

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS AS A COPING RESOURCE AMONG ADOLESCENTS LIVING UNDER ROCKETS FIRE: A SALUTOGENIC APPROACH

Daniella PELED¹,
Shifra SAGY²,
Orna BRAUN-LEWENSOHN³

Abstract: *The study examines community perceptions as coping resources among youth living in areas under rocket fire in the south of Israel. Community variables were examined as potential moderators and mediators of emotional reactions to stress. Data were gathered during 2007-2009 from 284 Israeli adolescents. State anger and sense of hope were measured as stress reactions. Adolescent community perceptions were investigated using a measure which integrated sense of community coherence and sense of community, and included four dimensions: influence, meaningfulness, comprehensibility and belonging to community life (IMCB). Type of community and community perceptions (IMCB) were found to be significant in explaining state anger and hope. In addition, interviews were conducted with 10 key persons working with youth in Sderot and in the kibbutzim, which enable a better understanding of the community profiles in which teenagers were living under the ongoing stress situation. Community perceptions as coping resources among youth are discussed against the backdrop of the salutogenic and ecological theoretical frameworks.*

Key-words: *Salutogenesis; coping resources; community perceptions; adolescents; stress.*

¹ Department of Education, Ben Gurion University of the Negev POB 653, Beer Sheva, Israel.
E-mail: peleda@bgu.ac.il

² Department of Education, Conflict Management & Conflict Resolution Program, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, POB 653, Beer Sheva, Israel. E-mail

³ Conflict Management & Conflict Resolution Program, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, POB 653, Beer Sheva, Israel.

1. Introduction

We employed the salutogenic approach (Antonovsky, 1987) as the theoretical framework for this study which examines the relationships between community types, adolescent community perceptions and emotional reactions of youth who live under the stress of rocket fire.

The salutogenic model defines health using a holistic approach, and suggests not only asking about risk factors but also studying health-promoting factors (Antonovsky, 1987). One of the basic ideas of the salutogenic model is that life itself is a stressful situation. Sense of coherence (SOC) is a central concept in the salutogenic model explaining the movement towards health. When facing a stressor, people with a strong sense of coherence will be motivated to cope (meaningfulness); will see the challenge as understandable (comprehensibility) and will believe that they have resources for coping (manageability). Thus, the salutogenic approach provides us with an important lens through which we can understand what distinguishes youth who show resilience when the entire community is under stress.

The salutogenic approach is integrated with the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979) to provide this study with a conceptual framework for analyzing the relationships involved in the psychological consequences of a continuing stressful situation on youth. Following Bronfenbrenner, we examined the community as an environmental resource, which could be an important factor in understanding coping in stress situations.

This pilot research was conducted among Israeli adolescents, who were exposed to continue missile attacks during 2007-2009. In the present study, we seek to gain insight into community variables as potential moderators and mediators of emotional reactions to stress. To that end, we first reviewed briefly the issue of adolescent's community perception. We then consider the operational limitations of this concept along with our attempt to build a new index refers to the adolescent's community perception (IMCB) along with the role of major relevant demographic factors such as gender and age. We then present the results of our empirical study.

2. Research Background - Rockets fire on southern communities in Israel

More than 3,000 rockets fell in the southwestern area of Israel between 2001 and 2009. About 190,000 citizens were living under potential threat of rocket fire, including the city of Sderot, and kibbutzim and moshavim located near the Gaza Strip. Life under these continuing attacks led many residents to leave the city of Sderot and the kibbutzim of the area, whether for short periods or permanently. The culmination of resident departure was in the summer of 2007, as a result of the escalation in fire (Cohen, 2007).

Adolescent community perception as a mediator of emotional reactions to stress

In this study we developed a new tool to measure adolescent community perception, which includes additional dimensions of the concepts defined by researchers as "sense of community" (Davidson & Cotter, 1986) "community sense of coherence" (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2011b) and "psychological sense of community" (Glynn, 1981). This new measurement represents feelings of adolescents towards their community. Adolescent community perception was defined in this study as the extent to which the adolescent perceives the community as a place which s/he can influence, as a significant place for him/her, as a comprehensible place, and as a place where s/he feels a sense of belonging. It includes four components: influence, meaningfulness, comprehensibility and belonging to the community (IMCB).

