

Protective Factors that Promote Resilience in Alcoholics

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ABSTRACT

In this study 3 adults who previously considered themselves alcoholics and binge drinkers were interviewed about the protective factors in their lives that led them to overcome their addiction and maintain long term sobriety. The results of these interviews and an analysis of research suggest that self-determination (grit), faith (spirituality), and intelligence (cognition) were the key protective factors in their resilience and ability to maintain long term sobriety.

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The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimated that in 2016 approximately 20.1 million Americans struggled with some type of substance abuse disorder (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, 2017). Out of those 20.1 million Americans, 80% struggled with alcohol. The most common treatment for alcohol addiction in the United States is Alcoholics Anonymous, which only has a successful recovery rate of between 5-10% (Slusser, 2014). Additionally, the ASAM (American Society of Addiction Medicine) states that only around 10% of individuals who join a 12-step program ever maintain long term sobriety. The purpose of this paper is to explore the resilience of those individuals who have overcome alcohol addiction and maintained long-term sobriety.

Alcohol abuse is a major problem in the United States because of the detrimental physical, social, emotional, and financial effects it has on individual's lives and our society as a whole. Alcohol abuse is defined by SAMHSA as "drinking five or more alcoholic drinks for men and four or more alcoholic drinks for women on one occasion", termed as binge drinking. Binge drinking is the most common, costly, and deadly pattern of excessive alcohol use in the United States (Esser et. al, 2014). In 2014 one in six adults in the United States reported binge drinking an average of four times per month, and while the amount of alcohol consumed by binge drinking was done mostly by younger adults between the ages of 18-34, more than half of all total binge drinkers are 35 years of age and older. (Kanny et. al, 2015).

Research has demonstrated that there is a causal relationship between alcohol abuse and more than 200 disease and injury conditions (Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health, 2018). Globally, there are 3 million deaths each year as a result of detrimental use of alcohol, which represents 5.3% of all deaths worldwide. Additionally, substance abuse disorders such as

alcoholism costs Americans close to \$200 billion annually in healthcare, legal issues, and lost workplace productivity. Alcohol abuse can also detrimentally affect children, marriages, and interpersonal relationships. Families that had at least one parent abusing a substance report disruption of attachment, roles, routines, communication, and finances (Lander, 2013). These families were often characterized by an environment of conflict, secrecy, violence, abuse, and fear.

While alcohol abuse is hard to overcome, certain protective influences in an individual's life are sources of resiliency. Research has demonstrated that resilience emerges from commonplace protective factors such as a healthy human brain in good working order, close relationships or an attachment with competent and caring adults, effective communities and family systems, and beliefs in the self (Masten, 2014). However, the details of resiliency can be complex and controversial (Luthar, 2006). When it comes to overcoming any substance abuse addiction, each person in the world has unique cultural, developmental, cognitive, and social backgrounds, all of which interact and create complex questions when trying to pinpoint a definitive answer as to why some people succeed in overcoming addiction and others don't. Despite this complexity, through interviews and research I have found that the most powerful sources of resilience in overcoming substance abuse addiction came from the protective factors of self-determination (grit), faith (spirituality), and intelligence (cognition).

Resilience

What is resilience? Whether it's among young people, families, schools, communities, organizations, economics, or our ecosystem, resilience can be defined as "the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development" (Masten, 2014). Positive adaptive capacities are naturally embedded in all

individuals (such as intelligence, self-determination, competence), parent-child relationships, communities, religion, or culture (Luthar, 2006). Within the context of this paper, resilience signifies the capacity of an individual to overcome a substance abuse addiction, adapt successfully to the negative disturbances that it is causing, and maintain long term sobriety.

Protective factors are the core of what promote successful adaptation, recovery, and resiliency. Scientists have often wondered why some children can function from terrible backgrounds and negative environments while others cannot. Research has shown that powerful protective forces appear to be operating on behalf of the healthy, functioning individuals from difficult or chaotic backgrounds (Masten, 2014). These protective forces can range anywhere from higher quality caregiving and more positive and nurturing relationships to better cognitive skills, greater self-efficacy, optimism, motivation to succeed, and as the individual grows older more faith and religious connections.

