reduced to the contents of personal Groenewal, 2004. p. 43).

Target Population

The researcher attempted to recruit six (6) youth between the ages of 19 and 30 from the Preston area, Spryfield, Fairview and Dartmouth North. These areas were selected because they appear to have higher levels of poverty than other regions of the HRM Ramos & McNabb, 2018). Researchers such as Frank and Saulnier (2017) noted that data from the Canadian National Census conducted in 2015 indicated that the poverty rates for children in North and

East Preston were 40% and 38.9%, respectively. When compared to other sections of the HRM, the Preston area also has a higher percentage of residence with high school education or less. Residents from this area also have a lower percentage of university credentials. A similar pattern is also true for Spryfield and North Dartmouth (Ramos & McNabb, 2018). Studies have shown that being adolescent, living in a low-income community and family, and having limited education can increase the possibility of at-risk behaviours among youth (McWhirter et al., 2017; Croisant et al., 2013; Oman et al., 2013). For this reason, youth living in these areas are of interest to the researcher. In order to meet the eligibility requirements to participate in this research, youth were either active members of an organised religious group or considered themselves to be spiritual. Those who identified themselves as religious would have to be affiliated with a religious organization, or group, and had fellowship with this group at least once per month. Youth who identified themselves as spiritual would not belong to an organized religious group but expressed that they have a personal relationship with a supernatural. Additionally, each participant would have demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity. Resilience in this context means that youth have managed to avoid antisocial or criminal activities and have been able to contribute to society in a positive way. In this research, being gainfully employed and matriculating into university was treated as indicators of resilience.

Sampling

Two types of sampling methods were used in this research: Purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The research began using purposive sampling. It is a non-random sampling method in which the researcher uses his/her judgement to select participants he/she thinks are knowledgeable and capable of answering the research questions (Bryman, 2012). This method was considered most appropriate for this research because the researcher believed that youth who

belong to an organized religious group and those that consider themselves to be spiritual, could most appropriately express thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions about the role of religion/spirituality in fostering resilience in their lives. The homogeneous type of purposive sampling was used because only people who possess shared characteristics (religious participation/spiritual engagement/resilience) that are central to the research participated. Purposive sampling was also used because it allows the researcher to complete this research in a short period of time and without much cost. However, after two participants were recruited it became increasingly difficult to recruit more participants. At this point, the researcher decided to employ snowball sampling. This method involves respondents who can, in turn, help the interviewer to identify some other person who can be interviewed (Agarwal, 2006, p. 191). After each of the two initial participants completed the interview, the researcher requested that they asked youth who they were acquainted with and/or those who they think would qualify for the research to make contact with him or his supervisor. The researcher aimed to recruit six (6) youth between the ages of 19 and 30 from Spryfield, Fairview, North Dartmouth, or the Preston area. To gain access to participants who considered themselves to be religious, the researcher contacted church leaders in Spryfield, North Dartmouth, Fairview, and the Preston area. Church leaders were asked to assist the researcher in gaining access to youth members of their congregations who were willing to participate in the research. To gain access to youth who were spiritual from the target areas mentioned above, the researcher attempted to recruit participants from Mount Saint Vincent student clubs and societies (e.g., Black Student Support & the Canadian Nutrition Society-student chapter). The researcher then outlined the research objectives and then explained it orally to the leaders who responded to the request. It was clearly outlined that

the researcher was interested in youth between the ages of 19 and 30 who are from low-income areas in the HRM. Only youth who were actively engaged in their faith were recruited to participate in this research. After the study was described to the group leader, he/she was asked that he/she felt met the requirements and were interested in participating in the study. A poster describing the research was also given to religious leaders so that they could distribute them to youth members of their group/organization (See Appendix 2). The researcher then waited until he was contacted by the youth. After the researcher was contacted by potential participants, the purpose and nature of the research was outlined and explained, and each participant was given the opportunity to ask questions about their participation.

Ethical Consent

Youth who agreed to participate in the study were contacted by phone. Youth who met the inclusion criteria were emailed a letter of consent (See Appendix 3) which youth read beforehand. After receiving the letter requesting consent, they were again contacted by phone with the aim of going through the letter with them, and they were asked if they had any concerns. If youth did not have any issue participating in the research, they were asked to sign it and return it via e-mail. After consent was received, a date was arranged for a telephone interview.

After all participants were selected for the research, youth who did not meet the inclusion criteria were contacted and told why they were not selected. They were then thanked for expressing interest in participating in the study.

Data Collection

After participants were selected, a date and time was arranged for them to participate individually in a telephone interview. This interview method was done to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission and prevent any possible harm to participants or the public.

Semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix 4) were administered to all participants. Semi-structured interviews are predetermined open-ended questions which allow the researcher to stay on course, while permitting open responses (Bryman, 2012). While the open-ended questions operated as an interview guide, additional questions were asked when the need arose during the interview process. This interview technique was used because the researcher thinks that there were specific questions to be asked, in order to answer the main research questions, and this method would help to keep the interview on track. At the same time, he did not

experiences by using closed-ended questions. This data collection technique was selected

-ended interview with the

directionality and agenda of the survey instrument to produce focused, qualitative and textual

(Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p. 149). Semi-structured interview was also used because it is a cost-effective means of gathering data over a short time (Saks & Allsop, 2013).

Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded using an external recording device. Important points from the interview were recorded in a notebook. After the interviews were completed, the audio recordings were transcribed to Microsoft Word on a computer. The document was formatted on each page to make space for writing down the emerging themes. All participants were given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was

(Scharp & Sanders, 2019, p. 117). This method, rather than focusing on quantity, attempts to capture important aspects of the data using patterns (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). This technique was selected because the researcher intended to focus on the common themes and patterns of meanings that emerged from the data.

Before coding began, the researcher printed and read the transcript repeatedly to become familiar with the document. Some analysis began before the interviews were completed. The researcher did not approach the data with any preconceived themes. In vivo coding was used in this research, and as such, codes were predetermined by the researcher (Bryman, 2012). This method was selected because the researcher wanted to code the data by utilizing the phrases, words, and expressions of the participants while they share their perspectives, opinions, feelings, thoughts, and experiences. Repeated coding was done to ensure that the information coded in the data in step one was recurring and/or significant. Codes that were seen as insignificant were discarded and the ones seen as important were retained. Additionally, the research supervisor was asked to code a transcript that has already been coded by the researcher. This was done in order to compare the codes across the two transcripts and agree on common codes. This activity was done to improve inter-rater reliability.

After the transcripts were coded, the recurring codes were grouped together to form higher level codes, categories, and themes that allowed the researcher to see if there is a common pattern across the data. This was achieved by the

top of each column and the corresponding codes for each question below. Coloured highlighters were used to highlight similar codes across the table, and similar codes were highlighted with the same colour. The process was repeated with every transcript to see if similar themes emerge, or to see if the codes supported the themes, which were expected to be related to the research questions. After this, a description of the themes was done. The researcher interpreted exactly what was said and did not impose any underlying meanings. The themes that emerge were the main findings, and they were described with an objective voice. After the themes were developed, a report was produced on the findings.

Theoretical Framework

(Lincoln & Guba, 1977) was utilized in understanding and interpreting the findings of this research. As mentioned earlier, this approach allows researchers to posit that resilience does not solely result from traits within the individual but result from a relationship with other systems and institutions in society.

Results

This study targeted six (6) resilient and religious/spiritual youth from low-income areas in the HRM. The findings showed that religion/spirituality played a significant role in helping these youth to overcome their difficulties. Youth reported that their mood and outlook on life improved after participating in religious activities. Having trust and faith in God was also reported as key elements in their resilience. The results showed that, also of significance in youth overcoming their difficulties, is the support they get from people who are close to them.

Initially, the plan was to recruit youth from both genders. Unfortunately, no male youth eventually volunteered for this study. A total of 5 females participated. Four were from the Preston Area and were African Nova Scotians, and one participant was from Fairview, and identified herself

as a Filipino Nova Scotian. All participants belonged to the Christian faith (4 United Baptists and 1 Catholic) and were between the ages of 19 and 25. No participant from any other faith volunteered for this study. As indicated in the *Data Collection* section of this research, all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. As such throughout the entire research, instead of their actual names.