The first component of influence, which has been studied by several researchers measuring sense of community (e.g., Prezza et al., 2009; Evans, 2007), is considered a central dimension of sense of community experience as it is related to the adolescent's opportunities to interpret various social roles as the basis for community relations. The second component- meaningfulness- refers to the internal resources of the individual, used to consider the appropriateness of solving the particular problem (Antonovsky, 1987). Comprehensibility refers to the degree that community processes are more understandable, consistent and predictable (Antonovsky, 1987). The fourth component- belonging- refers to people's sense that they are part of the collective (Newbrough & Chavis, 1986), whether referring to the neighborhood, to the close community, to the nation or to any other group.

The concept of "sense of community" has become very popular in the last decade within a vast range of disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, social work, political science, etc.) and practices. In the context of community psychology, sense of community is considered a core construct, as well as a central value and ideal, and as such, it has been the topic of considerable research and intervention programs (e.g., Fisher, Sonn & Bishop, 2002). Further, the term has quite different meanings in commonsense discourse, and it is used to describe feelings of belonging to different kinds of communities (e.g., social organizations, formal and informal, that are bounded by a physical or geographical location - like the local community, the town or city, the nation, the neighborhood, the school, - or are based on common interests, goals or needs, - like sport groups, political groups, volunteering groups, etc).

Sarason (1974), defined the term as representing the special relationship between the individual and his/her environment. McMillan & Chavis (1986) defined the concept "sense of community" as including four components: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Studies have found these four components to be closely related and to form a relatively uniform structure, which includes the feelings and the general tendencies of the individual

towards the community (Chavis et al., 1986; Pretty, 1990). Other researchers suggest that the conceptual structure, "sense of community", does not always represent the experience and understanding of people of the community, and the phrase "sense of community" is sometimes difficult to understand (Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995).

Community perception is a broad concept about which studies have demonstrated empirically that its various components manifest themselves across settings (Arnon, Shamai & Ilatov, 2008; Prezza, Pacilli, Barbarnelli & Zampatti, 2009; etc.). However, the way the concept is expressed in different settings has remained relatively unexamined (Sonn et al., 1999). Moreover, studies have indicated that there is insufficient attention to the dynamic and specific characteristics of the community (Mykota & Muhajarine, 2005; Sagy & Antonovsky, 1986). Thus, it seems important to explore community perceptions as a coping resource with regard to the specific communities involved. Specific contexts, such as contexts caused by stress resulting from political violence (Ungar et al., 2007), are of special interest.

The tool we developed to examine adolescent community perception includes, as mentioned above, dimensions relevant to the specific community and to the population of adolescents. This is based on Antonovsky's concept sense of coherence (1996) which suggests that the individual sense of coherence is influenced by and sensitive to the individual's life experiences and his/her specific culture. Our main objective was to explore adolescent community perceptions as a significant coping resource in reducing emotional distress reactions in communities with a variety of characteristics that have been exposed to a continuing prolonged stress situation. Our hypothesis is that higher measures of IMCB will enable adolescents to deal more successfully with stress. This hypothesis is based on studies which have found positive and coherent perceptions of the community to be positively related to well-being (Braun-Lewensohn & Sagy, 2011; Arnon, Shamai & Ilatov, 2008).

Emotional reactions among adolescents in areas of political violence

Two emotional reactions were examined in our study. One of them is commonly used in research as an indicator of psycho-physiological distress (Lazarus, 1993): state anger (Spielberger, 1972). Spielberger, Jacobs, Russell, & Crane (1983) have conceptualized state anger as the experience of negative feelings similar to being annoyed or irritated, or, to a greater extent, filled with rage. During this experience, the autonomic nervous system can become aroused to different degrees depending on the situation. State anger is defined in this measure as an emotional state marked by subjective feelings that vary in intensity from mild annoyance or irritation to intense fury and rage. Anger is one of the key long-term effects of trauma exposure

of all kinds and is strongly predictive of subsequent mental health difficulties, particularly posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Hawthorne et al., 2006). Among adolescents who have been exposed to violence, anger was found as a trauma symptom (Singer et al., 1995).