Self Determination (Grit)

One of the major protective factors in an individual's ability that is a source of resilience is grit. Grit is defined as the passion for a goal, and/or the consistency of interest and perseverance in the pursuit of long-term goals (as well as overcoming obstacles), and an unchanging persistence for a consistent interest despite facing adversity or failure (Duckworth et al., 2007). Within alcoholism and any form of substance abuse, grit signifies an individual's personal willpower to set goals, refrain from using a substance that they recognize is harmful to themselves, and/or the ability to maintain long term sobriety in the face of adverse pressure and temptation. Grit signifies an individual's inherent self-determination to succeed and is one of the major pathways of resiliency (Maddi, 2013). If an individual harnesses an inherently strong sense of grit they will tend to exhibit resilient behaviors when under duress.

Duckworth (2007) further emphasizes that grit is a non-cognitive trait that measures the components of passion and perseverance for long term goals. In terms of resilience, Duckworth believed that the more perseverance an individual had the higher the level of grit they possessed. This source of resilience was inherently accessible to anyone with a strong desire to succeed. The persistence of effort and force of one's character are also considered components of grit that are vital to resiliency (Incantalupo-Kuhner, 2015). Despite having certain talents or aptitude, a necessary component to being successful is the desire to push forward even when faced with difficult challenges (Duckworth, 2007; Incantalupo-Kuhner, 2015; Masten 2014). Individuals that possess more grit tend to be more committed in the long run to a cause and demonstrate stamina to persevere through negative feelings and circumstances.

Faith (Spirituality)

Another contributing source of an individual's resilience is the protective factor of faith (spirituality). Resilient people identify hope and meaning as protective influences in their lives, and individuals with a connection to religion or a strong sense of spirituality have more meaning, hope, and feelings of support (Masten, 2014). Faith and spiritual support is widely reported in studies of resilience as a protective factor (Boothby et al., 2006).

Masten (2014) further emphasizes that spiritual practices can be important in overcoming any particular adversity in an individual's life. Religion develops and transmits traditions, ideas, and practices for living that can be powerful sources of resiliency. Religion teaches self-regulation prayer, self-reflection, and meditation, which promote resiliency and provide guidance and comfort to members of the group (King & Benson, 2006). Additionally, deeply held religious beliefs are sources of security for an individual and provide a loving and caring spiritual figure in an individual's life that can be a source of resilience and strength. Religion

provides a sense of connection that is often experienced as a relationship much like an attachment relationship (Masten, 2014).

Resilience through faith also comes in the form of social support. Religion can provide relationships with other individuals who can be a source of tremendous support and guidance (King & Benson, 2006). Faith provides many opportunities for individuals to interact with adults and peers outside of their immediate friends and family, with people who can encourage and support the individual in their recovery and sobriety. In the case of addiction, these individuals can provide help, mentoring, and pro-social activities that encourage sobriety and recovery in the individual. These connections can also provide a deep sense a belonging, which is another protective factor that promotes resilience. (King & Benson, 2006; Masten, 2014).

Religion and faith often emerge in accounts of coping and resilience (Fernando, 2011; Masten 2014). Meditation, recitation of stories and scripture, and a particular philosophy of life that encourages acceptance and peace are associated with resilience (Fernando, 2011). Studies of children in war have also often demonstrated the remarkable impact on resilience and recovery that religious practices and faith have on an individual. Many religions teach compassion, forgiveness, honesty, and other positive virtues that instill resilience in individuals (Boothby et al., 2006).

When it comes to substance abuse addiction faith can be a powerful protective factor that provides the individual with a sense of belonging and community (Gauvain, 2013; Masten, 2014). This sense of belonging additionally transmits into resilience through traditions and practices that promote positive development in an individual's life. Many religions have ceremonies, rituals, customs, and special events that provide individuals with opportunities for involvement which can act as powerful sources of resilience as well.