Participants reported that they were faced with several difficulties. These included pressure from school workload, racism, financial difficulties, being pressured to join gangs, and sell/use illegal drugs. Some participants also noted that they had to confront issues such as community violence, and the general sense of hopelessness/pessimism. These issues represent some of the main difficulties that they encountered. However, they reported that because of their faith, they were able to temper these challenges.

All participants stated that they had become involved in, and exposed to, their faith from very early in their childhood. This introduction came through their interaction with their parents and/or other family members. No participant reported that they had discovered their faith on their own. These participants also mentioned that going to church is expressed as a way of life; not just something they were born into, but a culture. This general idea is captured by Ruth in describing how she got involved in her faith. She noted,

I became involved in my faith since I was younger; since I was a little girl. I think that been using faith through my whole life, I would say (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

While all participants agreed that they had grown up in their faith and were introduced to it by their parents or other family members, three participants went further to explain that after a life crisis/challenge, they had made a decision to take their religion more seriously.

(Naomi, December 31, 2021).

And,

there were more challenges in areas of life that I faced (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

Bathsheba explained that at grade 10 she began taking her faith more seriously than in her earlier years because

[W]hen I started my relationship with my [church] community and my relationship with God is not reliant on the decisions of my parents anymore; in that I had to make my own decisions (Bathsheba, January 17, 2022).

When participants were asked to gauge their level of religiosity/spirituality, on a scale of 1-10, (with 10 being the highest and 1 the lowest), most participants reported a spirituality level on the higher end of the continuum. Their overall self-reported level of spirituality was approximately 7.5. In justifying her high level of religiosity, Ruth stated:

challenges, I always revert (no matter what) and go back to my faith, to help me get through life challenges (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

Naomi, another participant who reported a very high level of religiosity/spirituality, justified this high level by declaring that

I turned to God for most/ majority of things that happen in my life (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

However, while the level of religiosity amongst participants was generally high, most felt that their relationship with God/religion could be better, or needed improvement. For instance, Bathsheba who gave herself a score of 7 noted that

restrictions, I have been restricted to only serving partially at my church. It

and I feel like that has interfered with my confidence in my spirituality (Bathsheba, January 17, 2022).

All participants mentioned that they practice their religion both in public as well as privately. However, two noted that they are involved in private worship most of the time, and three reported that worshipping with other people in a gathering constituted the bulk of their religious activities. Bathsheba justified her preference for worshipping in a gathering with other people by suggesting that

motivation to see other people and doing things in your view (Bathsheba, January 17, 2022).

All interviewees reported that their spiritual/religious engagements involved studying and reading the Bible, praying (talking to God), and the use of worship songs (listening, thinking about, or singing these songs). The majority of these youth also engage in youth group activities in their religious practice. This activity is not limited to singing, praying, and studying the Bible but also includes activities like going on trips, volunteering, or undertaking other activities that may be of interest to them. Only one participant mentioned that meditation was a part of her practice.

The participants also described several ways in which their faith helps them to stay out of trouble. Common across the responses of several participants is the idea that their religion influences them to live by a certain standard. Mary noted,

Growing up its like [it is] instilled in us to live a certain life. So, when I go out and I see certain things happening with certain youth, or certain friends are involved in, I decide
n
better plan for me (Mary, January 7, 2022).

Naomi expressed a similar sentiment, when she said,

Growing up I learned more and more about God, and I know the difference between right in respect to money, I just know that God will make a way out of no way. So, the key factor in what I do in respect for that is trust (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

Additionally, many participants also mentioned that they are helped to stay out of trouble based on their conviction that God has a plan for their lives. In response to questions about her ability to stay out of trouble, Naomi noted,

For me, I know that God has a bigger plan for me in my life. I know those things [drugs and violence] are not of God (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

A common theme that also emerged was the idea that God will act as a guide in difficult times.

For example, in talking about her decisions and obstacles, Mary noted,

I just go with my own faith and just let God guide me through in relation to these actions in my life (Mary, January 7, 2022).

Talking to God about the presenting issues was also reported to be one way of staying out of trouble. For instance, in expressing how she overcame her difficulties, Naomi said one way is

T him throughout my day (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

These young women also mentioned the people they surround themselves with as one important factor in helping them to stay out of trouble. Participants reported that people close to them such as peers, parents, church members, schoolmates and friends provided the necessary support that help them to rise above their challenges. Because of the...

... peop

activities or whatever trouble if that makes sense (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

This idea is also echoed in a response from Bathsheba.

definitely got to do with the people around
have gone astray and done other things (Bathsheba, January 17, 2022).

Additionally, the impact of participating in activities at church also appeared to guide youth
in the right path, keeping them out of trouble. For instance, Bathsheba noted that

My

January 17, 2022).

One possible reason why church activities are so important in helping youth stay out of
trouble was offered by Ruth, when she noted that...

Religion helps me in a sense where especially through my church [where] we have youth
meetings/youth gatherings where they focus on the importance of school and why it is
important to get an edu
free time, instead of going out and getting involved in things (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

Participants were able to identify scriptures that are pertinent in guiding their behaviour
and keep
to guide their actions. Themes about overcoming difficulties, honouring God with your body,
obeying parents, not being jealous of others, and trusting in God were highlighted.

When faced with life challenges, youth reported that they would engage in important
activities, such as singing/listening worship songs, praying, and reading the word of God.
However, prayer was reported to be the most important activity in helping them to rise about
their difficulties. For example, according to Mary, praying is the main way that she
communicates with God in times of difficulty, because only he can provide the answers that she
needs; people cannot (Mary, January 7, 2022).

Most participants reported that it is very important to have other people around when
performing these activities. This general idea was captured by Sarah who noted that

I think that you are heavily affected by your surroundings. So, it is important to surround yourself with people who are going to inform you and motivate you to have a positive path (Sarah, January 6, 2022).

However, other participants reported that the presence of others is not necessarily important in the participation of religious activities. Naomi declared that

and mind on him first, and everything else will be added unto me. So, my trust, my faith does not come from people, therefore, it does not matter (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

In relation to the question about whether participants used either their own inner resources or support from their church to overcome their difficulties, the results are indicating that generally, there is no preference for either among youth. It seems that both are equally important among the population studied. This idea is captured by Ruth who explained that

involved in some form of religion. I would say that support from religious community and inner resources are equally important for my life (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

Participants reported that there were times when unfortunate situations happened in their lives during which they felt disappointed by their faith/God. However, they pointed out that this feeling was short-lived, and was quickly extinguished by their faith and trust in God. This general idea was probably best represented by Naomi, who noted that:

In the moment, yes, but after I take time to reflect on the situation, I see that there is always a method to the madness. There is always a plan behind what happens in my life or things around me. That God always has a plan, so whether I may not understand what's happening there's always a plan to the things that happen around me. He has a plan far greater than mine (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

A similar sentiment was shared by Sarah:

Of course. I definitely think [when] certain things happen, and I am faced with certain guidance from my parents, my [church] community, and that helps me to, in those moments, understand that God does not abandon me, and has a different plan for me (Sarah, January 6, 2022).

Participants also reported that there are significant differences between their general mood and outlook on life before and after participating in a religious activity. This was the case whether these activities were done in private or with other members of their faith. They mentioned that, before their engagement, there is usually a sense of pessimism and negative emotions. They often feel hopeless, alone, untrusting, unhappy, confused, heavy, unencouraged, and have a tendency to want to question their faith. However, they all reported that, after participating in a religious activity, they held a more positive mood and a greater sense of optimism. They generally reported that they felt hopeful, uplifted, at peace, happy, reassured, thankful, less angry, and more understanding of the situation. For instance, when Ruth was asked about her mood/outlook on life before and after a religious activity, she noted that

[Religious activity] helps you to more see the light at the end of the tunnel t kinda give you hope for the future and to not [dwell] on what is happening now (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

All participants reported that religious participation influenced their mood, thoughts and actions towards self and others in positive ways. They find that it gave them more hope about life, helped them to be more grateful, provided comfort in the fact that they have a relationship with God, and often allows a better understanding of their life situation. Participants also reported that engagement in religious activities also influenced them to treat, and think about others in a positive way. These include being kinder, more self-aware, having a better

not holding grudges. A response from Sarah captures this fundamental idea.

I think that participating in spiritual activity can help because it brings things into perspective. It is not just you. You are part of something bigger. Even in moments of sadn

that whatever challenge or issue you are facing now in due time will be resolved and whatever you are going through will eventually end or you will move past it. Like I am more forgiving. I hold less anger. I am motivated to be kinder to people (Sarah, January 6, 2022).