The salutogenic approach has directed us to explore another variable as a stress reaction: the level of hope. Hope is defined as the interaction of wishes and expectations (Staats & Stassen, 1985). Hope involves a consideration of the future. We hope for something that is not in the present but is an uncertain future event. Staats (1989) defined hope as the interaction between wishes and positive future expectations.

Most studies examining adolescents living in conflict areas describe the effects of exposure to violence on adolescents in terms of well-being (Barber & Schluterman, 2008). Exposure to political violence can be physical and/or psychological (Nader et al., 1993; Galea, et al., 2002). It increases the risk of both emotional and behavioral problems in the short and long terms. However, results are mixed in terms of range and intensity of problems (Braun-Lewensohn, et al., 2009). Many studies in conflictual areas indicate that children exposed to political violence do not necessarily suffer from serious psychological consequences (Cairns & Dawes, 1996; Zeidner, 2005; Sagy, 2002; Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2010a). Moreover, a large body of research has suggested that exposure to prolonged stress triggers a process of modulation that is characterized by a gradual decline in the number and intensity of symptoms over time (Punamaki, 1996). These studies have found that only a small fraction of those exposed to political violence will develop long-term stress reactions, while most individuals become accustomed to living under the shadow of political violence and danger (Ronen, Rahav & Appel, 2003). In our study we aimed to deepen our understanding of state anger and hope as reactions among adolescents exposed to stress situations. Based on the salutogenic approach, and its emphasis on the ability of human beings to cope with stress and stay well (Antonovsky, 1987), we hypothesized differences in emotional responses in accordance with the degree of exposure to rocket fire, community type and community perceptions (IMCB).

Type of Community is one of the ecological cycles affecting the individual coping with stress (Ungar, 2005). A number of studies have found communal style as a predictor of better mental health compared to urban living (Benyamini et al., 2004). In a study of community resilience in several localities in the north of Israel, it was found that living in a small community in a rural environment buffers stress and promotes community resilience (Shamai, Kimhi & Enosh, 2007). Type of community also makes an important contribution in the context of preparation for dealing with the threat of future terrorism (Shamai, Kimhi & Enosh, 2007). These results emphasize the importance of looking at individuals in their ecological contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and the relations between the community context and emotional reactions and adjustment to stress.

The Role of Demographic Characteristics

The role of demographics, such as gender and age, in explaining youngsters' psychological outcomes has often been investigated. Most studies confirm the importance of gender, as girls generally report more PTSS (Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome) and internalization of difficulties compared to boys, who report more externalization of problems and risk-taking behavior (Hoven et al., 2002; Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2005; Pfefferbaum et al., 1999). The research also tends to find that age explains the extent of stress reactions in the wake of terror attacks. Younger children appear to exhibit more severe psychopathology such as PTSS, somatic complaints, depression and distress than older children or adolescents (Hoven et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 2005). However, the effects of age remain unclear. Other studies which have focused on ongoing exposure to terrorist attacks have found no age effects (Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2009; Solomon et al., 2005).

The role of socioeconomic status as a differential factor among adolescents is well documented. Several studies indicated different challenges of stress for youths who come from a lower socio economic status (Evans, 2004; Grant et al., 2006) as well as relationships between SES and stress (Goodman et al., 2005). Generally, adolescents having a low SES reported lower levels of perceived health and more stress reactions than youngsters from a higher SES (Piko & Fitzpatrick, 2001; Berntsson & Kohler, 2001). One of the reasons for being more vulnerable is that low SES adolescents are assumed to lack psychological and/or other resources and therefore their ability to cope with threats decreases (Finkelstein et al., 2007).

