

# Promoting Resilience in People who have Experienced Childhood Sexual Abuse

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# Survivors Stories 1.

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“This is a story that I have waited sixty years to fully tell. From about age seven until I was ten my brother sexually abused me... There was no one to tell and I knew that no one would believe me so I have stayed quiet all of these years. I married an abusive man and suffered through twenty-one years of marital sexual abuse and rape. I tried to talk about this after I divorced him and his family convinced my children that I was crazy. I am not crazy nor have I ever been crazy. Somehow I have survived.”

[Dancinginthedarkness.com](http://Dancinginthedarkness.com)

# Survivors Stories 2.

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“Born to NY parents that would soon succumb to their illnesses. A young girl and boy unwanted by the immediate family would be tossed into the NYC system for foster care...I was about 7 the first time my step father touched me...As a teenager, I wondered, “would anyone believe me?” I hated myself. I hated what I allowed to continue to happen, I hated that I was so weak to allow it. I hated that I felt ugly everywhere...*(struggling with the presence of her stepfather and negotiating adulthood)*...

My husband waited up for me to come home...he asked me something no one had ever asked “did your father ever touch you?” I got help this time, my husband really loved me. With my husband beside me, I told my sister and brothers. They didn’t hate me, and they believed me. They never doubted me....I studied many techniques – meditation, went into therapy. I’m so thankful for every day...Talking with my children helped me and continued to help me to heal. I am a professional woman. I am a manager of a business. I am a survivor.

Susan [www.womensselfesteem.com](http://www.womensselfesteem.com)

# Prevalence and incidence of child abuse and neglect

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## 11-17 year olds

- Around one in five children (18.6%) have been severely maltreated.
- Over one in eight children (13.4%) have experienced severe maltreatment by a parent/ guardian.
- One in 20 children (4.8%) have experienced contact sexual abuse.

## 18-24 year olds

- One in four young adults (25.3%) had been severely maltreated during childhood.
- One in seven young adults (14.5%) had been severely maltreated by a parent/guardian in childhood.
- One in nine young adults (11.3%) had experienced contact sexual abuse during childhood.

# Negative Outcomes associated with CSA

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Regardless of definition, researchers have shown that people who have experienced childhood sexual abuse, are at an increased risk of developing various difficulties, including:

- Interpersonal/sexual difficulties (Ahmad, 2006)
- Suicidal behaviour (Tonge & King, 2004)
- Addiction (Bulik, Prescott & Kendler, 2001; Lee, Lyvers & Edwards, 2008).
- Revictimisation (Hamilton & Browne, 1999; Olafson & Boat, 2004)
- Dissociation (Hanks & Stratton, 1995)

# CSA & Resilience

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**However, some people are able to survive their experiences and ‘bounce back’ in order to lead healthy adult lives.**

# My Doctoral Thesis : Methodology

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- My thesis investigated whether self-esteem, attachment and coping strategies promote resilience in women who have experienced childhood maltreatment.
- 527 women (18-71yrs old) recruited through advertisements in Take a Break, The Birmingham Post and The Birmingham Evening Mail.
- All completed a battery of measures online (including: A screening questionnaire, The Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale, The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale, The Trauma Symptom Inventory, The Relationship Questionnaire, The Relationship Scales Questionnaire, The Coping Responses Inventory and the Culture Free Self-Esteem Inventory).
- 477 women completed all of the questionnaires.

# My Doctoral Thesis : What is Resilience

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In the study resilience was conceptualised in 3 different ways. It was therefore defined as:

- a. Self reported success in adult life.
- b. A lack of psychopathology.
- c. The presence of identified protective or compensatory factors.

Depending upon the definition used, 33.5% - 48.6% of participants were found to be demonstrating resilience.

# My Doctoral Thesis: Main Findings

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- Having a secure attachment style, was found to be most predictive of resilience (result found using logistic regression).
- Social self-esteem was predictive of resilience
- Coping style, did not predict resilience.
- An accepting/resigned coping style was found to reduce the likelihood that participants demonstrated resilience.

# Other People's Studies

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48 papers identified which examine resilience in individuals who have a history of CSA.

Factors found to be associated with resilience were:

- Inner/psychological resources
- Family
- Friendships/relationships
- The community
- Demographic variables
- Abuse Characteristics

# Inner/Psychological Resources

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- Adaptive coping skills / Hardiness
- Attribution Style
- Meaning Making
- Self Esteem

# Inner/Psychological Resources (cont.)

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- Interpersonal/Emotional competence
- Ego Resilience/Ego Control
- Low Neuroticism

# Family

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- A stable and supportive family environment
- Being supported and understood by parents
- Positive parenting practices
- Is in a context where other forms of adversity are minimised.