All participants noted how their religious engagement influenced their moods in positive ways. Participants who worshipped together noted that being rejoiceful in worship, receiving support from other church members, and experiencing a sense of personal growth when they attended their religious gatherings were helpful in giving them a positive mood/outlook on life. This was achieved through singing, praying, reading the Bible and interacting with each other in one accord. For example, when Mary was asked about religious/spiritual activities that caused her to have a positive mood, she noted,

Today I can just be ...having a regular time, feeling normal and then say Sunday comes
ch, your fears will be lifted,
continue to go back. It feels more rejoiceful and relieved (Mary, January 7, 2022).

Religious activities done in private also had certain features that are believed to have a positive impact on participants mood as well. For instance, when asked what in particular about her religion causes her to have a positive mood or outlook, Naomi, a predominantly private worshipper noted

Just that feeling that I feel after I talk to God I can feel the change immediately after I pray or meditate..
can actually feel the change afterwards. I feel him leading me through the day, guiding my footsteps and guiding me through (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

Also of importance was the positive influence of scripture reading on their mood/outlook and on helping them to deal with the challenges that they may encounter. An example of how way is provided by

Naomi. She noted,

One of the scriptures I like is For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you, not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future. that I know that there is a plan for my life. If I obey his word and live accordingly, then I know that I will forever be blessed and I know that he's always with me. I know even many things that happen throughout my life there's things that I shouldn't have been able to come out on top of, but I have, because of my faith (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

Participants reported that their life now, being religious, is far better than when they were not actively practicing their faith. Before their active involvement in their faith, life to them appeared to be more challenging. Some respondents reported that they felt like something was missing from their lives and they cared more about what people thought about them. Active participation in their religion made their challenges easier to overcome. An example is shared by Ruth. She explained:

When I wasn't as so involved...I found I had more challenges in life. IID 5>4(i23d)] r4q5(r)-(for)[()] TJ

there is more peace within, and greater satisfaction with their lives in comparison to youth who are not practicing faith.

All interviewees expressed their beliefs that there are consequences to not being religious/spiritual. These include being around the wrong influences, missing out on inner peace and guidance, not pleasing God, and having a harder time overcoming challenges. This overarching idea of the consequences of not being religious /spiritual was expressed by Naomi. She noted that,

lot here are people that have financial issues, depression, anxiety, and all those things [If they knew God, maybe they would put their faith in not man-made things [put their faith in God] and their life would be more at peace. People that don't really know God tend to put their hope in the world and the world can forsake us (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

To participants, the most important thing about being religious/spiritual is to have a close relationship with God. Also of importance was the idea that th He/their faith will help them to get through difficult times.

Most of the respondents believed that institutionalised and non-institutionalized religious activities are equally important. This idea is captured by Sarah. She said,

[They are] equally important, solely because I think that they have to co- and not follow-up with my personal. In [the] scripture, it teaches -institutionalized forms] work in harmony in partnership with each other (Sarah, January 6, 2022).

Despite what most participants believed, some participants did think that institutionalized forms of worship were more important than non-institutionalized forms. The primary reason that was given for this, from their standpoint, is that, when they worship together, they get the

necessary support that they are not able to achieve when they worship on their own. No participant expressed that worshipping entirely on their own was more important, than worshipping in a church.

A significant number of the participants also reported that the way they practiced their faith was driven by internal values rather than external benefits and rewards like job opportunities, networking, and the possibility of meeting friends. In emphasizing this point, Sarah explained:

I set my mind on him...and only him...everything else will kinda be attracted to me
[T] ...I attract based
on the sole purpose that I know who I am as a person, and I know who gives me
(Sarah, January 6, 2022).

No participant mentioned that the way in which they practiced their faith was driven solely by external benefits and rewards. However, some suggested that it had to do with a mixture of both internal values and external benefits and rewards.

I would say personal values now. There was at some point [when] it was driven by external benefits and just[the] pressure around me (Bathsheba, January 17, 2022).

All interviewees, to a significant degree, agreed that membership in a religious community helped to steer them on a positive path, by providing much of the necessary resources and support they would need to become productive. All participants also mentioned some elements of mental health support. This ranged from encouragement from another ordinary church member to having workshops, seminars or programs designed specifically for youth. In one church, there was also a program for youth who were experiencing loss. In some instances, there were churches that had different programs and activities that focused on peer relationships,

healthy living, leadership skills, volunteering, and mentorship. Mention was also made of activities which involved adult learning programmes. In these programmes the church would arrange for youth to get their General Educational Development (GED) if they did not complete high school. One participant further reported that her church provided bursaries for students attending university.

Despite these efforts, one participant reported that while the church as an institution may offer programs that youth could benefit from, frequently, youth are discouraged from participating by the attitudes and behaviours of older members towards young people.

... because from our experiences there has been older people within our church that make us feel that we are always doing something wrong things differently from what they did when they were our age...

... really show that they are trying to help us genuinely, you just feel that they are trying to oppose to do (Mary, January 7, 2022).

When asked to describe their religious/spiritual leader, most participants use positive adjectives. Religious leaders were often described as inspiring, approachable, welcoming, supportive, encouraging and someone they could rely on. They generally saw their religious leaders as role models who give advice, comfort, support, hope and guidance in times of difficulty. On the other hand, there were instances where participants reported that they had negative experiences with their religious leaders. In these instances, they said that they would not go to their current spiritual leader for support or advice. The primary reason for this is because they believe that religious leaders are often much older than youth, and therefore have a difficult time understanding their issues. For instance, Naomi noted,

the youth of today
that I would need to reach out to [T]
how to [They]
understand the ways of the world that we are living in now (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

A significant number of participants also reported that, in times of difficulties, youth could also look to other members of the church for support and guidance, and in turn this act put their minds in a better mental state. This also included seeking guidance from peers. For instance, they often reported that when they are faced with difficult issues, they often look to their peers for encouragement. Additionally, mention was made by one participant of how important it was to have a group leader who had mental health training. She noted that she could talk freely to this person about any presenting psychological or general issues. It was also noted that having other people in the church that they look up to (apart from the leaders) made a big difference.

The results have demonstrated that religion/spirituality plays a pertinent role in helping youth in low-income areas to rise above their difficulties. The findings have also indicated that participating in religious activities interaction with others. It was also found that having faith and hope in God was also important in times of difficulties. Central to these results is the importance of getting support from others in their quest to overcome their difficulties. Now that these results have been presented, a discussion of the findings is not only necessary but critical.

Discussion

The overall finding of this study is that participation in religion/spirituality can play a role in helping some youth living in at-risk areas of the HRM to build resilience and overcome their

difficulties. As the findings indicated, the youth who were interviewed in this research reported that they were highly religious/spiritual, with an overall self-reported level of religiosity of approximately 7.5 out of 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest). This reported level of

in helping female youth in low-income areas of the HRM to overcome their difficulties. The finding that religion/spirituality can encourage resilience among youth is also similar to the general findings of previous studies in the United States (e.g., Breland-Noble et al., 2015; Cole-Lewis et al., 2016; Davis & Kiang, 2015; Rose et al., 2016) and from the developing world (e.g., Bali & Sharma, 2018; Chulakarn & Chaimonkol, 2021; Cortina et al., 2020; Sahin & Unlu, 2020; Salas-Wright et al., 2013; Vinueza, 2017). While the current results are indicating that religion/spirituality may be useful in helping youth to overcome their challenges, this finding is influenced or caused their resilience. Instead, these results report the thoughts, feelings and experiences of youth who shared how their religion or spirituality has aided in their resilience. Also, this finding is by no means suggesting that religion/spirituality or its related institutions are the only contributing factors to resilience. It may be quite possible that institutions that are void of spirituality, God or faith may still help youth to be resilient.

The results revealed that all youth who participated in this study had been exposed to their religious practice/faith early in their childhood by a parent, parents, or close family members who are Christians. This finding was not surprising because it is known from reading the work of Handel (2011) that family/parents play a significant role as a primary socialization agent/s of the newborn. The family/parent is responsible for teaching the new arrival into the society, the skills and values necessary for survival. Having an awareness of this standpoint,

there was an expectation that children would likely take on the values of their parents. In a sense, if parents are highly religious, their children are more likely to be religious than youth who do not belong to a religious family.