Intelligence (Cognition)

An individual's level of intelligence is another protective factor that can contribute to resilience. Intelligence in general terms can be defined as the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills. It is synonymous with the terms of mental capacity, judgement, reasoning, understanding, and comprehension. Masten (2014) defines intelligence as the mental processes associated with adaptation to our environment. Intelligence can also be conceptualized as the "capacity for good adaptation" in the context of significant hardship (Avci et al., 2013).

Intelligence scores academically have been associated with better functioning, both in low and high stress conditions (Luthar, 2006). Additionally, intelligence can be considered as self-awareness, which is a powerful protective factor that can motivate, encourage, enhance, and promote resilience in an individual. Intelligence can also be seen as a collection of abilities involving judgement, common sense, initiative, and adaptive behavior (Masten, 2014). Intelligence has been a clear marker for resilience and success under a variety of difficult circumstances, and evidence exists that intelligence is a protective influence when adversity is particularly high.

Avci et al., (2013) elaborates on the idea that intelligence can be connected to a multi-component protective factor that sets up several resources: the capacity of the individual to discover or recognize resources crucial for maintaining well-being, the capacity of the individual to locate these resources in their surroundings, and the capacity of the individual to utilize those resources. Intelligence as a protective factor is also connected to mastery motivation and the desire to succeed (Masten, 2014). Mastery motivation can be defined as the desire to challenge and improve oneself, which is an important protective drive in resilience and/or when attempting to overcome an addiction.

Research has also shown that the effective use of cognitive skills also are associated with the ability to cope better with stress (Avci et al., 2013). Avci describes how EF (executive functioning) is responsible for the regulation of our cognitive processes, and that higher EF capabilities and individual has (which can be developed as well) can facilitate positive adaptations to stressors and thus resilience. EF is also associated with working memory, speed of processing, and inhibition, all of which promote resilience and positive adaptation outcomes in response to stressors. (Avci et al., 2013; Masten, 2014).

Method

Procedure

Research on substance abuse, resilience, success rates, intelligence, spirituality, and grit were collected within the past 12 years through Chapman Library databases. The keywords used in the search were “substance abuse”, “addiction”, “alcohol abuse”, “resilience”, “intelligence”, “self-determination”, “grit”, “faith”, “spirituality”, and “recovery”.

The participants were of a convenience sample, recruited by social outreach. Three men who met the criteria of being alcoholics, and having maintained sobriety and recovered from their substance abuse addiction for at least 10+ years were selected to participate in this study. The participants also met the criteria of having successful and healthy interpersonal relationships (friends, marriage, mentoring relationships). The three interviews were conducted in person and took place in a private setting. The interviews were semi-structured, each lasting approximately 2 hours. Interview questions were composed to gather information of the participant’s experience before, during, and after being addicted to substance abuse (See Appendix A). The interview questions focused on strengths, support systems, turning points, and recovery. The interviews were documented through audio-recording and personal notes with the permission of the

participants. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participants and their families.

Participants

Paul. Paul is a 75 year old man and father of two who currently resides in Rancho Palos Verdes, California with his wife. He is retired and previously worked in the field of engineering as a marketing and sales executive. Paul was born and grew up in Latvia about 3 miles away from the Russian border during World War II. He remembers as a young child the Russians invading Latvia and forcing him and his family to flee due to them being put on a “death list”.

His strongest (and only) memory of that time is that of his parents hiding him under a pile of dead leaves near the side of the road and telling him not to move or make any sounds until the soldiers had passed, and of two soldiers stopping near his hiding spot to smoke a cigarette. Paul and his family eventually made it to the Allied forces and stayed in refugee camps until the end of the war, after which Paul’s family was sent to the United States as part of a visa program.

Paul’s earliest experiences in the United States were of hard labor and poverty. He remembers his father having to work difficult and menial jobs mending fences and how much it physically broke him down. Paul’s family relocated often until they settled in Echo Park, California, where he attended high school. Paul did well in school academically however he was not keen on being social. He remembers being asked to join the football team and hating it. Paul preferred to be alone due to his upbringing and language barrier, but due to his success in school, being good at sports, and other people liking him he was forced by his peers and coaches to be social and participate further in sports.