# Friends/Relationships

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- Having a confiding relationship
- Perceived Support from spouse

# The Community

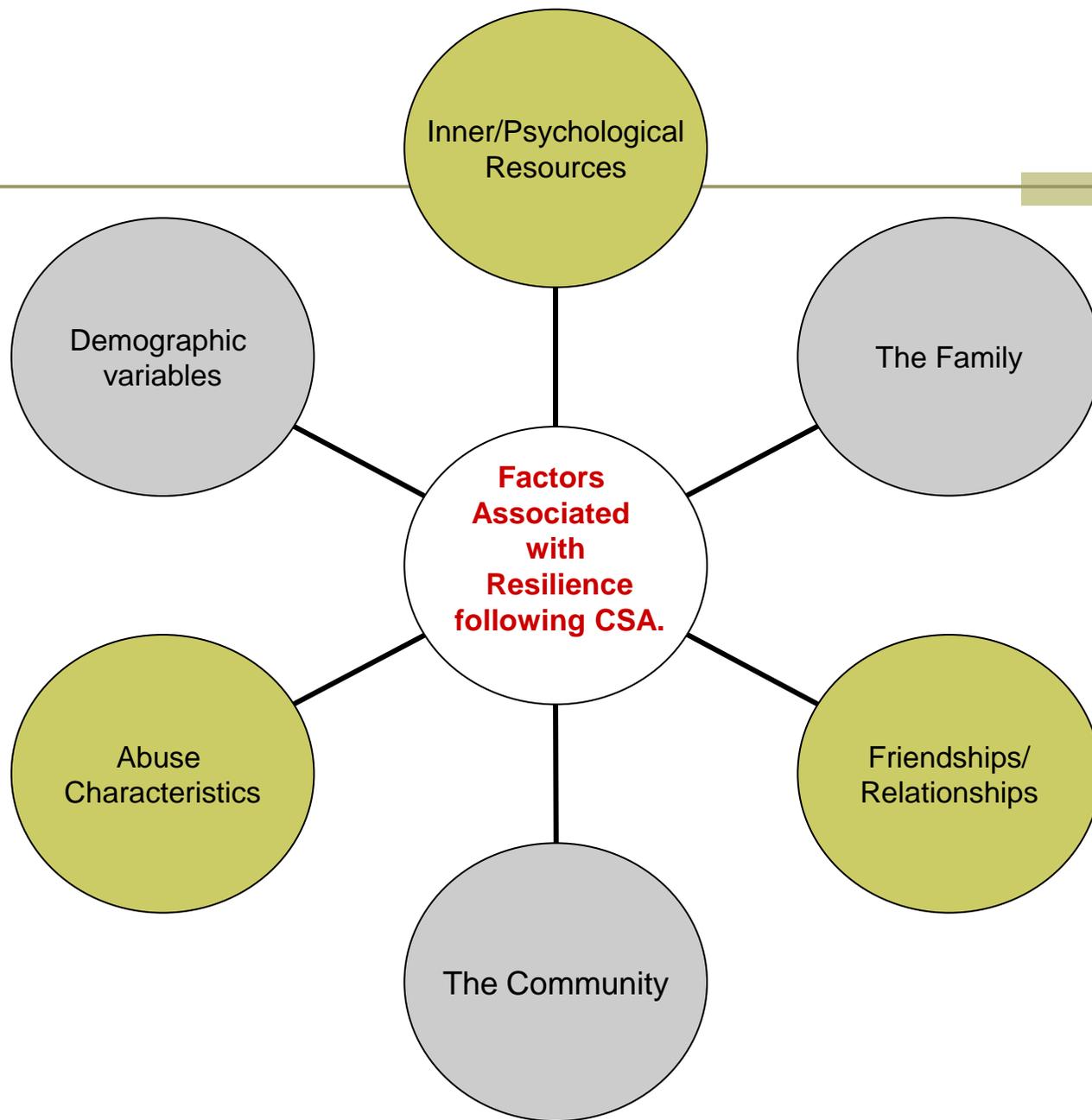
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- School
- Spirituality
- Being part of a group

# Demographic Variables and Abuse Characteristics.

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- Gender
- Race
- High Socio-Economic Status
- IQ
- Severity of Abuse
- Age at which the abuse began