The idea that all participants reported that they all had at least one parent and/or other family members who were Christians, and that they grew up in their faith, triggers thoughts about the concept of *Embodied Capital* advanced by Bourdieu (1984). According to Bourdieu (1984), embodied capital represents individual qualities that can be consciously and passively acquired. It is also out of the individual control and is acquired overtime from birth (not instantaneous). Embodied capital represents the value of internalized skills that may influence an

Overtime, it becomes more primed to accept similar influences. Youth in this current study, having had close family members who were Christians may have allowed them to learn and embody the necessary values instilled in them by their family. Because the embodied capital primes people to accept or agree with similar influences and values, this may partly explain why all youth (Christians) in this study had close family members and parents who were Christians themselves.

However, while it might be true that children are likely to learn the values of their parents early in life, one is still mindful of the fact that children are active agents in their own socialization process. Children do not simply just internalize the values and practices of the society into which they were born (Bluebond-Langner,1978; Corsaro, 2015).

It is important to note that participants reported that while they were born into their faith, they began taking their religion more seriously when they encountered a crisis or a challenging life situation, often in the teenage years. This decision happens to coincide with Erikson psychosocial stage of identity versus confusion (12 - 19 years) (Erikson, 1960; 1980). According

to Erikson (1960; 1980), during this stage of development, crucial accomplishments are made in establishing personal identity. In searching for their personal identity, youth seek to establish relationships with others, different ideologies, and may look to institutions for assurance (Erikson, 1960;1980). This may provide some explanation as to why youth decided to reconfirm or renew their faith during their teenage years and not earlier or later in their lives.

Participants also reported that people close to them such as peers, friends, parents, church members, and church leaders, as well as the church as an institution, provided the necessary support that helped them to rise above their challenges. For instance, Naomi noted that even though she was from a low-income area, she managed to stay out of trouble as a result of the support of her religious community and the people with whom she surrounds herself. This general view was also that she got from people around her, such as her friends and mother, and her church community. At no point did any of these youth indicate directly or indirectly that their individual characteristics (e.g., personal strength, determination, courage) were the only factors which had contributed to their resilience. When asked whether their inner resources, or support from their community was more important, youth suggest that they were equally important.

The current results agree with the findings of previous studies (ex. Luthar, 2003; Masten, 2001; Ungar & Liebenburg, 2011; Moore et al., 2019), which indicated that resilience is not simply and solely determined by the individual capacities of youth, but is the result of a combination of their abilities, supportive relationships (parents, peers, friends) and the availability of community resources and opportunities. It would appear from these findings that resilience is associated not just with individual capacities, but also with supportive relationships, and connectedness to community institutions (Masten, 2001). The findings of this research

contrast with

-up (ex.

Burt et al., 2016), cognitive style (Cortina et al. 2020), or personal/personality attributes determine whether a youth will be resilient, when life challenges are experienced.

Participants also described several ways in which their faith helps them to stay out of trouble. Collectively, they suggest that their faith instilled in them a certain standard, or a clear sense of right and wrong. They indicated that their strong belief in God lead them to avoid behaviours that are dishonorable to Him. This way of thinking helps them to avoid situations or behaviours which might be classified as at-risk or lawbreaking, primarily because they are not of God. For instance, Naomi noted that she avoided drugs and violence because she knows that they are not of God. These results are similar to findings of research conducted by Shek and Zhu (2018) on spirituality and moral competence. In this study, moral competence was defined as having high expectations of oneself, and the ability to self-evaluate and reflect. The results of Shek and Zhu (2018) study showed that, after controlling for sociodemographic factors, spirituality and moral competence were negatively related to at-risk behaviours and the intention to engage in such behaviours. The findings of the present study, agree with the results of this previous research.

Additionally, central to the ability of the youth in the present study to rise above their difficulties, was the conviction that God has a plan for their lives, or that the plan which God has is much greater than the one they have for themselves. This may allow youth to attribute some greater-good to the challenges or setbacks which they experience. Consequently, this belief may lead them to see a meaning to their obstacles, instead of giving up. They believe, in their heart, that no matter how difficult things get, these difficulties are part of the plan to make them better.

Ruth when she said that

This general idea is supported by previous research. Francis and Bance (2017) in their study of the protective role of spirituality among Indian college students experiencing suicidal ideation found that, despite being from different religious backgrounds, they all described their religion as a source of strength and a source of meaning in times of difficulty. Other studies (e.g., Raftopoulos & Bates, 2011) also suggested that one importance of being religious is that it provides a sense of meaning in times a difficulty. Perhaps, it is these meanings that allow youth to hold on to hope.

Additionally, a common theme that has also emerged from these findings is the idea that God will be a guide and will make a way when there is none. This does not just give hope, but it also demonstrates faith and trust in God, to guide them through their difficulties. For instance, when Naomi was asked to talk about the ways that she managed to stay out of trouble, she noted,

[I]n respect to money, I just know that God will make a way out of no way. So, the key factor in what I do in respect for that is trust (Naomi, December 31, 2021).

And,

A similar picture is painted by Mary:

think or having difficulties, cause I live in a generation and that generation is a certain way ...I just go with my own faith and just let God guide me through in relation to these actions in my life (Mary, January 7, 2022).

Participants also agreed that there were times when unfortunate situations happened in their lives that led them to feel disappointed by their faith/God. However, they pointed out that

this feeling was quickly eclipsed by their faith and trust in God. This is part of the general idea

was a profound statement in respect to this research. Youth in low-income areas are often seen as having limited opportunities and chances of achieving socially accepted goals due to issues associated with being in a lower socioeconomic group (ex. poverty, high crime rates, low levels of education). Being in a lower socioeconomic group may make their chances of achieving success more difficult. With this in mind, it could be argued that youth who believe that God will create a way when there is none, or when it is blocked, may perceive their lives less daunting or hopeless than youth who do not have this belief. This may be particularly true when this idea is considered within the context of the *Theory of Deviance* by Merton (1968). The fundamental tenet of this theory is that society establishes certain goals for success. However, Merton (1968) noted that some members of society (especially those in the working class) are often unable to achieve these goals in socially accepted ways. According to Merton (1968), youth enter into deviancy because they have internalized the material goals of success in their society, yet the pathways to accomplishing these goals are blocked or limited (there is no easy or no suitable way to achieve their goals in socially acceptable crime and deviance, one may be more likely to understand why spiritual/religious youth are less likely to engage in deviance or at-risk behaviours. It might be that even though they live in a low-income area and their opportunities may be blocked, through their faith, they have managed to convince themselves that God will help them to overcome their obstacles.

Previous studies have supported the idea that having faith and hope can help youth to rise above their difficulties. While Gunnestad and Thawala (2011) found that, in addition to

praying and intercession, fellowship (seeing church as a network), encouraging good values, faith and hope were also instrumental in helping youth to rise above their challenges. Similarly, Dill (2017) conducted a study on the role of spirituality in helping African American youth to cope with life challenges. In addition to the finding that youth highlighted the important role of prayer in their lives, they also talk about the role of a strong and unwavering faith in a higher power in building their resilience.

Additionally, it may be that even though youth may have internalized certain goals of material success in their society, these internalized goals may have been tempered by the values and teachings of their faith. This might lead youth to focus less on trying to achieve material gains, and as a result reducing the tension between the internalized goal of material success and the realities that prevent them from achieving same.

For instance, Bathsheba explained that because of the teachings of her faith, she is aware that life satisfaction does not come through material gains but by prospering spiritually. She noted

[B]ecause of my religion I was able to become more open to certain teachings and Bible who have been redeemed by God, and not that they were becoming rich, but they were being prospered spiritually. Yet they [were] satisfied with that. So, it is those teachings that came from being religious that really helped me to realize that the purpose of life is not to

(Bathsheba,
January 17, 2022).

Participants in the present study were also able to identify specific scriptures that operated as guides to their behaviours. These scriptures speak specifically to how they use the word of God to stay out of trouble. The common thread that runs through the scriptures that were highlighted included, but is not limited to, overcoming difficulties, honouring God with your

body, obeying parents, not being jealous of others, and trusting in God. It is easy to see how these scriptures can manifest themselves in the lives and daily behaviours of the believing youth.