To sum up, the purpose of this study is to expand the knowledge about community resources which might contribute to moderating reactions to stress. Our main goal is to understand the role of adolescent community perception (IMCB) when facing chronic rocket fire. In accordance with the literature review, we hypothesize that:

1. Adolescent Community Perception (IMCB) will mediate the relationships between exposure to rocket attacks and anger or hope. Adolescents that have a stronger community perception will present more moderate emotional reactions to stress (Zeidner, 2005; Arnon, Shamai & Ilatov, 2008; Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2010b).
2. The level of community perception by youth living in rural communities (kibbutz and moshav) will be higher than youth living in the urban community of Sderot (Arnon, Shamai & Ilatov, 2008; Prezza et al., 2009).
3. Youth living in rural communities (kibbutz and moshav) will report milder emotional reactions to stress compared to youth living in the urban community of Sderot (Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2009). Thus, youth living in the city will report higher levels of state anger and less hope compared to youth living in rural communities (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2009).

4. The socio-demographic variables (age, gender, parents' education) will differentiate in community perception so that young adolescent girls from lower socio-economic levels will report stronger community perception compared to young adolescent boys from high socio-economic levels (Kirchler, Palmonari & Pombeni, 1990; Chiessi, Cicognani & Sonn, 2010; Evans, 2007; Arnon, Shamai & Ilatov, 2008).
5. There will be differences in the emotional reactions to stress, according to socio-demographic variables as well as to the level of exposure to rocket fire. Female adolescents will report higher levels of state anger and less hope (Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2010a; Shamahi & Kimhi, 2007). Young adolescents will report higher levels of state anger and less hope than older adolescents (Pat-Horenczyk et al., 2005). Adolescents from the lower socioeconomic group will report higher state anger and less hope than adolescents from the higher socio-economic group (Evans & Kim, 2010). And the exposure variable is expected to play a minimal role in relation to stress reactions (Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2009).
6. The type of community will moderate the relationship between community perception and emotional reactions to stress. Specifically, adolescents who live in rural communities, and have a stronger community perception will express moderate emotional reactions to stress and higher hope. However, among youth from the city of Sderot the relationship between community perception and emotional reactions to stress will be the weakest. Among adolescents living in a moshav, the relationship between community perception and emotional reactions to stress will be the strongest (Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2009).

Participants

Two hundred eighty-four teenagers living in southern Israel participated in the study. The sample included adolescents aged 12-18 ($M= 15.28$ $SD=1.58$) and a majority of girls (66%); 58% lived in the city of Sderot, 32% lived in kibbutzim and 10% in a moshav.

Procedure Data were gathered via self-completion questionnaires during the years 2007-2009. The first author and research assistants administered the questionnaires and provided general instructions and explanations regarding the anonymity of the data collected. After receiving permission from parents, the questionnaires were administered in the respondents' homes (sometimes in shelters) .

Measures

Adolescent's Community Perception (IMCB): This questionnaire, which was constructed specifically for this study, included a combination of 14 items developed

by Davidson & Cotter, (1986) to examine sense of community, and four items from the index developed by Sagy (1998) to examine sense of community coherence. The current version of the questionnaire includes 18 items (For example: "I can influence what happens in my community / There are opportunities here to do many things"; "Sometimes I feel that things I'm involved in in the community have no meaning"; "Residents of my community have clear goals and objectives") each item rated on a scale of three levels (strongly agree - not so much agree - disagree). The mean was computed and Cronbach alpha reliability was .65; the recommended minimum Cronbach's alpha for exploratory studies is .60 (Nunnally, 1978; Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991).

State Anger (Spielberger et al. 1970), Hebrew translation (Teichman 1978) was used in order to assess adolescents' anger. The Hebrew translation proved to be reliable, valid and equivalent to the English State Anger Inventory (Teichman 1978). This scale consists of six items on a four point Likert scale. Cronbach alpha reliability was .89

Hope Index (Staats, 1989), is constructed as the interaction of wishes and expectations and includes items of hope referring to self and to others, or to broad global concerns. Participants were asked to independently rate the extent to which they would wish for a particular future occurrence and the extent to which they would expect this to occur. Responses were rated on a scale of zero (not at all) to five (very much). The multiplication of the wish value by the expect value generated the measure of hope. The Cronbach's alpha of the hope index was .91.