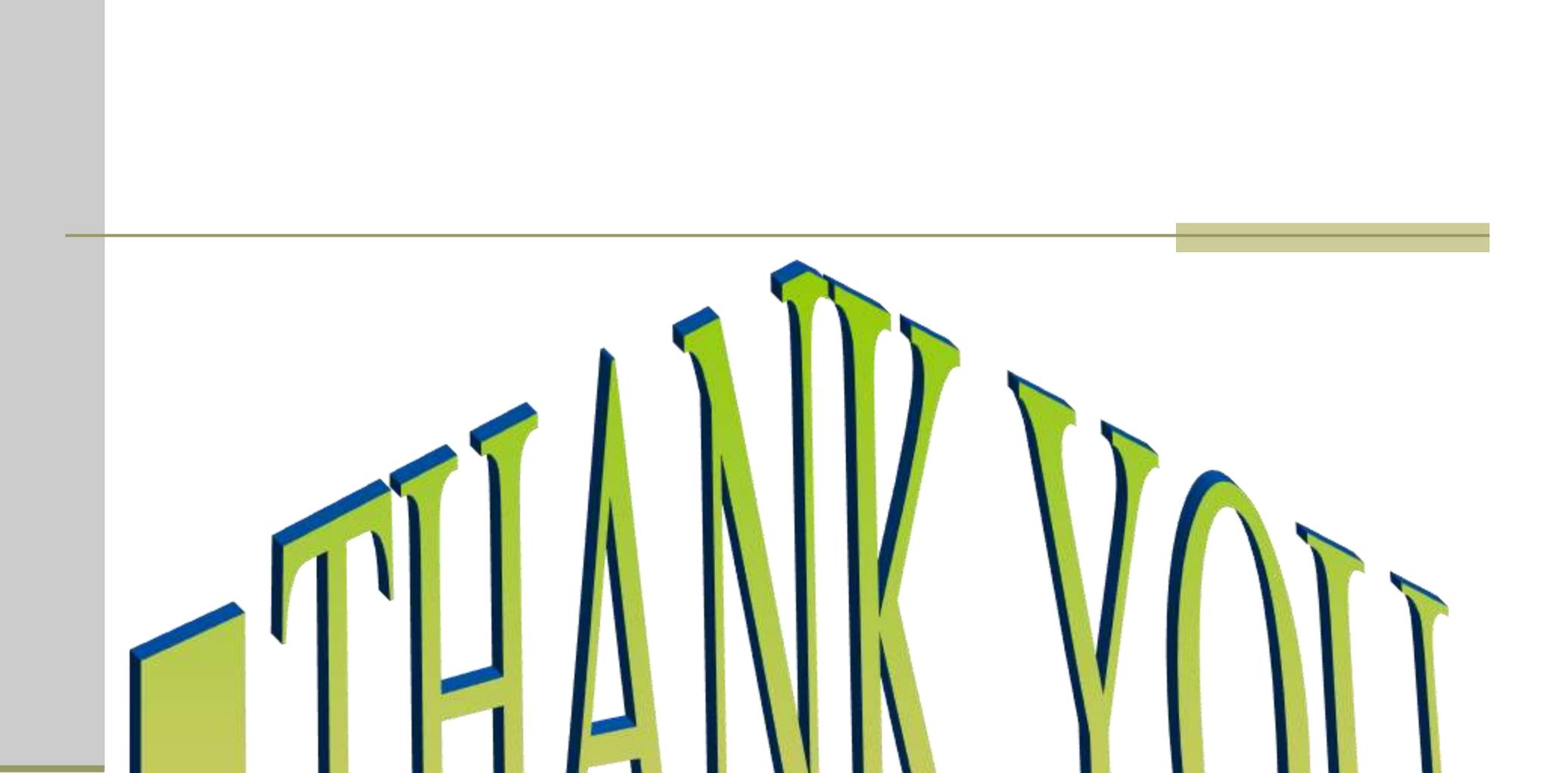
# Applying Resilience Research :Some ideas from the Literature

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- Following a resilience based curriculums in schools. E.g. UK Resilience Programme or Al's Pals: Kids making healthy choices (Lynch, Geller & Schmidt, 2004) and the Penn Resilience Project.
- Utilising psychological interventions with individuals. E.g. Uncover strengths and Build Resilience: A four step model (Padesky & Mooney, 2008).
- Using family interventions (e.g. Place, Reynolds, Cousins & O'Neill, 2002).
- Running community groups (e.g. SUPERSTARS, Emshoff, Raduka, Anderson & Calvert, 1996).
- Developing resources to teach others how to respond to disclosures of CSA in a way that will enhance resilience (e.g. Jinich et al, 1999).

# Some Key/Interesting References

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THANK YOU