For example, Sarah noted:

I always go back to 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20. It is basically talking about how your body is the temple of the Lord God, and the Holy Spirit, and as such you should honour God

if I am ever tempted
with such temptation (Sarah, January 6, 2022).

This example speaks to how religious scriptures/faith behaviours. This idea can also better help us to understand previous findings from other studies. Previous studies have found that youth who are religious/spiritual are less likely to be engage in early sexual behaviours, drinking alcohol and using illegal drugs (Moulin-Stozek et al., 2018), cannabis and tobacco use and risky behaviours (Francis et al., 2019), and the consumption of alcohol/abuse of alcohol and other hard drugs (Baena et al.,2019). The findings of this current research can help us to understand that, for at least some of these youth (i.e., those who are highly religious/spiritual) what is written in scripture may help them to abstain from certain activities.

reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy or the transmission of a sexually transmitted disease

The young women in this study also reported that, when they were faced with obstacles in their lives, they prayed, read the Bible and engaged in the act of singing or listening worship songs. Prayer was reported to be the most common method used in their quest to rise above their difficulties. In addition to this, most participants also reported that these activities were most effective when they were performed with other members. This finding is similar to the conclusions of other studies that were examined in the literature review. For example, Breland-

Noble et al. (2015) found that praying and getting support from church leaders and other members were important in helping youth to rise above their difficulties. Similar findings were presented by Oxhandler et al. (2018), in which he found that praying, reading the Bible, and gaining support from their religious community were key factors in helping youth rise above their difficulties. While worshipping with, and gaining support from others appear to be important in helping most participants to rise above their difficulties, one participant suggested that others are not necessarily important in the participation of religious activities because once she submits herself to God, that is all that matters. Such a response from this participant was expected since she reported earlier in the interview that she prefers to worship in private. If worshipping in private is a preference, this could be a signal that worshipping with others is not considered equally important.

Participants also reported that there are vast differences in their general mood and outlook on life before and after participating in a religious/spiritual activity. Pessimism and negative emotions dominated their feelings and outlook before their engagement. As indicated in the results section, in this phase they reported that they often felt hopeless, alone, untrusting, unhappy, confused, heavy (burdened), unencouraged, and had a tendency to want to question their faith. These feelings tended to change significantly after engaging in a religious activity, after which they reported a generally positive mood and a greater sense of optimism. They stated that they felt hopeful, uplifted, at peace, happy, reassured, thankful, less angry, and more understanding of the situation.

These findings are comparable to that of Yendork and Somhlaba (2016), who found that religion facilitated well-being by encouraging positive emotions along with hope and optimism. Similarly, Raftopoulos and Bates (2011)

resilience found that it gave youth a sense of comfort and protection from harm, an increased sense of meaning and a positive outlook on life, self-awareness, and the belief that they could accomplish their goals.

Why is this finding important? These findings are crucial because several studies have behaviours. Ansari et al. (2019) found a negative association between optimism and cigarette smoking and the use of illegal drugs. People with a high level of optimism appear to have a greater tendency to engage in healthy behaviours and the former often cushions the effects of negative mental states (Bromberger & Matthews, 1996). Additionally, adolescents with high levels of hopelessness tend to demonstrate lower levels of resilience (Karatas & Cakar 2011). These findings would seem to suggest that by engaging in religious/spiritual activities, the moods and outlook on life of youth can be improved.

Participants in the present study also noted that participation in their religious activities help them to treat others better. The young women suggested that after a religious or spiritual activity they were generally kinder to others, more self-wishes, more forgiving, and less likely to hold grudges. A key factor in all these characteristics is an improvement in interpersonal relationships. When youth experience these feelings, it might be more difficult for them to have conflict with others, and this may serve to keep them on track. For instance, a youth who is forgiving, or not holding grudges, might be less likely to be involved in a conflict because they may be able to move past a wrong that has been done to them. This idea is consistent with the views of Foy et al. (2011), who argue that religious virtues might help to encourage social accountability, avoid inappropriate behaviours and help to

promote good relationships and/or reduce interpersonal conflict among its members, as well as other members of society.

Participants further stated that specific religious activities help to put them in a positive mood. These positive feelings are often the result of being rejoicing in worship, being supported by other church members, and the experience of a sense of personal growth when they attended their religious gathering. These activities included singing, worshipping, and interacting with each other. All of these activities suggest that worshipping with other members help to keep youth in a positive mood, and help them to overcome their difficulties. This finding is a reiteration of the glaring support for the arguments advanced by Ungar et al. (2013) which it is also influenced by factors in the wider community such as peer support, and support from other members of the community.

Participants noted that when they compared their lives now to times when they were not actively practicing their faith, they could see clearly how their former life was more challenging. This response was expected. Previous studies, both in developed and developing countries have suggested that religion/spirituality encourages resilience (Salas-Wright et al., 2013; Breland-Noble et al., 2015; Cole-Lewis et al., 2016; Davis & Kiang, 2015; Rose et al., 2016; Vinueza, 2017; Bali & Sharma, 2018; Cortina et al., 2020; Sahin & Unlu, 2020; Chulakarn & Chaimonkol, 2021). It stands to reason that, if religion/spirituality actually helps youth to rise above their challenges, they would mostly likely report that their challenges were more difficult to overcome when they were not practicing. Additionally, all participants in the present study stated that they believed that their life satisfaction was better than that of youth who were not practicing a faith. This finding is also plausible. Since these Christian youth reported that they thought that their

life had improved after becoming Christian, it stands to reason that they would argue that unbelievers were living less fulfilling lives.

While there is no reason to doubt the accounts given by these youth regarding their lives before and after their involvement in faith, it is difficult not to consider the concept of *effort justification* (Aronson & Mills, 1959). According to Aronson and Mills (1959), this is a mental maneuver in which people tend to make attempts at justifying their added effort or sacrifice, by attributing greater importance to the result that arises from greater effort than to one that follows lesser effort. Compared to before they became committed Christians, youth who join religion may see their decision, in many ways, as a significant sacrifice in which they must give up the and maintain a certain religious discipline. According to this idea, to justify their efforts, they would convince themselves (even in the absence of evidence) that their efforts had not been wasted.

Most participants noted that the most important aspect of being religious/spiritual was to have a close relationship with God. This was true for both spiritual and religious youth. Similar findings have been documented in previous studies. For example, Williams and Lindsay (2006), in their study on the effects of spirituality/religiosity on runaway and homeless youth between the ages of 18 and 25, found that their relationship with God was central in helping them to overcome their difficulties. Francis and Bance (2017) also arrived at similar conclusions studying Indian college students between age 19 and 22 experiencing suicidal ideation. The finding that the most important aspect of being religious or spiritual is to have a close relationship with God was not surprising. Especially since most youth in this current study reported that praying was the single most important activity in which youth engage when they encounter challenges. Compared to singing, and reading the Bible, it appears to be a line of one-

on-one communication (two-way communication) between the youth and their God. It therefore makes sense that youth would see their relationship with God as most important, regardless of whether they are religious or spiritual. This makes sense, since regardless of their spiritual or religious involvement, the ultimate aim is to make it right with God. Even though this finding might be suggesting that his/her private and internal resources, it does not in any way discredits or disqualifies the value of supportive relationships in helping youth to overcome their difficulties. This finding may also be alluding to Ungar et ty. According to Ungar et al. (2013) equifinality suggests that resilience, howtha44r,sth w(ienone)4(dit(latless2([(one)4()]

However, it is not difficult to understand why the results of the present study would slant towards the direction of favoring institutionalized forms of worship. This research collected data from youth who are members of churches. The fact that they were, and continue to be, a part of a church community may mean that they value worshipping with others highly. This finding that worshipping with other people is so important to youth highlights the importance of supportive relationship and people in resilience.

Most participants in this study reported that the practice of their faith is driven by internal values, rather than external benefits and rewards such as the possibility of meeting friends or networking with others. No one indicated that they attended worship solely for external gains. Earlier, the importance of hope, faith and trust were discussed as significant tools in helping youth rise above their difficulties. There is no surprise in the idea that these themes re-emerged when youth were asked about whether the practice of their faith was driven by internal values or external rewards. As noted earlier, of utmost importance to youth is to focus on their relationship with God, which includes having faith in Him and trusting Him. The focus is not on the material gains of the world. However, the idea is that, if one is in tune with God, and if it is his will, this will attract opportunities to their lives.

