



## Values Upheld within Peer Culture and Resilient Identity among Mid Adolescents (15-17 years Old) in Mbengwi Sub Division

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### ABSTRACT

Some mid adolescents in Mbengwi sub division, Northwest Region of Cameroon are faced with adverse conditions such as poverty, low socio-economic status, and loss of parent or parents that put them at risk of developing emotional and behavioural problems. Despite all these adversities faced by these adolescents, most of them still cope and develop successfully. Their ability to overcome such adversities often results from the interplay of individual characteristics, the characteristics of the family as well as those of the physical, social environment and the peer group. Hence, this study examined whether the values upheld within peer culture foster the development of resilient identity among mid adolescents. Both descriptive survey and ethnographic design were used to conduct this study. A sample of 300 mid adolescents and 10 parents were chosen for this study using purposive and incidental sampling techniques. Data were analysed following a triangulation approach in methodology, analytical process and statistical packages. Based on the above, it was realised that the “the values mid adolescents uphold” ( $X^2=95.136$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $P<0.001$ ) significantly foster the development of resilient identity (social competence, sense of purpose and problem solving) among mid adolescents. Such values realised among mid adolescents within peer groups that fosters resilient identity include: social solidarity, collaborating in harmony, employing creativity, being tolerant, patient, hardworking, persistent and accepting/taking risk. At the end of the study, it was recommended that, such values as mentioned above should be encouraged by stake holders of the community so as to enable mid adolescents to be able to overcome adversities and challenges that come their way.

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## Introduction

Adolescence is a period of intense and rapid development and is characterised by numerous developmental tasks such as gaining new and more mature relationships with others, achieving a masculine or feminine social role and achieving emotional independence from parents and other adults (Hazen, Schlozman & Beresin, 2008). For some young people this period is particularly difficult because of the presence of family and community risk factors such as parental mental illness, low socio-economic status, loss of parents, substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse or neglect that predisposes them to poor developmental outcomes.

The African worldview conceives of the adolescent as growing out of childhood and poised for adulthood that lies in the future (Araria, 2007; Nsamenang, 2002). In African social ontogeny, adolescence is regarded as a “way station” between the stages of social apprenticeship in childhood and full social integration in adulthood beginning with social entrée, a brief transitional period that may be approximated with puberty which marks the beginning of adult life (Nsamenang, 2002; Serpell, 1994).

Peer groups are especially important during adolescence, a period of development characterised by a dramatic increase in time spent with peers and a decrease in adult supervision (Pope & Ward, 1995). For many adolescents, a secure environment and a sense of belonging are sufficient to enable them to face new challenges. Programmes which emphasise group-rather than individual-activities and achievements and which advocate the importance of effort in resolving difficulties, help adolescents to develop additional sources of strength (Krovetz, 1999). Resilience is linked with two important attributes acquired by children in well-run programmes, reciprocity, a collaborative spirit which values shared activities and the contributions of peers and resourcefulness, the ability to identify the most important resources (including human resources) for resolving any difficulty, large or small, in any environment (Brooker, 2008).

Unfortunately, no published studies directly assessing peer culture and values upheld by mid adolescents within peer groups in relationship to the development of resilient identity were identified in the literature. The evidence for such agency is more obvious within African family traditions and peer cultures and activities than in the school or formal institutional education, though versions of it are to be found therein; they remain mostly unexploited, however (Nsamenang, 2008). More so, within peer groups and peer cultures, there is evidence of agency through the different works of art and different activities adolescents engage in thus permitting them to be able to overcome their harsh realities (Nsamenang, 2008; 2012).

The majority of African children and youths are not overly defeated by their difficult circumstances but instead navigate their challenges successfully into productive pathways surprisingly often outside official agendas. There is a need for more research on how these African youth successfully produce competent African self-identities (Nsamenang, 2012).

According to Nsamenang (2012), peer cultures are children’s spaces for socialising, exploratory play, play and learning, differing and worrying in child- to-child worlds limited to no adult presence. More importantly, peer cultures train in responsibility taking, but lamentably, African peer spaces have been little researched and remain uncharted developmental niches. In this light, comprehending and explaining values mid adolescents uphold in relation to the development of resilient identity among adolescents, gives opportunity to address the issue of personal agency in them which permits them to forge on in life, no matter the circumstances and difficulties that they face.

