

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Childhood should be a time that is enjoyable. However, survivors of sexual exploitation face a lot of hardships. Most efforts to build resilience are guided by western models. In Africa, especially Uganda, resilience strategies have not been fully explored to provide clarity and children voices are unheard of. In the third word it is difficult to measure resilience. The study, therefore, sought to explore the nature of hardships; understand how children and NGO staff conceptualize resilience; assess the interventions at NGO facilities and develop a resilience framework to guide delivery of resilience interventions.

Methodology: The study adopted an exploratory design, using qualitative methods to collect data in Kampala City, Uganda. Data were collected from a cross- section of NGO staffs and survivors of sexual exploitation. The study used child-friendly tools to collect responses from children. For adults FGDs, in-depth interviews and case studies were used, using a convenient sample from three NGOs. Thematic content analysis was used to generate results from the qualitative data.

Findings: I found that all survivors had been trafficked and experienced early onset of problems in homes. Furthermore, conceptualization of resilience varied among all respondents and the definition of resilience in the local context is anchored more on economic empowerment and less on psychosocial empowerment as in western hemisphere. Regarding objective two, data showed that two broad resilience building intervention areas emerged among NGOs; the psychosocial and economic empowerment, largely center-based. Additionally, there was use of outsiders, external facilitators and involvement of rehabilitated alumni. NGOs interventions utilized many tools, but most activities were largely center-based. Moreover, this study found no resilience framework tool to help NGOs in the delivery of support, and case management was underdeveloped.

Discussion: Survivors' hardships and triggers to sexual exploitation started early in life, complex at many layers of the child, family and in social systems. Conceptualisation of resilience varied and interventions were dominated by economic empowerment with less psychosocial aspects common in western world. Survivors mastery of vocational skills to solve many of their economic needs was key indicator of successful adjustment. Complementary tools, use of external facilitators, resource maps and child participation were encouraged, indicative of the need for many players and various resources in helping survivors change within their social environment validating the western theories. Large span of NGOs intervention activities is cognizant of interconnection and influence of issues affecting survivors, family and community system. Absence of the resilience framework to guide the staff could lead to neglect of core activities for children.

Conclusion: A major implication of this study is that NGO Interventions for building resilience for survivors of sexual exploitation in a low-income country are multi-faceted, layered at many levels of social system, because of many complex hardships and safety nets are weak. The findings point to the need to train NGO staffs, promotion of child recovery capital and use of standardisation guide in resilience interventions in Uganda.