Paul initially tried alcohol in high school at the request of his football coach who told him to drink 3-4 beers each night in order to put on more weight (he was a lineman). Paul estimates

that he was probably 15 at the time. Paul later graduated and did so well academically that he had the choice between UCLA and USC. Paul's mother was a good influence on his life, however she had her own way of parenting which was based on the hard lifestyle of their eastern-European origins. She once told Paul in broken English "Do whatever you want, but if you get arrested, I not come pick you up." Paul remembers this quote and said that it kept him from getting into too much trouble growing up. Paul reported that his mother encouraged him to choose engineering as a major due to his cousins also being engineers and having successful and well paying jobs. One of Paul's biggest motivators was his desire to get out of the poverty that his family was living in. He remembers making a promise to himself that he would never live in a place like the one that he grew up in, and this motivated him so much that he forced himself to put academics over everything else in college, and he graduated with a degree in engineering and almost double majored in mathematics as well. Amazingly, Paul humorously remarked during the interview that he "hated engineering and hated math, however he was so motivated to have a better life that he wasn't going to let anything stop him from succeeding."

Paul had a knack for communication and interpersonal relationships and recognized that he could use his engineering degree and knowledge of the field to become an expert salesman in engineering products, something that there wasn't much of in terms of a skillset at the time. This put Paul in high demand and he quickly rose through the ranks of corporate companies. By his early thirties was already a marketing director of major engineering firms in the US and was the leading expert in a variety of niche engineering specialties. He was making a lot of money and reported that in addition to his body's high level of tolerance for alcohol this became a bad combination.

Paul remarked that he was always a highly functioning alcoholic. He was able to drink

heavily and still perform his job, and so he reported that his career was never in jeopardy as people couldn't reprimand him or say anything negative about his drinking. He was always able to balance both things at once throughout his career, leading him to continue drinking heavily every day for more than 25 years. Paul remarked that he preferred beer but also drank hard alcohol and soon took up a passion for cigars, which "grew to a monthly cost of about the amount of his monthly mortgage payments."

Paul was eventually confronted by his wife and aging health and eventually admitted he had a problem and joined a recovery group at his local church, which he states as having the most profound impact on him. He stated that through self-discovery, learning more about God, and the social supports that existed through his small group and church was he finally able to get the healing, support, and strength he needed to overcome his alcohol addiction.

Randy. Randy is a 67 year old father of three who currently resides in Rancho Palos Verdes, CA. He is retired and use to work as an engineer for companies such as Raytheon, Northrop Grumman, and Boeing. Growing up as a "latchkey kid", Randy remembers his parents never being home. Randy felt like he had to do everything for himself such as making dinner after school and breakfast in the mornings. Randy's parents were caring but detached. He doesn't remember too much warmth in his house but he did remember that they would compliment him and give him praise when he got good grades, motivating him to put do well for their approval.

Randy always did well in school and cites his academic intelligence as being a major advantage in his life. Randy constantly sought out his parent's approval and attention and did the best thing he knew how in order to get it, which was to get good grades and "succeed in life". Randy was also very social and considered himself to be the "life of the party" in high school and beyond. He had lots of friends and remembered having a very social lifestyle as a youth.

Randy partied often and had his first alcoholic drink in high school. As Randy grew older his partying and outgoing lifestyle led him to begin taking and trying harder drugs. He experimented with cocaine, hallucinogenics, and prescription drugs. On the outside, Randy remarked that everything seemed to be going well. He had a good paying job, he was married, and he was living a “successful and independent adult life” that he thought he was always suppose to be having. However, the stress of Randy’s job and the long hours started to build up and issues began to occur between him and his wife. When his marriage began falling apart Randy began to drink regularly every night upon his return from work. The strain between him and wife grew and they eventually divorced. Soon after, Randy’s parents died. This emotional toll was large on Randy and further turned him to alcohol to soothe and self-medicate himself. He also continued to use other drugs and from there things spiraled out of control.