This study therefore becomes an important resource for future research in this domain, providing data and filling the gaps left by existing literature. It also ushers in an original agenda for educational practitioners, school psychologists, social workers, counsellors, adolescents and other stakeholders in

the preparation of the next generation of Cameroon. It finally provides new directions for a theoretical framework that explains peer culture and values mid adolescents uphold in relation to the development of resilient identity based on Cameroon and African realities.

### Method

Both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms were taken into consideration to conduct this study. To begin with, in order to collect quantitative data, the descriptive survey design with the aid of a questionnaire was used in conducting this study.

In addition, to collect qualitative data, the ethnographic and phenomenological approach with the aid of a Focus Group Discussion Guide and an Interview Guide were used in conducting this study.

Finally, data were analysed following a triangulation approach in methodology, analytical process and statistical packages. The Epi-Data Version 3.1 and Epi-Info 6.04d were used for data entry and analyses with the support of SPSS 17.0. Two modelling approaches were used to establish the explanatory power of the predictor variable over the outcome variable and to appraise the effect of critical indicators of both variables. The models were Binary Logistic Regression Model (BLRM) and Log-Likelihood Ratio test. The relationship between indicators was appraised using the Chi-Square test of independence. Inter-item relationship or association was assessed using the non-parametric Spearman's rho correlation test. Reliability or internal consistency of responses was assessed using Cronbachs' Alpha reliability test. For the analysis of qualitative data thematic, content and grounded conceptual modelling with the support of Atlas Ti 5.2 were used.

### Measures

Items were measured with the aid of a 4-point Likert scale questionnaire whereby respondents were required to state how they feel about each item, that is by stating whether they strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD), pertaining to the variables of the study. To facilitate analysis, responses were further collapsed into two categories (agreed and disagreed) as clearly shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Distribution of values mid adolescents uphold within peer groups**

Values mid adolescents uphold within peer groups	Agreed	Disagree d	N
Social solidarity and collaborating in harmony are very important values.	297 (99.0%)	3 (1.0%)	300
Employing creativity is a very important value.	293 (97.7%)	7 (2.3%)	300
Being tolerant and patient are very important values.	299 (99.7%)	1 (0.3%)	300
To be hard working is a very important value.	293 (97.7%)	7 (2.3%)	300
Being persistent is a very important value.	289 (96.3%)	11 (3.7%)	300
Accepting and taking risk are very important values.	271	29	300

	(90.3%)	(9.7%)	
<b>MRS (aggregated score)</b>	<b>1742</b> <b>(96.78%)</b>	<b>58</b> <b>(3.22%)</b>	<b>1800</b> <b>(100%)</b>

Looking at the above table component by component, 297 (99.0%) of the participants agreed that the first component “social solidarity and collaborating in harmony are very important values” is very important for the development of resilient identity; meanwhile 3 (1.0%) disagreed to the importance of this component.

Again, on the second component “employing creativity is a very important value”, 293 (97.7%) of the participants agreed that the component is very important for the development of resilient identity, while 7 (2.3%) disagreed to it.

Similarly, on the third component “being tolerant and patient are very important values”, 299 (99.7%) of the respondents agreed on its validity for the development of resilient identity, while 1 (0.3%) disagreed to it.

In addition, on the fourth component “to be hard working is a very important value” had 293 (97.7%) of the respondents who agreed that the indicator is very important for the development of resilient identity, whereas 7 (2.3%) disagreed over its importance.

Furthermore, considering the fifth component “being persistent is a very important value”, 289 (96.3%) of the participants agreed that it was important for the development of resilient identity, meanwhile 11 (3.7%) disagreed over its importance.

Finally, looking at the sixth component “accepting and taking risk are very important values”, 271 (90.3%) of the respondents agreed it was important for the development of resilient identity, whereas 29 (9.7%) disagreed over its importance.

In conclusion, taking into consideration the MRS (aggregated score) a majority of the participants (96.78%) agreed that the values that mid adolescents uphold within peer groups, are all important in fostering the development of resilient identity (social competence, sense of purpose and problem solving) as opposed to (3.22%) of the participants that disagreed on its importance.

## Results

**Table 2: Likelihood ratio tests predicting the effect of values mid adolescents uphold on resilient identity**

Indicators	Score	Df	Sig.
Social solidarity and collaborating in harmony are very important values	21.779	1	.000
Employing creativity is a very important value	20.909	1	.000
Being tolerant and patient are very important values	21.892	1	.000
To be hard working is a very important value	46.196	1	.000
Being persistent is a very important value.	29.489	1	.000
Accepting and taking risk are very important values	26.449	1	.000
<b>Overall Statistics</b>	<b>38.506</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>.000</b>

Binary Logistic Regression Model was used to appraise the effect of values mid adolescents uphold on

overall indicators of resilient identity (social competence, sense of purpose and problem solving). The variability explained by the model was significant (Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficient: Likelihood Ratio Tests: Chi-Square=95.136; df=6;  $P<0.001$ ;  $N=300$ ). The explanatory power of the model was 36.3% (Nagelkerke R Square =0.363). The validity of the model is also confirmed by the Hosmer-Lemeshow Test.