Exposure to missile attacks was assessed by five yes/no questions: Respondents were asked to report whether a missile had fallen on their homes, whether they had been hurt by a missile, whether someone they knew had been hurt, whether the home of someone they knew had been damaged and whether missiles had fallen in their neighborhood.

Demographic characteristics: Gender, age, parents' level of education as representing socioeconomic level, and place of residence were reported by the respondents.

3. Results

Table 1 presents means and standard deviation of the study's variables. Community perception scores were towards the higher end of the scale. Frequencies of state anger and hope were towards the higher end of the scale, as well as level of exposure to rocket fire.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations in the variables of the sample

Variable	Sample (n≈273)	
	M	SD
Community Perception	1.84	.31
State Anger	2.12	.73
Hope	13.44	5.04
Level of Exposure	.54	.18

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 2 presents One Way Anova of type of community in the different variables. Significant differences were found in community perception with youth from the city of Sderot reporting stronger perceptions compared to youth living in a kibbutz. Youth from moshavs reported strongest perceptions compared to all other groups. Contrary to the hypothesis, adolescents from the city of Sderot reported a higher level of hope than adolescents living in communities with collective characteristics.

Table 2
One Way ANOVA of type of community in the different variables

Variable	City ^a (n≈152)		Kibbutz ^b (n≈89)		Moshav ^c (n≈30)		F
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Community Perception	1.82	.29	1.80	.33	2.04	.31	7.35* ^{ab}
State Anger	2.18	.67	2.10	.77	1.81	.76	3.28
Hope	14.15	5.85	12.02	3.63	13.46	5.09	4.68** ^{ab, bc}
Level of Exposure	56.	.16	50	.21.	.54	.15	3.18* ^{ab, bc}

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Tables 3-5 present the different study variables according to socio-demographic indicators. Regarding gender, no significant differences were found in community perceptions. Significant differences were found only in sense of hope with female adolescents reporting higher levels of hope compared to male adolescents. Regarding age differences, community perception was stronger among older adolescents compared to younger adolescents while no differences were found in stress reactions. No significant differences were found between adolescents from

different socioeconomic levels in community perception level. With regard to stress reactions, no differences were reported on state anger and hope.

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations and t test in the variables in the study according to gender

Variable	Girls (n≈181)		Boys (n≈95)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Community Perception	1.85	.31	1.80	.29	-1.4
State Anger	2.15	.73	2.06	.74	-.86
Hope	13.86	4.84	12.23	5.05	-2.37**
Level of Exposure	54.	.17	.54	.20	-.12

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 4
Means, Standard Deviations and t test in the variables in the study according to age

Variable	Young adolescents (n≈143)		Older adolescents (n≈139)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Community Perception	1.79	.31	1.89	.31	-2.53*
State Anger	2.15	.75	2.08	.70	.87
Hope	13.61	5.27	13.30	5.16	.48
Level of Exposure	.56	.18	52.	.17	1.79

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Table 5
Means, Standard Deviations and t test in the variables in the study according to SES

Variable	Mother's level of education				Father's level of education				t
	Academic (n≈195)		High school (n≈72)		Academic (n≈164)		High school (n≈101)		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Community Perception	.31	1.82	.30	1.88	.31	1.80	.30	1.91	1.54
State Anger	.73	2.11	.71	2.17	.75	2.15	.70	2.08	.57
Hope	4.98	12.98	5.48	14.00	5.14	13.00	5.20	13.75	1.43
Level of Exposure	.18	.53	.19	.54	.19	.52	.17	.55	.27

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001.