A big factor for Randy’s resiliency was that he one day admitted that he had a proble on his own volition. He acknowledged that he had a problem and decided to attend rehab on his own accord. Going to a recovery group and seeing/hearing the stories of the other men there, Randy said that listening to the others convinced him that he needed to stop drinking alcohol immediately as he didn’t want to end up like them. Randy started to attend a new recovery group at a local church and eventually got involved as a leader and began to give back to the new men who joined. He stated that being involved in the group and giving back was another positive influence for him and a source of resilience that helped him recover and maintain his sobriety from alcohol. Volunteering, a sense of meaning and purpose, and belonging to the small group were all major aspects of his faith that he said played a huge role in his future sobriety and resilience.

Trevor. Trevor is a 60 year old single man who doesn’t have any children and lives

alone. He resides in Torrance, California. Trevor was 2 years old when his father died of natural causes. His mother re-married and Trevor was 6 when his step-father died of natural causes.

When Trevor was 11, his mother re-married and his second step-father raised him until he was 19, and then he then died as well. Trevor losing these three paternal figures in his life remarked that this had a traumatic effect on him and often led him to feel a lot of shame and guilt later in life, as he felt like “he did something that caused them to die”. Trevor is very overweight and this was the case in high school as well. He remembers constantly being bullied for it as a child and stated that he didn’t have that many friends growing up and did not get to do anything social as a child. He spent most of his high school years working for his second-father, who was a mechanic, and felt like he missed out on being a normal kid.

Trevor was very intelligent and also very good with his hands. Trevor had a natural skillset for fixing parts and as a mechanic learned quickly from his stepfather. Trevor stated that he built his first car engine from scratch when he was 16. Trevor later took up woodworking and welding in high school through an extracurricular class and excelled in those as well. Trevor remarked that his teacher in those classes was a mentor to him and helped him get his first job when he graduated for a major manufacturing company in the South Bay. It was during this period after graduation, when he was 18, that he had his first beer.

Trevor said that he used to go to bars and restaurants with his coworkers who were all over 21, and that during lunch they use to order alcoholic beverages and pass them to him. Trevor later began drinking regularly and combined with all the money he was making with his job began to use most of his earnings towards purchasing alcohol and drugs. Trevor later began to use harder drugs and began experimenting with cocaine, hallucinogenics, and methamphetamine. He soon became addicted and his life spiraled out of control.

Trevor was soon fired due to poor work performance and found that he was unable to keep a steady job. Trevor's life revolved around trying to find drugs and alcohol and the means to pay for them. Trevor lost his apartment, his income, and his girlfriend at the time. He soon was homeless and living in various encampments in the greater Los Angeles area. Eventually Trevor realized that this wasn't the life he wanted and went to a local church where they were offering free dinners. He learned about a church based recovery program and immediately joined it, remarking that from that point on his life was forever changed.

Trevor began spending more time at the church and eventually began volunteering and giving time back to other members. Trevor reported that the church group provided social support, a relationship with God that he never had before, and healing for his hurts and addictions. Trevor was determined that he never wanted to go back to the life that he was living before and knew that he had to continue coming back and making an effort to attend in order to recover. He was determined and committed himself to regularly attending and participating. He eventually found the healing, recovery, and long-term sobriety that he has been maintaining for over 15+ years.

Findings

Each participant had a unique experience as a child and as an adult, however several key themes ran parallel throughout their respective stories that depict the sources of their resilience. The three common themes seen in these stories were a high level of intelligence, a strong sense of self-determination to succeed, and a spiritual relationship that presented opportunities for attachment, social support, volunteering, and a sense of meaning and belonging. These three themes were key protective factors that contributed to each of these individual's resilience and perseverance from continuing to engage in substance abuse.