Yet, most youth also reported that being part of a religious community helped them to overcome their difficulties by providing the necessary resources, and support. There was strong evidence of how being a part of a church community helps with mental health support. This help ranged from youth having an uplifting conversation with a peer, another regular church member, group leader, or talking to the pastor about their issues. For instance, Ruth provided an example of how she was assisted by another church member, when she experienced difficulties:

There is a lady that we like to talk to about our issues that also take the time out to talk with us about our situation or taking up the phone and sending her a text message. She is always there to support us whenever we need it. We really appreciate her help and her words (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

Significant in this finding is the idea that youth reported that being a member of a church community gave them easy access to mental health support which helped them to deal with mental health issues. For instance, when youth were confronted with difficult life issues, they noted that they could rely on their peers for encouragement. They also noted that they could find other members of the church that they could talk to when they are faced with challenges. These fellow members ranged from individuals with mental health training to those with no training at all. However, even without being trained in mental health, church members might provide the necessary support that is probably crucial in helping youth overcome their difficulties. These results are similar to previous findings regarding religious participation and improved mental health. Rose et al. (2016), in investigating the relationship between organized religious involvement (youth group functions and various church activities) and mental health among Caribbean black adolescents found that adolescents received emotional support from other members of their church group and were less likely to become depressed. Cole-Lewis et al. (2016) also found that encouragement that youth got from other members of their religious organization when they experience adversity was also instrumental in helping them to cope. Perhaps Malindi and Theron (2010) were right in concluding that the church provides a source of moral support and compass, and guidance from the church leaders and other members regarding difficult matters. This probably explains some of the reasons why after reviewing 150 articles on the relationship between spirituality and mental health, Dew et al. (2008) found that ninety-two per cent (92 %) of these articles had at least one significant association between religiousness

and better mental health. As noted earlier, direct involvement in religious activities help youth to rise above their difficulties, however it would also appear that the access to mental health support at church help to drive resilience.

In addition to providing an atmosphere for mental health support when youth experience challenges, being a part of a religious community also helps in building their capacity by providing them with the necessary skills and knowledge to be productive citizens. Youth in this study highlighted programs and activities that are provided by the church community that help to support healthy living, their leadership skills, encourage volunteerism and arrange for them to be mentored by a more experienced/ accomplished church member (role model).

By attending church, youth may also learn how to take care of their overall health. This may explain one reason why religious involvement by adolescents predicted lower levels of delinquency, drug use, risky sexual behaviours, and school dropout in the study by Kim et al. (2018).

Youth in this current study also reported that their church encourages and promotes volunteerism. This practice might help youth to see that they can impact society in a positive way, and this may serve to encourage prosocial behaviours. This suggestion that volunteering might help to encourage resilience among youth has been supported by other studies. Dill (2017), in his study of the role of spirituality in helping African American youth to cope with life challenges, found that along with praying and having a strong unwavering faith in God, youth volunteering or giving back to their community was also important in helping them to overcome their difficulties.

Many youth in this study reported that they were often assigned mentors at their church. Compared to the youth, the mentor is usually more experienced and knowledgeable in key areas of life. This, they claim, made a big difference because they could always have someone to turn to for guidance. Cook (2000), in his study of African American, Haitian American, and Latino male and female teenagers from an inner-city community in the United States also found that church attendance played an important role in reducing psychological stress among youth. Participants in most instances described their religious leaders using positive adjectives. Religious leaders were described as inspiring, approachable, and welcoming, supportive, encouraging and someone they can rely on. They generally saw their religious leaders as role models who gave advice, comfort, support, hope and guidance in times of difficulty. One key piece of this research that was similar to the current research is that youth in this study reported that mentoring from church leaders helped them to rise above their challenges.

One may also relate the current results to the findings of a study conducted by Mirza and Arif (2018). They conducted a study in which they investigated the protective factors that could lead to higher levels of academic resilience among at-risk youth. In this study, the researcher played the role of a supportive teacher. The findings indicated that the researcher by simply being a mentor/guide/facilitator proved to be beneficial to at-risk youth. By way of his positive, motivational, and inspiring role, the teacher aided youth in fostering their resilience. Mirza and Arif (2018) noted the important role that factors such as providing explanations, encouraging

This may be suggesting that youth in this study, by having a mentor, or a role model, to serve as a guide, might be a key factor contributing to their resilience.

Not everyone in the present study agreed that being a member of the church community benefitted youth all the time. It was suggested that older members tend to discourage youth from participating in these activities, by belittling them and making them feel as if they were always doing something wrong. The idea is that the young participants do not think the actions of their older members are genuine. Additionally, while most youth in the present study spoke of their religious leaders in a positive way, they also expressed the idea that the leaders are often too old and have difficulty relating to the youth in the church. This finding was unexpected. The present study was based on a literature review examining how religion may help youth to rise above their difficulties. In this respect, the idea that a religious community (or its leaders) might actually spoke negatively about leaders and other members of their church community also reported that their inner resources were more important in overcoming their difficulties, than support from their religious community. It could be argued that youth who rely more heavily on their internal resource than on their church may have had negative experiences with the church community and as a result prefer to rely on their own resources rather than the church.

Some participants in the present study also stated that their church assisted youth directly with advancing their education. They reported that their church community provided opportunities for youth who did not complete high school to be engage in an adult learning programme, and sometimes provided bursary assistance for university. The extent of these contributions can only be fully understood if the nature of the communities from which these youth originate are taken into consideration. As indicated in the introductory sections of this paper, youth participants in this research are from low-income areas. Frank and Saulnier (2017) stated that the Canadian Census conducted for 2015 indicated that the poverty rates for children

in North and East Preston were 40% and 38.9%, respectively. They also noted that when compared to other sections of the HRM, the Preston area also has a higher percentage of residence with high school education or less, and expectedly a lower percentage of university graduates. Fairview has similar levels of undereducation and poverty (Ramos & McNabb, 2018). Studies have demonstrated that living in a low-income community and family, and having limited education can increase the possibility of youth engaging in at-risk behaviours (McWhirter et al., 2017; Croisant et al., 2013; Oman et al., 2013). The church helping youth to complete their high school education may help them to be more employable since many youth in these communities did not finish high school. Additionally, providing bursary assistance may also help youth in these low-income communities to help cover the cost of their education.

Also of importance is the indirect positive results of being attached to a faith and participating in religious activities. For instance, Ruth Noted

[H]aving youth gathering, it took care of stuff you did in your free time, instead of going out and getting involved in things...h
to go to
2021).

(Ruth, December 29,

A preoccupation with church activities may cause youth to spend more time around other church members who have similar values and beliefs about life. At the same time, it might reduce the youth engaging in other activities outside the church, or bonding with the

. By attending church activities, youth may be less likely to engage in at-risk behaviours because they spend less time in the social or physical environment that would encourage such behaviours.

Application of Theoretical Framework

As indicated in earlier sections of this paper, the researcher intends to use

(1979) Social Ecological Model to explain the findings of this research. This model considers the interplay between the individual, groups and institutions in society in attaining resilience. This model is appropriate because the researcher is of the view that while individual qualities are important in overcoming difficulties, support from other individuals, groups and institutions are also important. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), all things in a human development, one must also understand the ecological system in which this development occurs. These influences are bidirectional in nature, in that they influence each other. Bronfenbrenner (1979) further argued that the environment in which the child develops has five ecological systems that are interrelated and influences each other. They are the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem. The microsystem interacts directly with the child in his immediate environment. Some examples of these are parents, close family members, peers, friends, and the church. The mesosystem relates to the interactions between the -system does not contain the child and affects him/her indirectly rather than directly. Examples of this would

iefs

and ethnicity,

that may affect youth development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem does not relate to the direct environment in which the child exists, but rather, the established culture in which the child develops. It encourages the transmission of values. Finally, the chronosystem relates to any

changes in the environment and patterns in the course of a life that might affect the development process. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), how the developing child interacts with each system will influence their development. At the centre of this model is the individual with his/her personal qualities and traits that will interact with these systems to produce an outcome.