Following Baron and Kenny (1986), a pre-requisite assumption of mediation is that there should be a significant link between exposure to rocket fire and stress reactions, and between perception of community and stress reactions (correlation matrix is presented in Table 6). Since these two basic assumptions were not found, the mediation hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6
Pearson correlations of variables in the study (n=284)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Community perception	-	-.18	.09	-.00
2. State Anger		-	-.06	.14*
3. Hope			-	.08
4. Level of Exposure				-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Tables 7 and 8 present regression analyses for the emotional reactions to stress – state anger and hope. The moderating hypothesis was not supported. Type of community did not moderate the emotional reactions to stress. In a preliminary analysis that was conducted, there was no statistically significant interaction effect for community perception X type of community ($\beta = -0.13$; $p = .40$); community perception X year ($\beta = 0.32$; $p = .15$) in explaining state anger. Therefore, they were not included in the regression. Community perception explained 6% of the variance of state anger. As for hope, there was no statistically significant interaction effect for community perception X type of community ($\beta = -0.24$; $p = .12$); community perception X year ($\beta = -0.30$; $p = .17$). Type of community explained 8% of the variance of hope.

Table 7
Hierarchical multiple regression results for State Anger

Variable	B	SE	β	t	R ²
Exposure	.55	.25	.14	2.15**	
Gender	.10	.09	.06	1.06	
Age	-.07	.09	-.05	-.79	
Mother's education	-.23	.12	-.13	-1.82	
Father's education	.16	.11	.10	1.39	
Type of Community	-.05	.05	-.07	-1.19	
Community Perception	-.36	.15	-.15	-2.35*	.06

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 8
Hierarchical multiple regression results for State Hope

Variable	B	SE	β	t	R ²
Exposure	1.61	1.74	.06	.92	
Gender	1.16	.68	.11	1.71	
Age	.07	.66	.07	.10	
Mother's education	-.50	.85	-.04	-.58	
Father's education	-.37	.81	-.03	-.45	
Type of Community	1.00	.36	.18	2.75**	
Community Perception	1.15	1.07	.07	1.07	.08

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

4. Discussion

In this study we focus on community perceptions as potential coping resources mediating emotional reactions among youth who were chronically exposed to rocket fire. We further aimed to explore the role of type of community as well as other demographics in explaining the emotional reactions of state anger and hope.

Our main question dealt with the contribution of community perception as a potential coping resource in reducing anger and enhancing hope. Based on the salutogenic approach integrated with the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (1979), we hypothesized that adolescents with a stronger community perception would report milder stress reactions, that is, lower state anger and more sense of hope. This hypothesis was partly supported by the data. First, the findings indicate different patterns of resources in buffering stress reactions. Anger was explained mostly by the perception of the community. Thus, adolescents with higher perceptions of community expressed less state anger. These findings are in accordance with previous studies (Sagy, 1998, 2009).

The level of hope, however, was explained mostly by the community type rather than by community perception. Specifically, adolescents from Sderot expressed higher levels of hope than their peers from the kibbutz settlements in this area. It appears that the differences between the communities during the ongoing stress situation affected the levels of hope. This general finding is in a different direction than findings from previous research which found higher levels of wellbeing among residents of kibbutz rather than the city of Sderot (Arnon et al., 2008). Residents of Sderot were found to have higher levels of anxiety than other rural communities (Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2009).

Moreover, contrary to our hypothesis, we found stronger community perceptions among youth from Sderot compared to those living in the kibbutz. Type of community

was the only significant factor in explaining variety in community perceptions among the adolescents.

It appears that there is a need to explore community perceptions with regard to local and contextual characteristics of the specific community settings. Perhaps we may understand the results against the backdrop of the different settings (Hill, 1996). In Sderot, large numbers of people left the area and this was widely reported in the media (*Ma'ariv*, 20.5.07). The public and political criticism led to a deep process which has changed the community organization in the city: "Still there are signs of a community initiative manifestations and inner strength of the region and the people of Sderot who choose to stay in the city of Sderot" (Sheleg, 2007). In turn, this new way of organization seemed to affect the youth and their involvement in the city.