Inner Strengths

Intelligence. Their level of intelligence and awareness about their own destructive paths was a key protective factor that was a source of resilience. Masten (2014) stated that competence in childhood usually begets competence later in life. Competence can be defined as salient tasks such as academic achievement, getting along with peers, rule-governed conduct, and later on in terms of friendship, romantic relationships, world success, resilience, and (for those with children), good parenting. Luthar (2006) further emphasizes this when he conducted research that found that intelligence scores in childhood were associated with better overall functioning in life, both in low and high stress conditions. This intelligence theme in all three of these individuals was a major source of self-awareness and intelligence.

Avci et. al (2013) also stated that intelligence is connected to a multi-component protection that sets up an individual's resources such as the: capacity to discover or recognize resources crucial for maintaining well-being, the capacity of the individual to locate these resources in their surroundings, and the capacity of the individual to utilize those resources. Randy depicted this awareness in stating that at his first recovery meeting he listened to the other men once and that caused him to evaluate his own life dramatically. Randy stated:

When I went to my first alcoholics meeting and heard the other men share it scared me. I knew right then that I didn't want to be where they were and I didn't want to have what happened to them happen to me. That was a big turning point for me and I knew that I needed to drastically change my life to avoid that.

Self Determination (Grit). Each individual possessed a sense of grit that served as a powerful protective factor and a source of resilience. A common theme found among all three individuals was that they each reached a turning point in their lives when they became fully

committed to recovery and which they decided upon a course of action to stop abusing alcohol and any other substances and stuck with it. While each individual reported that they relapsed once or twice after initially planning on stopping their alcohol consumption, they each became distinct from the rest of the general population statistically in that they have continued to maintain their sobriety for over a period of 10+ years since then. Paul has been sober for 10 years, Randy for 12 years, and Trevor for 15.

A key takeaway point is that each individual persevered in overcoming their substance abuse addiction through their own desire and passion to remain sober. Duckworth (2007) elaborates on this when he stated that perseverance in the face of adversity signifies the pursuit of a long-term goal (as well as the determination to overcome any obstacles in pursuit of that goal), and an unchanging determination for consistency despite facing adversity or failure. Paul, Randy, and Trevor each reported failing and all three men persevered. Paul stated:

It was really hard for me to give up my cigars and my drinking. Especially beer. I gave up hard alcohol easily, but I loved the taste of beer. However, once I reached that point when I truly realized how it was affecting my wife and affecting my body, I knew I had to stop. Ever since that point, I never looked back.

Randy had a similar motivation towards stopping his substance abuse completely:

I knew that I didn't want to be like those other guys, and I saw that was where my life was heading if I continued to drink. I saw where my future was heading and the direction that my addiction was going towards, and how powerless I was against it. I knew I needed help. I decided that I would do whatever it took to get sober and stay sober.

Trevor was also motivated to overcome his alcohol abuse and drug use at all costs.

Ever since that day I knew I couldn't keep doing this. I made a decision to go to church

that night and I never looked back. I kept coming back each night and eventually found out about a recovery group that I joined, which helped me so much. I knew that I needed to keep attending and coming back to that group as much as possible in order to maintain my sobriety, and I did that.

This drive was the source of their resilience that they harnessed when trying to overcome their alcoholism and substance abuse. As Incantalupo-Kuhner (2015) elaborated on in her research, an individual's persistency and force of character are considered components of grit that are vital to resiliency. Randy, Paul, and Trevor each possessed a strong internal motor that they utilized towards overcoming their addiction and maintaining their sobriety.

Support Systems

Faith. Faith and spirituality played the largest role of each of these individual's resilience. It provided hope, a sense of belonging, purpose, meaning, social support through their small groups and church, an attachment with God, and a strong motivation to change their lives around and succeed. It also provided empathy for other individuals who were struggling with alcohol as they had once been, which all three men remarked as being something that helped them in their recovery as well (volunteering, giving back).

Boothby et. al, (2006) and Masten (2014) both emphasize in their research that a person's faith and spiritual support is widely reported in studies of resilience as a protective factor. What Boothby and Masten didn't go into detail about how the multiple protections and benefits of faith that interact with each other, as the protections mentioned above were seen in the lives of the three individuals and were great sources of resilience.