This test evaluates how the observed frequencies versus expected frequencies agree over the entire range of probability values. This test is a chi-square test that compares the difference between observed and expected frequencies for each of the  $2 * 6$  matrix. With this test, a non-significant chi-square is desired as to confirm the assumption that the model being tested is not different from the perfect model therefore supporting the inference that the variability explained by the model is good. In the context of this model, this assumption was not verified (Hosmer-Lemeshow test: Chi-Square=18.914; df =7;  $P=0.008$ ;  $N=300$ ).

The above usually happens in Logistic Regression, when the predictive power of individual indicators is too high to portray co-linearity. This is the case with this model whereby all the different 6 predictors as clearly shown in the table above, significantly predicted resilient identity with the P-values (0.000), which is extremely small in all the cases.

The effect of the individual model indicator was equally computed as presented in table 2 above. From the above table, it was realised that all the indicators demarcated themselves as significant predictors of problem solving as an indicator of resilient identity with P-values (0.000) in all the cases ( $P<0.05$ ).

The variability explained by this model component on resilient identity was significant (Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficient: Likelihood Ratio Tests: Chi-Square=95.136; df=6;  $P<0.001$ ;  $N=300$ ). Though the explanatory power was moderate 36.3% (Nagelkerke R Square =0.363), all the indicators significantly predicted resilient identity. Therefore in conclusion, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis was retained indicating that, there is a significant relationship between the values mid adolescents uphold and the development of resilient identity.

### **Discussion**

The above findings indicate that, mid adolescents uphold a good number of values within their peer groups, which include; social solidarity and collaborating in harmony, employing creativity, being tolerant and patient, being hard working, being persistent, accepting /taking risk, being God fearing, polite, humble, hospitable, cheerful, respectful to each other and to elders, helpful to each other in time of need and crises, kind, optimistic, determined and hardworking, patient, persistent, tolerant, adventurous, creative, collaborating and exchanging ideas with each other.

More so, it was also realised that all the above values are highly cherished and encouraged by members of the community. In this regard, such values were found to be very important in fostering the development of resilient identity (social competence, sense of purpose and problem solving) among mid adolescents and thus enable them to be able to overcome and cope normally with the different difficulties and problems that they encounter.

The above findings are consistent with the findings of Early & Vonk (2001:18), who found that, an array of personal values differentiates resilient adolescents from their vulnerable peers. These values include; effective communication and collaboration with each other and pro-active problem-solving skills and effective coping skills. According to Early & Vonk (2001), mid adolescents are enabled, through good communication skills and collaboration with each other to express their needs, thoughts and feelings. They are also able to negotiate emotionally hazardous experiences and to avoid

feeling overwhelmed and helpless in the face of adversity and difficulty, when they communicate their problems to each other and collaborate in looking for solutions to the problems.

Early & Vonk (2001:18), further found that, pro-active problem-solving skills and effective coping skills are very important values that fosters resilience among mid adolescents. The ability to cope effectively with anxiety and stress is another value which differentiates low-risk from high-risk young people. Effective coping skills influence the individual's response to stress, which in turn affects the way that person deals with conflicts with others. Depending on the young person's problem-solving skills, he or she could either cope with humour, altruism or by focusing his attention elsewhere, or he or she could withdraw, act out, etc. The resilient child would do the former (i.e. cope with humour; focus his or her attention elsewhere).

The above view is reinforced by Masten, Best & Garmezy (1990:432) and Lewis (1999:202) who suggested that children who display resilience demonstrate the capacity for solving problems and believe in their own capabilities. McWhirter, *et al.* (1998:82) agrees with this statement but emphasises the resilient adolescent's ability to consider the consequences of his or her decisions. These abilities appear to relate to high intelligence and employing creativity which will be discussed next. Smith and Carlson (1997:238) and Wang, Haertel & Walberg (1997:19) make mention of the fact that intelligence and creativity, are important values that have been linked to resilience. Wang *et al.* (1997:19) found that resilient children usually score higher on school tests and performed better in a good number of activities. Masten, *et al* (1990:432) found that more intellectually able children often have socio-economic and educational advantages, as well as more able parents. They may be able to quickly and accurately discern danger, find havens and locate sources of help and consequently adapt better in the face of adversity.