The illustration below, taken from an interview with a key person in Sderot who works with youth, can clarify the situation in the city at the time our study was conducted:

"... So last May, May 2007, we had a barrage of Qassams.., there was mass escape from Sderot. And a mass entry of various voluntary organizations that attempted to take the management ...which released us from all the education and the ideology and the development of leadership and assertiveness, concepts that we were working on with them as "positive" but not in stress situations ... and since we got back to the community, we continued to develop all of them (youth) as team leaders and as partners involved in emergency plans for stress situations. What are we going to do in case of escalation in rocket fire..." (an interview conducted by the first author, 11.2.08)

The change in the city's organization appears to be reflected in the perceptions of the community by the youth at the point of time we approached them. Our results reflected the adolescents perceiving their community as a place where they had influence, as a significant place for them, as a comprehensible place, and as a place where they could feel that they belonged.

In a completely different way, the kibbutz communities have been undergoing an ideological crisis in recent decades that creates internal tension, reflected in the struggle for a new ideological identity formation on the one hand, as opposed to maintaining traditional kibbutz ideology, and the social and cultural values associated with the kibbutz idea on the other (Gutwein, 2010). This tension, combined with the stressful and continuous rocket fire, might have resulted in a lower community perception among those adolescents in our study who lived in collective communities such as the kibbutz.

A key person in the kibbutz community, working with youth explained in an interview:

"I have no doubt the feeling of less togetherness is not only due to the privatization process of the kibbutz, but also a kind of feeling that when the "red alarm" sounds,

I will have to run alone... And that we are different... and the others don't understand us... everyone is for him/herself ...” (an interview conducted by the first author 28.4.08)

Our findings may reflect tension within the kibbutz community between change and conservation, while the latter is more prominent. It appears as a naive desire to create a sense of 'business as usual' based on the ideological conception of patriotism on the one hand and not to whine and demand change on the other (Fiiraizn-Vail, 2007). To sum up, while the youth in Sderot perceived the stress situation and its implications as having the potential for promoting a better and stronger community in which they can be involved and grow up, the adolescents from the kibbutz communities seem to develop a lower sense of community, as expressed by feeling of less involvement and support in community.

Regarding the question about the role of other demographics in community perception, most of our hypotheses were not supported by the findings. First, no gender differences were found in the community perception of adolescents. Recent studies among adolescents (e.g., Postlethwait-Barth & Guo, 2010), which examined gender differences on issues related to behavior in the context of social relations, such as participation in volunteer activities in the community, reported fewer differences compared to the past (McKay-Killingbeck, 2007). It seems that an increase in opportunities within the community for females, as well as current trends in the direction of gender equality, might explain the findings.

Regarding age, contrary to our hypotheses, community perception level was stronger among older adolescents than among younger adolescents. Our hypothesis relied on the literature relating to indications of a decrease in the feeling of sense of community with increasing age of adolescents. This decline is typical at this stage of development because of multiple transitions, emergence of new opportunities, social groups, values and interests (Chipuer et al., 1999; Evans, 2007). However, in the present study, older adolescents who took part in the study, had lived under stressful conditions for many years, but also had been exposed to different and new types of organization on the community level. Thus, they took a more active role in coping with the stressful situation caused by rocket fire than their younger counterparts. The result was reflected in their higher sense of community perception.

Obvious differences were found between the studied groups in terms of socioeconomic level. Level of education of fathers was found significantly higher among young residents of kibbutz. It appears, however, that socioeconomic level also had no effect on the perception of community. This finding contradicts previous studies (e.g., Bo, 1989; Arnon, Shamai & Ilatov, 2008) which refer to the variable of education as an inner resource that affects the individual's estimation of other available resources (Brewin et al., 2000).

Our last question related to differences in emotional reactions according to demographics. No differences in state anger level were found according to the type of community. But contrary to our hypothesis, we found that adolescents who lived in Sderot reported a higher sense of hope. These findings could be explained by the changes Sderot has undergone in the last few years, as explained above. It appears that hope is not only a sensitive index of human needs but also a significant indicator of social change (Sagy & Adwan, 2006).

As for gender differences, we found higher levels of hope among girls than among boys. This finding contradicts previous research which has found that in acute stress situations, female adolescents reported lower levels of hope compared to their male counterparts (Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2010a; Sagy & Braun-Lewensohn, 2009; Shamai & Kimhi, 2007).