A major source of resilience for these three individuals came through the social support system connected to their faith. Their faith and spirituality provided relationships through the

church with other individuals, which can be a source of tremendous support and guidance (King & Benson, 2006). These three men's religious affiliations provided many opportunities for them to interact with adults and peers outside of their immediate friends and family, people who encouraged and supported them in their recovery from alcohol and substance abuse. These social supports that came from other members of their church and through their small group members, who provided emotional support, mentoring, and pro-social activities that encouraged sobriety, held them accountable, and promoted resilience in each individual. King & Benson (2006) further emphasized that these connections also provide a deep sense a belonging and purpose, which is another protective factor that promotes resilience.

Fernando (2011) discussed how religious practices often can be beneficial and emerge in accounts of coping and resilience. Prayer, meditation, reading, and memorization are useful tools that can help a person overcome substance abuse addiction and be sources of resilient in the face of adversity. Paul, Randy, and Trevor all remarked on the power of prayer in their lives, and how this daily practice helped them get through stressful times. Additionally, prayer served as a reminder to the attachment figure of God, which also promotes protective factors that can be the source of resilience. Masten (2014) discussed how deeply held religious beliefs are sources of security for an individual and provide a loving and caring spiritual figure in an individual's life that can be a source of resilience and strength. Religion provides a sense of connection that is often experienced as a relationship much like an attachment relationship.

Turning Points

Each participant identified an incident or "moment of awakening" where they realized that they had the potential to have a more positive outcome for their life. Paul remarked:

One of the major turning points in my life was an incident with my wife. I could get

away with drinking everywhere else except for in my own home and with the woman who I had to be with 24/7.

Paul stated that he often isolated himself from family members to drink and smoke his cigars, and that family outings were barely remembered except through family photos where he had bloodshot eyes. Eventually his wife told him he was “one sick puppy”, which he said he never forgot. His wife eventually threatened him with divorce and after repeated arguments and battles he began to realize that his alcohol abuse might be a problem. The second turning point for Paul was when he reached the age of 60 and his body began to break down. He started losing his balance and coordination and reported that falling down often was a big turning point for him. The last turning point for Paul was joining a recovery group at his local church, which he states as having the most profound impact. Paul stated:

I finally began to look within myself clearly and see what a mess I really was, and to trust in God in order to get me out of this addiction. I had to humble myself and admit I needed help.

Randy cites his own awareness as a major turning point in his life, as in his thirties he realized that he didn't want to be like the other men he heard about in his substance abuse recovery group. Randy stated:

Going to rehab and listening to the other men really scared me. It was a huge turning point for me and I realized that I wanted nothing more to do with alcohol, with this lifestyle, and where I was heading if I didn't get a grip on this and stop.

He decided that he wanted something more spiritually oriented due to his upbringing in the catholic church and eventually found a recovery group at his local church, of which he attended and cites as the biggest turning point in his life. He eventually became a leader and is now giving

back to the other men that join.

A major turning point in Trevor's life appeared to him when he had been living in a tent with several other drug addicts. Trevor stated:

I stepped outside one morning to see another homeless individual squatting and defecating in front of my tent without a care in the world, as if this were normal behavior. It shocked me and I finally thought to myself What am I doing here? I deserve better than this kind of life. I know I'm capable of more than this. I immediately grabbed up all my things and left that place for good.

Words of Wisdom

Paul, Randy, and Trevor all had similar words of wisdom that they would pass down to someone else who was struggling with alcohol or a substance abuse addiction. While the three participants shared different experiences, they all underwent similar experiences in overcoming their alcohol addictions.

Paul. Humble yourself. I couldn't begin to help myself until I admitted that I had a problem and that I needed help. I think pride was a big roadblock for me, and a major milestone for me was admitting that I had a problem and asking God for help. Once I got to that point and surrendered, I began to experience recovery.