The main findings of this research have indicated that religion/spirituality plays a role in different systems and institutions around them. The results have indicated that support from peers, parents, close family members, pastors and other church members were helpful in their resilience. These groups represent what Bronfenbrenner (1979) would refer to as part of the microsystem. He suggested that a positive development will take place if there is a positive interaction between youth and this system. Evidence of microsystem support can be found in the results of this study. For instance, when asked about how she manage to overcome her difficulties, Naomi noted that it has to do with the people in her immediate surroundings (e.g., peers, parents, pastors). This is probably an example of what Bronfenbrenner (1979) meant when he suggested that that support from the microsystem can help youth in their positive development.

The mesosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner (1979), relates to the interaction between the different microsystems. He noted that the nature of their relationships will affect youth development in one way or the other. In this research, there have been several examples of the harmony between the different mesosystems, which according to Bronfenbrenner (1979) is important for positive child development. There is evidence that the church, parents, close family members, peers, and other church members and the pastor worked in harmony with each other.

The fact that close family, friends, peers, and church had similar goals, this help to facilitate youth being more resilient. If there was conflict between them probably this would have made youth less resilient. In her quest to overcome her difficulties. Ruth noted that

Talking to family as well about faith and God too can help you overcome difficulties (Ruth, December 29, 2021).

And

Bathsheba also noted,

I would say like in junior high there were definitely a lot more things that I could have done but because of my friends and family encouraging me to do church activities. Even my mom wanted me to go even when I did not want to.

These statements demonstrate not just how youth benefit from supportive relationships. They also demonstrate how one part of the microsystem supports another. For instance, family and friends (microsystem) encourage youth to engage themselves in church(microsystem) activities. Parents, close family members, and peers were actively engaged regarding church, and by so doing triggers the positive influence of the mesosystem.

Bronfenbrenner (1979)

development. To him, the exosystem is a part of the social ecological system that impacts the child indirectly. As mentioned earlier, this includes, but is not limited to the mass media, suggest how they use the internet to listen to gospel music, which helped them to be more resilient. The internet could be interpreted as mass media in this sense, and from this perspective may serve to help youth rise above their difficulties. There is also evidence that youth may have received support from people in their extended family.

The macrosystem

As noted earlier, examples of these are the poverty levels, ethnicity and socioeconomic status of the youth. Because youth in this study are from low-income areas and belong to ethnic minority groups, it could be argued that the macrosystem did not contribute much to their resilience. It is quite possible that this reality may have made their ability to rise above their difficulties much more challenging. However, it must be noted that their involvement in their faith helped them to deal with issues in their communities such as economic hardships, community violence and racism. Additionally, as mentioned previously, youth also mentioned that they often volunteered in their communities. This could be interpreted as contributing to, or helping to improve the microsystem.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979) the chronosystem relates to any changes in the environment . Two important life events that are reported in this research may have contributed in this study. The first relates to their birth and their second to their adolescent years. Youth reported that they were born into their faith. The fact that they have been involved in their faith from very early in life may have instilled in them important lessons for survival. Being resilient is probably just one. It may be quite possible that if they were introduced to their religion much later in their lives it might not have been so useful in helping them to overcome their difficulties. Additionally, as noted in the results section, a majority of youth reported that they began taking their faith more seriously after some significant life event. These significant life changes occurred when these youth were in their teenage years. It is widely held by researchers in the area of human development (e.g., Erikson, 1960;1980) that during this period youth are focused on establishing their personal identity, and as such they seek to establish relationships with

others and may look to institutions for reassurance. Since these changes happened during adolescence, perhaps this situation helped youth to gravitate more toward peers, church members (relationship with others) and the church (institution for reassurance). Because the events that caused youth to become more serious about their faith took place in their teenage years, an exact time in the youth development, this may represent aspects of what Bronfenbrenner (1979) referred to as the chronosystem. In this situation, the chronosystem encouraged resilience rather than hindered it.

By applying the social ecological model to the findings of this research, it is probably easy to see how the individual (e.g., personal qualities), the microsystem (e.g., peers, parents, pastor, church) the mesosystem (e.g., interrelations between church and parents/peers), and the chronosystem (e.g., taking religion more seriously in teenage years) contributed

youth to rise above their difficulties. conditions (e. g., poverty and low socioeconomic status) that defined them as at-risk in this research in the first place.

Limitations

The findings of this research suggest that religion/spirituality plays a significant role in fostering resilience among at-risk female youth in low-income areas of the HRM. This research reiterates the findings of other studies suggesting that religion is instrumental in helping youth to overcome their challenges. It also indicates that resilience may not be solely the result of individual traits but is also the product of supportive relationships with other members of society. Despite these important findings, there are several limitations to this study.

This study encountered had difficulty recruiting participants. No doubt, this was partly due to the fact that COVID-19 restrictions limited the movement of people, and therefore affected the ease at which the researcher was able to access a church-going or a spiritual population under normal circumstances. For instance, it was harder to meet people face-to-face and explain or advertise the research. This was probably compounded by the sociodemographic variables being studied in this research. In order to study resilience among at-risk youth in low-income areas, the researcher used employment and/or university attendance as indicators of resilience. While this design was necessary in order to operationalize resilience among at-risk youth, using university/college matriculation as indicators of resilience decreased the pool of potential participants that could be recruited, particularly since the study was conducted during COVID-19 study-at-home lockdowns, which saw post-secondary institutions offering online-only courses. As it was noted in earlier sections of this paper, Frank and Saulnier (2017), noted that compared to other parts of the HRM, low-income areas had a higher percentage of high school education or less, and were less likely to pursue university education (Ramos & McNabb, 2018). This reality would have made it more difficult to find participants from these areas who were enrolled in a postgraduate program. These youth may be less likely to be gainfully employed if they do not have the requisite education. These factors together may have helped to contribute to the difficulty experienced in recruiting participants.

As also indicated in the results section, the researcher only managed to recruit Christian participants, despite making attempts to gather information from participants from other religions. It stands to reason that because Christianity is the major religion in Nova Scotia, there would be a greater chance that they would be more likely to be recruited for participating in this research compared to any other religious groups. As a result, the reader should be mindful that

these findings speak more about the role of Christianity in fostering resilience rather than how religion or spirituality in general encourages resilience. There might also be a problem attempting to attribute the influence of spirituality on resilience in this research. Attempts at recruiting youth who would consider themselves to be spiritual did not materialize. As such, the information gained from this research may be skewed in the direction of religiosity rather than providing information about religion and spirituality equally.

It also turns out that only Christian females participated in this research even though the researcher attempted to recruit members of other faiths/genders. It is known from reading Schnabel (2015) that in the Western world women appeared to be more religious than men. Since a greater proportion of women are involved in Christianity in the Western world, this may have contributed to the difficulty in finding male participants, and thus made available only a higher proportion of women.

Another reason for the difficulty in finding youth participants may be related to the secularization thesis. Studies have found that over the past decades there might have been a decline in the influence of religion decades, the religious landscape in Canada has undergone significant changes, including a decline in religious affiliation and the practice of religious activities, both collectively and individual HRM as well.

Additionally, this research was conducted using five (5) Christian female youth from low-income areas in the HRM. Four of these females were African-Nova Scotian and one was a Filipino-Nova Scotian. With such small, largely homogenous, and unrepresentative sample, it would be difficult, if not impossible to make any generalization about the current findings to

youth in general. For instance, even though it was found that religion played a significant role in resilience among youth in this study, the findings cannot be applied to all youth.

In addition to this, the way participants were recruited may have led to more positive responses about their faith rather than neutral or negative responses. To gain access to participants, the researcher first contacted religious leaders seeking permission and assistance to recruit members of their organization. The religious leader would have had the opportunity to decide who participates and who does not. It is likely that church leaders choose church members who she/he thinks will represent their faith or denomination well in an interview. A second, and related problem is the idea that because participants know that their church leaders are aware of their participation in the research, they may have responded more positively about their church, faith, or religion.

Furthermore, the use of the snowballing technique as a means of recruiting participants may have reduced the diversity of responses in the data. After the first two participants completed their interviews, they were asked to other church members they think might be interested in participating in the research. In addition to belonging to the same church, interviewed participants are probably more likely to choose other youth with the same ideas, ideologies, interests, and outlook on life.

Conclusion and Future Research

The results of this research indicate that religion plays an integral role in helping youth in low-income areas to rise above their difficulties. This research also reiterated the idea that resilience does not rest simply in individual qualities, but it is the result of supportive relationships with peers, friends, church members, family, and the input of community resources.