Regarding age, our study joins a series of other studies in which age had no effect on stress reactions during politically violent events (Solomon, Even-Chen & Itzhaky, 2007; Braun-Lewensohn et al., 2010b). These findings may indicate that, in the context of ongoing exposure to political violence, age plays a different role and the differences between younger and older adolescents are reduced. Perhaps the cumulative effect of stress is more significant for older adolescents and they actually lose the advantage of "maturity".

To sum up, we found community perceptions to be a significant factor in explaining some of stress reactions among adolescents living under prolonged stressful situations. However, not all of our hypotheses were supported and the differentiation between the communities appear to be a significant factor in understanding our results. Actually, community type (city versus kibbutz) distinguishes the community perception of adolescents as a potential resource as well as their sense of hope as an outcome. Residents of Sderot presented stronger community perception and higher levels of hope.

These findings reinforce the salutogenic-ecological approach employed by this study, and indicate that community is one of the ecological environments which relates to individual coping with chronic stressful situations. It seems that exploring adolescents' perceptions of community- influence, meaningfulness, comprehensibility and belonging to the community- can help to clarify the resilience of the youth and perhaps the community as a whole.

Study Limitations

Although the sample included a diverse population and was selected to reflect different parts of the adolescent population in the region according to age, gender and level of exposure, we should be careful in generalizing sample results to wider

populations since the communities examined were relatively small (Sderot and western Negev rural communities). It is also important to remember that our data were collected in the midst of a war and during missile attacks. Therefore, the samples are neither representative nor random but rather consist of youngsters whom we were able to reach during such a difficult time. Thus, some degree of potential sample bias should be taken into account. Apparently, the distribution according to socio-demographic criteria was not sufficient. For example, the samples included a higher percentage of girls than boys. Moreover, although young people's self reports are generally a reliable source of information about their stress experiences and community perception, a multi-informant paradigm could enhance the data.

In spite of these limitations, the importance of this study is in its being a field research carried out in the midst of the stressful situation of severe missile attacks. The unfortunate conflictual violent situation in the area served as a "natural laboratory" for investigation which was essential for studying human behavior (Lazarus 1982). Further studies should explore the views of adolescents from diverse backgrounds in terms of types of communities, their population and their "history" of coping with political violence.

5. Conclusions

The main aim of this study was to examine community perceptions as coping resources among youth living in areas exposed to ongoing rocket fire in the south of Israel. Type of community (city vs. kibbutz) indeed emerged as a central variable associated with adolescent's emotional reactions to stress. These findings strongly support the salutogenic – ecological approach presented in this study, pointing out that the community is one of the ecological environments which are related to the individual coping with chronic stress. A broader examination of the dimensions of community perception among youth might help clarify the strength of youth, as well as the entire community. These findings, should they be replicated, highlight the potential importance of community as a protective resource in times of stress, both in terms of intervention and prevention programs as well for clinical practitioners.

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AGENTS OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT? THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN BANGLADESH

M. Rezaul ISLAM¹,
W. John MORGAN²

Abstract: This article considers the role of non-government organizations (NGOs) in term of their capacity as agents of community empowerment in Bangladesh. The article investigates the application of community empowerment using the domains provided by Laverack (2006). The article is based on qualitative research focusing on two NGOs in Bangladesh: Proshika and Practical Action Bangladesh (PAB) and their work in two communities, one urban and the other rural. The data are obtained from two indigenous occupants: blacksmiths and goldsmiths. The article argues that NGOs in Bangladesh are potential agents of community empowerment, but there are obstacles which limit this.

Key words: Non-government organizations (NGO), NGOs' capacity, community empowerment, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

This article is developed from and adds to a previous article published by the authors (Islam and Morgan, 2011). That article focused on non-governmental organizations

¹ M. Rezaul Islam, PhD is Visiting Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Administration and Justice, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Building, University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, E-mail: rezaul@um.edu.my

² W John Morgan, PhD is Chairman of the United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO and Chair of Political Economy and Education, Distinguished Professor, International Institute of Adult and Lifelong Education, School of Education, University of Nottingham, NG81BB, E-mail: john.morgan@nottingham.ac.uk