More so, McWhirter, *et al.* (1998:87) found out that, sociability and a well-developed sense of humour which is related to the development of a good self-concept have protective value for mid adolescents as their social competence elicits positive responses from others. McWhirter, *et al.* (1998:87) identified several core skills and values which are essential for satisfying social relationships and for more effective interpersonal problem solving, such as; developing and maintaining friendships, sharing, laughter and jokes with peers, knowing how to join a group activity, skilfully ending a conversation, and interacting with a variety of peers and others.

Krovetz (1999:121) also found that, a good self-concept and good self-esteem are all values that are common among resilient mid adolescents. Resilient mid adolescents, appear to have a positive self-concept and a strong feeling of self-worth. When adolescents feel good about themselves, they actively and positively become involved with and seek out others for example, educators, parents and peers. If they experience this involvement positively, they feel empowered as people in their own right who may develop a positive self-concept and self-esteem. Smith & Carlson (1997:238) and Early & Vonk (2001:12) maintain that these components together with acceptance and optimism have been linked with protection. Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana (2002:223) found out that these characteristics fit into each other in a reinforcing way.

Smith & Carlson (1997:238) also found out that, healthy beliefs and being God fearing are also important values that are associated with protection from negative outcomes among mid adolescents. Masten, Best & Garmezy (1990:432), Hood & Carruthers (2002:143) and Vakalahi (2001:37) indicate that religion may enhance positive beliefs about the self and provide social connectedness derived from abstract relationships with religious protective figures and concrete relationships provided by supportive members within a religious community.

In addition, Krovetz (1999:121) and Kalil & Kunz (1999:199) also found out that, a strong

sense of purpose is an important value that fosters resilience among mid adolescents. Resilient youth have goals, educational aspirations and uphold values such as; persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future.

More so, according to Capella & Weinstein (2001:759), peers have a strong influence on the development of any child. Although the importance of the peer group is generally recognised, the nature of the peer group is important. Peer influence may be even more powerful in situations where the adolescent receives social support. In contexts like these, the peer group may have to make up for the lack of other forms of support, including family support. If the adolescent experiences a sense of belonging, acceptance and is able to achieve an identity and absorbs certain values through the peer group, then he or she develops resilience as these qualities and the interaction with the peer group serve as protective factors (Donald *et al.* 2002:224; Smith & Carlson 1997:240; Rodgers 2002:1026). Similarly, according to Ingersoll (2004), during middle adolescence, friendship with peers and being accepted by the peer group is extremely important. This is so because, each peer group has its values and in order to be a member you must be ready to adhere to such values. The degree to which the adolescent is able to make friends and is accepted by the peer group is a major indicator of how well he or she (the adolescent) will succeed in other areas of social and psychological development.

Finally according to Bandura (1986) socio-cognitive theory, through the process of observational learning and modelling young children and adolescents have an opportunity to observe how others' behaviours and values are accepted or rejected by the peer group. Through collaborating and sharing ideas with each other in different activities performed within the peer group, expectations and value judgments are created in relation to the perceived benefits of behaving in ways that are acceptable to the group. This can build young people's self-confidence and self-efficacy in their ability to adopt new behaviours and ultimately create a sense of personal agency. Thus permitting children and adolescents to be able to cope with and effectively solve the different problems they face (Bandura, 1986).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to find out whether the values upheld within peer culture foster the development of resilient identity among mid adolescents (15-17years old). To achieve this purpose, a questionnaire was administered to a sample of 300 participants and data from the 300 participants were effectively analysed and conclusions were drawn. The research designs adopted for this study were both the descriptive survey and the ethnographic design.

The data derived were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. In inference from the above, it was obvious that, there is a significant relationship between the values upheld within peer culture and resilient identity among mid adolescents. The findings indicated that, mid adolescents uphold a good number of values within their peer groups, which include; social solidarity and collaborating in harmony, employing creativity, being tolerant and patient, being hard working, being persistent, accepting /taking risk, being God fearing, polite, humble, hospitable, cheerful, respectful to each other and to elders, helpful to each other in time of need and crises, kind, optimistic, determined and hardworking, patient, persistent, tolerant, adventurous, creative, collaborating and exchanging ideas with each other. The above values were found to be very important in fostering the development of resilient identity among mid adolescents.

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