Randy. Get involved. Once you get to a certain point, help other individuals who have been where you were. Some of the best healing I have received over my hurts, hangups, and habits was when I began giving back and helping other men. Get involved with your church, with your recovery group, whatever you can do to share with others what you've been through.

Trevor. Pray. Trust that God is in control and ask him for help. The most influential and

helpful thing in my recovery and the biggest source of my resilience was from becoming a Christian and giving my life over to Jesus Christ. Once I did that, I gained a strength that I didn't have before.

Implications

The findings of this study provide several implications for further research. First, it is clear that individuals benefit from having as many protective factors as possible. School Psychologists and Counselors should take a more preventative approach towards substance abuse and future addictions and begin encouraging and developing resilience in students early on in the educational system by coming up with ways to encourage self-determination, intelligence, and a personal faith. More research would need to be done in order to figure out how to best do this in an appropriate and sensitive way, as well as in a way that includes all people.

Research has found that the earlier an individual begins abusing substances the more likelihood that a substance abuse addiction will later occur (Squeglia et. al, 2009). The brain is still developing up until the mid-20's and is highly susceptible to addiction of alcohol or any other substances at this stage. Research has shown that heavy drinking during adolescence can lead to decreased performance on cognitive tasks of memory, attention, spatial skills, and executive functioning. School Psychologists and Counselors need to encourage more education and awareness for students and young people during this age and encourage delaying any kind of alcohol or drug use until as late as possible.

School psychologists and Counselors can use the research and interviews conducted in this paper to A; encourage student's intelligence and self-determination and build up these protective factors in them (as well as help the student realize that all individuals have these inherently and can use them to be resilient) and B; encourage students to participate in some type

of social support, cultural or community group, or a faith based organization to get a sense of belonging, meaning, and purpose. Special consideration and sensitivity would need to be taken to account for different viewpoints, however it is impossible not to acknowledge the tremendous protective factor that faith and spirituality provides to an individual.

The National Association of School Psychologists points to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration) reports when discussing statistics and treatment for adolescents battling substance abuse. It mentions that only 10% of children age 10-17 and 11% of students age 18-25 admit that they have a substance abuse problem. This illustrates that awareness and preventative measures for all students are key, because a School Psychologist or Counselor never knows who is actually struggling and who will develop a problem later in life. School Psychologists and Counselors need to implement positive reinforcement and encouragement so that when future incidents and struggles do come up the students will have key protective factors to fall back on and harness their resiliency. Additionally, encouraging children and students now to become involved in a community, cultural, or faith-based organization is also vital towards building hope, belonging, meaning, purpose, and social support that promote current and future resilience. School Psychologists and Counselors should seek to build strong foundations in students now to aid them in possible difficult battles of their futures.

While there are minimal recommendations for students who struggle with substance abuse now (due to a “wait and see if there is a problem” philosophy), School Psychologists and Counselors should incorporate more of an RTI type of mode. Masten (2014) states that resiliency is a combination of unique configurations of individual risk factors and protective factors that combine to yield resilience. This research demonstrates that anyone is capable of fostering resilience, which gives hope to practitioners that resilience can be supported and promoted in

students now. Protective factors come in many forms, and the research and interviews in this paper showcase that any of the protections listed are capable of being attained by an individual in order to overcome a substance abuse addiction. Resilience research has increasingly encompassed a multiple-levels perspective, recognizing that individual development unfolds from the interactions of many systems across many different levels, both within and outside of the individual. School Psychologists and Counselors would be wise to take note.

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Appendix A

Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your yourself?
2. What are some of the things you've had to overcome in your life?
3. What were your sources of inner strength?
4. Did you have any mentors?
5. What were some of your turning points?
6. How did your family/friends/peers respond to your substance abuse? How did you respond?
7. How did you do in school? With sports?
 - a. What was easy for you?
 - b. What was stressful or difficult?
8. What are your hobbies or interests? What do you do for fun?
9. What would you like to get better at?
10. What are your future plans or goals?
11. What advice do you have for others who are experiencing adversity/challenges?
12. What was it like to do this interview?