It was seen how religion/spirituality relate to others. Also, this research, by using a qualitative methodology, gained some insight into the thoughts, feelings and experiences of resilient and spiritual/religious youth.

Previous studies had demonstrated that religion/spirituality was able to foster resilience in other cultures and societies. This current finding is indicating that this may hold true for female youth living in low-income areas in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Because of this finding, it might be useful for youth treatment institutions to start entertaining the idea of incorporating

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to rise above his/her difficulty, then some thought must be put into the idea of how his/her spirituality can be utilized in the helping process.

While important insights were gained from conducting this study, the researcher, by being involved in the process, was confronted with questions that could not be answered in this research. As indicated in the limitation section, only a small group of Christian female youth took part in this study. Future research should use a larger sample size with youth from several different faiths, and other genders to arrive at a more resounding answer to the question about the role of religion in fostering resilience. The current study found that religion helps to foster resilience among female youth in low-income areas. A question that is still unanswered is whether religion/spirituality plays similar roles in the lives of youth in high- or middle-income areas. Future research should also investigate whether there are any gender or racial differences in how religion help youth to rise above their difficulties. The results of this research showed that most youth recommitted themselves to their faith during their teenage years. This may suggest that religious commitment levels change throughout the life course. Future research could

explore if there is a point in adolescence when they are more likely to benefit from religion in their quest to rise above their difficulties.

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Appendix 1: Request to Access Youth Members

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am Lucan Johnson, a final year student in the Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study programme at Mount Saint Vincent University. To complete my degree, I must conduct an original research on an area that is relevant to improving the lives of children and youth. I have
-risk Youth in the

understand the role religion/spirituality in helping youth to overcome their difficulties.

It is with this goal in mind that I am seeking your permission and assistance in recruiting youth from your organization, with whom I can conduct interviews. I am interested in interviewing youth members between the ages of 19 and 30 who live in Spryfield, Fairview, North Dartmouth, or the Preston area. The 0 mn1a4(mm)-3(ec11(z)4(a) o li)ly engt The bePzao Ac6(gThef(c)4(5(F) fbe)3[(Fouth i

Research Participants Needed!

- Are you:**
- i) A youth between 19 and 30 years old?**
 - ii) Religious or Spiritual?**
 - iii) From (did you grow up in) Spryfield, Fairview, North Dartmouth or the Preston area?**
 - iv) Attending university/college or gainfully employed?**

If you meet the above criteria, I am kindly requesting your participation in a one-on-one interview session that will be aimed at getting a better understanding of the role which spirituality and/or religion have played in your life.

Each participant will receive a \$15 gift card.

If you are interested in contributing to the body of knowledge in this area, please contact Lucan Johnson, the principal investigator/graduate student at lucan.johnson1@msvu.ca or XXX-XXX-XXX.

Appendix 3: Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Child and Youth Study, Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of the requirements for completing a Master of Arts in Child and Youth Study, I must conduct an original research on an area that is relevant to improving the lives of

among at-

In this study, I am seeking to conduct interviews with youth between the ages of 19 and 30 who live in Spryfield, North Dartmouth, or the Preston area. Participants must be actively engaged in the practice of their faith, either individually or through a faith community. They must also be gainfully employed or attending a post-secondary institution (or both).

You are being asked to participate in a one-on-one interview session in which you will discuss your feelings, thoughts, and experiences regarding your faith, where I will ask you open-ended questions about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences, in relation to your religiosity/spirituality. This session will be conducted online, through Skype, Facetime, or a similar electronic means and will last between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed put in written form to ensure data accuracy. You will be given a \$15 gift card as a thank you for your participation.

All information that you supply provide during the interview will remain confidential. No part of the research will provide any identifying information. be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research (you will be given a pseudonym, in the final thesis and any publication that may arise from this). In a similar fashion, all identifying data will be removed or changed before the publication of the final thesis (ex. names of schools or organizations you have attended, etc.). Your data will be safely stored in a password-protected computer and a locked cabinet. Only myself, the Principal Researcher and my Thesis Supervisor will have access to this information. Furthermore, all recordings and transcripts of interviews will be immediately destroyed, one year after the end of this study. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the fullest extent possible. However, given the close-knit nature of many faith communities, I cannot guarantee that your identity may not be identified, in any final publication. Also, while I will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of your information, I have a legal obligation to report anything that you tell me, that may indicate that you intend to harm yourself, or others.

I do not foresee expect any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research. However, shou
have to answer any question which you do not want to answer. In addition, your participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and You may withdraw freely from this study at any stage, and for any reason, up to the point at which the results are being written into the thesis. Your decision to withdraw will not influence the outcome of this study, nor the nature of your relationship with your University, nor any other organization with which you might be affiliated, either now or in the future.

If you have questions or comments regarding this study, please contact my Supervisor, Dr. Fernando Nunes, Department of Child and Youth Study, Mount Saint Vincent University at fernando.nunes@msvu.ca, or at (902) 457-6424.

This research has been reviewed by the Ethics Review Board of Mount Saint Vincent University and conforms to the standards of the guidelines of the Canadian Tri-Council on Research Ethics. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, or if you have complaints or concerns about this research, you may contact Brenda Gagne, Research Ethics Coordinator, at Brenda.gagne@msvu.ca or 902-457-6350. I am seeking your consent to participate in this research, and I look forward to your participation.

the above description of this current research project and I am willing to participate and to have my interview audio-recorded.

Appendix 4: Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Today, I want to ask you a few questions about your experiences, feelings, and thoughts regarding your faith. You are encouraged to answer freely, as there are no right or wrong answers. As we have discussed when you sign your consent form, your confidentiality will be maintained throughout the entire research process.

Research Questions

General Questions

1. How did you become involved in your faith?
2. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the highest and 1 being the lowest, how would you describe your level of spirituality/religious beliefs? Could you explain your answer?
3. In practicing your faith, do you attend mass/mosque, youth camp, and other organized religious activities or do you worship in private?
 - a. If you do both, what constitutes the bulk of activities you engage in?
4. Could you describe as much as possible what a regular religious meeting or spiritual activity is like?

Specific Questions

5. Can you describe to me the ways in which your faith helps you to stay out of trouble (e.g., avoid crime and drugs, stay in school, etc.) and deal with practical difficulties (e.g., problems with money, violence in the community, pressure to join gangs or use drugs?).
 - a. Could you give an example?

- b. Are you able to identify and describe scriptures, teachings, and/or rules that guide your behaviour in this regard?
6. Could you identify and explain some of the religious/spiritual practices you engage in when faced with life challenges?
 - a. Of these activities that you mentioned, could you say which is most/least important to you, and why?
 - b. How important it is to have other people participating in these activities with you?
7. Which of the two would you consider to be more useful in helping you to rise above your difficulties: Your inner resources or support from your religious community?
 - a. Could you give reasons for your answer?
8.
more about this.
9. How would you describe your emotions and general outlook on life before and after participating in a religious/spiritual activity?
10. In what ways do you think that participation in religious/spiritual activities/practices influence your thoughts, feelings, and actions toward self and others?
11. What is it about your religion/spiritual practices that causes you to have a positive mood/outlook on life?
 - a. Can you relate to any scripture, practice, teaching, or activity that you find most effective at achieving this?
12. Can you recall not being a part of a religious community or not participating in any spiritual activity?
 - a. How would you compare that time to your life now?

13. Do youth think that your quality of life is different than the quality of life of youth who are not religious or spiritual? Could you explain your answer?
14. Do you believe that there are consequences for not being religious or spiritual? Could you explain your answer?
15. What do you think is most important about being religious or spiritual?
16. In your opinion, how important is participation in organized religious activities (e.g., Mass, praise and worship and crusades) compared to non-institutionalized forms.
17. Is the way you practice your faith driven by your personal values and beliefs or by external benefits and rewards (e.g., job opportunities, network, possibility of meeting friends)? Could you explain in more detail?
18. Do you think that being a member of a religious community make it easier for youth to have a positive life by providing access to resources/opportunities such as skills training, preparation for the world of work guidance, and/or mental health support? Could you give me reasons for your answer?
19. How would you describe your spiritual/religious leader?
 - a. How does your perception of him/her help you to overcome your difficulties?
20. Do other members of your religious community, or others who share your spiritual orientation, contribute to resolving your difficulties?
21. Is there anything else that I should know about the way that your religious practice or orientation has helped you to overcome the difficulties in your life?